

Pastoral Letter

From the Bishop of Killala



Our Common Home

Lent 2017

"Our common home is being pillaged, laid waste and harmed with impunity. People and their movements are called to cry out, to mobilize and demand – peacefully but firmly – that appropriate and urgently needed measures be taken"

(POPE FRANCIS, BOLIVIA, JULY 2015)

Lent is a time for reviewing our relationships; with God, with one another and with the Earth, which Pope Francis constantly reminds us is 'our common home.'



Lent is also a traditional time for prayer, fasting and almsgiving. I suggest that this year we join these themes together, to renew our relationship with the Earth, our common home. While forces and peoples outside our control are causing so much damage to the 'home' we share with everyone else, each one of us is contributing to it also by the way in which we live, by the throwaway culture to which we contribute and by our lack of concern for the poor, who suffer most from our actions.

The food culture of today surrounds us at every hands turn. In Ireland, when we go into a supermarket we are dazed by all the food that sits on shelves in front of us; so much so that if we don't know the layout of the supermarket we are lost for a few minutes. Especially before Christmas, food programmes take over our television screens. And the waste of food in Ireland is something of which we are all guilty and is something which should cause us to think. Do you know that every house in this country wastes between €400 and €1,000's worth of good food each year? And that means you and I. Do you know that we send 300,000 tons of wasted food to landfill each year? And do you know that it is estimated that we

could reduce this by 80% if we wanted to. Every time we shop we would think before we buy; do I need it, will I use it?

Traditionally, the Season of Lent is seen as a time for fasting from food. By its very nature, fasting seems to suggest that something is wrong. Eating is a normal part of living, so abstaining from eating implies a disruption in the very rhythm of life. For very many people, therefore, Lent is a time when we can cause some disruption in the rhythm of our lives and begin to look at things differently. Can I suggest two areas in which we might look at things differently during Lent 2017; our awareness of the damage done to God's creation by the way we live today and the effect this is having on the poorest in our world.

The Prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament (Laudato Si 58. 6-8) clearly expresses God's attitude to fasting. He says "No, this is the kind of fasting I want. I want you to break unjust fetters and undo the thongs of the yoke; to let the oppressed go free, to share your bread with the hungry and shelter the homeless poor, to clothe the man you see to be naked and not turn from your own kin." Here, in this short piece of advice from God, we touch the main themes of our lives



today; homelessness, hunger and injustice. And what does God want of us this Lent? He wants us to show our concern for those who suffer from these. And if we do what he wants, what does God promise? "Then will your light shine like the dawn and your wound be quickly healed over. Your integrity will go before you and the glory of the Lord behind you."

When Pope Francis calls the Earth 'Our Common Home' he means we are all in this world together; you and I, the people of Ireland and the people of Ethiopia, the children, like most Irish children, who have lots of blessings in life and the children in the poorest slums who have very little or nothing. We share this world with the world of nature and we depend on the world of nature to do so much for us; clean our air, water our crops and provide us with the sunshine we need for things to grow. Whether we like it or not, none of us can live without each other and without the world of nature which God has created and given to us to care.

But how do we care for our common home? The Season of Lent gives us an opportunity to do this through the three

traditional aspects of Lent, prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Translated into the Ten Commandments for Lent in 2017 they might look something like this;

Prayer

1. Regain our awareness of the mystery of life and discover how God fills all things. "Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face". (Laudato Si 233)
2. Remember the words of St Francis of Assisi, who reminds us that our common home is like "a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us" (Laudato Si 1-2)
3. "Let us become agents of mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation and make justice and peace flourish" (Pope Francis. Urbi et Orbi 2015)

Fasting

- 4 Buy only the amount of food you know you will use.



- 5 Only use the amount of water you know is necessary for your needs. Do you know that it takes 1,700 litres of water to make one bar of chocolate? This adds a new dimension to giving up chocolate for Lent.
- 6 Remember the 4 R's: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Rethink.
- 7 Eat healthy food, grown locally.

Almsgiving

- 8 We need one another. "We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and for the world, and that being good and decent are worth it" (Laudato Si 228-229)
- 9 We can walk and pray together. "Together we can praise the Creator for giving us the garden of the world to till and keep as a common good, and we can achieve shared plans to overcome poverty and to ensure to every man and woman the conditions for a dignified life" Pope Francis, Rome, October 28th 2015.
- 10 We need to reflect on our accountability before those who will endure the dire consequences of our actions and our inactivity. "We may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation and filth. The pace of consumption, waste and environmental change has so stretched the planet's capacity that our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes, such as those which even now periodically occur in different areas of the world."

(Laudato Si 161). It is now predicted that the water will become the new oil crisis, leading to water wars.

Conclusion

No matter how small and insignificant we feel we are, I believe that each one of us can make a difference in our lives. We can help arrest the damage that is being done to 'our common home' at present and we can contribute to making 'our home' a better place in which our children and grandchildren can live. As our diocesan motto for 2016 says, we can become 'a link in the chain for change' in our time.

As we begin Lent 2017 I make this appeal to you; think about the way in which you live, the waste which you create and the damage you are doing to the environment; think about the children who will bear your name in future generations and look back on you as one of the links in their genetic chain; remember the damage done by us to the poorest in our world through climate change, those who have no voice in the face of the super powers of our time. Reflect on these words of Pope Francis: "To protect creation, to protect every man and every woman, to look upon them with tenderness and love is to open up a horizon of hope, it is to let a shaft of light break through the heavy clouds". My prayer for all of us during Lent this year is that each one of us may cause that shaft of light to break through the heavy clouds darkening our world.

Bishop John.

Lent 2017.