

Third Sunday of Ordinary Time.
Jan. 23 & 24, 2016

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My dear Brothers and Sisters. Jesus began his public ministry shortly after he was baptized by John in the Jordan. What were the most characteristic features of Jesus' life at this time?

One was prayer. He went unto the mountains to pray; and he spent the whole night in prayer to God. (Luke 6:12) The other was teaching. He went down to Capernaum and taught them on the Sabbath. (Luke 5:31) The third was healing. They brought to him all those who were suffering from diseases of one kind or another, and laying his hands on each he cured them. (Luke 5:40) Prayer, teaching, and healing were Jesus' ministry at this time. And we partake in all three as we celebrate the Eucharist. There is one, however, that I would like to emphasize today. Jesus was a wonderful healer. He responded to the needs of the people with compassion, and that within the knowledge of the time. And so are we to do today in Jesus' name. The encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, is about this matter of healing today, responding with faith to present needs with present knowledge.

And we are not just experiencing the ills of single persons around us today, but that of the global humanity on earth. And that is what pope Francis' is concerned about. It is about our sustainability, that is, our survival today in a global ecological crisis. Francis is the first pope in more recent times who has faith and strength to recognize our present illness. But let me give you a very brief account of this global illness from science. This summary I would like to share with you has been taken from *World Watch Papers*, #143, 1998, written by Brown, Gardner, and Halweil. Please listen.

Many people consider our well being in terms of momentary economic progress and are blind to the hidden costs in terms of ecological depletion. The rule is that we cannot aim at unlimited growth in a limited world, be that growth economic or demographic. Here are just a few points to illustrate this statement.

There is no more land to be discovered on the earth to increase grain production. The use of fertilizers to increase yield is either unavailable as in most of the third world countries, or it has been stabilized by the law of diminishing returns as in the United States, Western Europe, and Japan. Grain production per person is now declining proportionally with population increase. Grain consumption per person in India today is less than 200 kg per year.

The available fresh water for domestic, industrial, and agricultural use is on the decline. Some major rivers, such as the Colorado in the United States, the Yellow river in China, and the Nile in the Middle East, rarely reach the sea. Water tables are falling on every continent including in major food-producing regions. Among those where aquifers are depleted are the US southern Great Plains, the

North China Plain, which produces nearly 40 percent of China's grain; and most of India. Most of this water is used for irrigation but as scarcity becomes more pronounced industry wins the battle for economic reasons. (Water used to grow \$200 worth of agricultural products expands industrial output by \$14,000, a ratio of 70 to 1.)

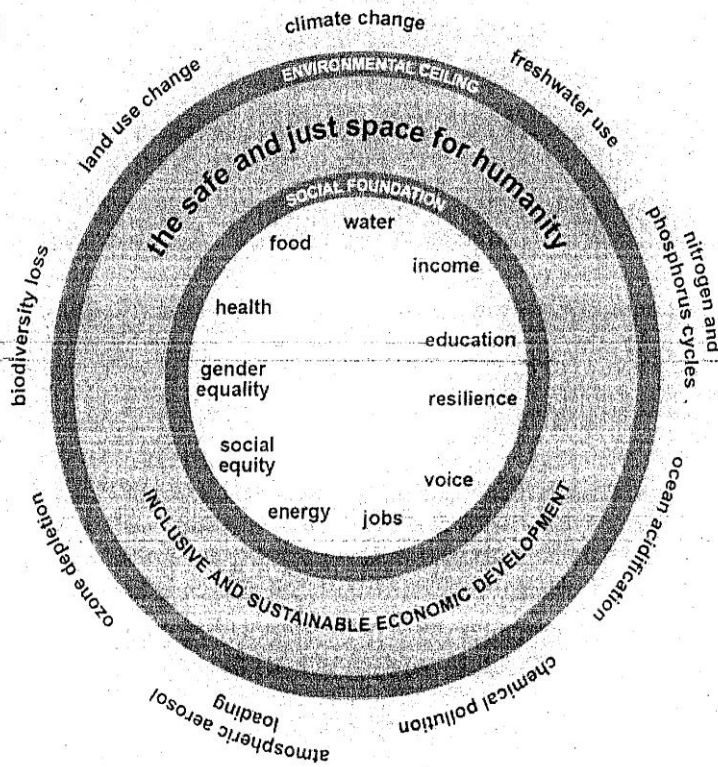
Biodiversity is on a rapid decline. The major cause of this depletion is habitat loss as the natural world around us yields to human development. Examples are the gradual destruction of tropical rain forests by settlers and miners; the destruction of coastal wetlands by developers; the disappearance of coral reefs by encroachment and pollution, the second highest concentration of biodiversity after the rain forests; the vast disruption of ecosystems on a global scale by greenhouse gas emissions.

And one could go on and cite the overfishing of the oceans, the disappearance of forests, the enormous problems of waste disposal contaminating the soil and the ground water; the gradual rising of sea level as global warming melts the polar ice. These are primarily ecological issues and to disregard them in the name of economic progress implies to spiral into a process of blind self-destruct. Such attitude is truly contrary to love and respect for life.

As we read the chapters of the encyclical we find a great deal of similarity and agreement in the words of Francis with those of the present scientific statements of ecology. In matter of fact the similarity is quite striking. Take a brief look at this diagram (below). This has been taken from the book State of the World 2013: 'Is Sustainability Still Possible?' published by the World Watch Institute, in Chapter 3 written by Kate Raworth: "Defining a Safe and Just Space for Humanity."

The circle is a two dimensional representation of the three dimensional global earth. The safe and just space for humanity is determined by two sets of boundaries, the ecological ceiling and the social foundation. The social foundation includes the fundamental, basic, human rights for each and every human being on earth today. As for the ceiling, there are nine ecological boundaries which we should not overstep for the sake of our sustainability. One third of these we have already overstepped. These are climate change, loss of biodiversity, and misuse of the natural nitrogen cycle. Today, climate change is in a self reinforcing loop. The more the earth warms up, the more the ice of the polar regions melt and releases methane the worst greenhouse gas causing further rise in the global temperature.

Immediate action is required, and that implies prayer and knowledge, and a change to sustainable ways of life within the safe and just space for humanity. We need to pray, because Jesus the Son of God and the Son of Mary is our healer, and we need to respond to present needs with present knowledge as it is expressed with such force and clarity by Pope Francis in the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*.



Source: Raworth; Rockström et al.