

Praying for ourselves and our planet

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Pope Francis announced his 2020 monthly intentions before the onset of coronavirus. But his September intention, that the planet's resources will not be plundered, but shared in a just and respectful manner, sums up his concern for the environment.

This concern has been evident from the beginning of his taking office and is so powerfully expressed in his Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, which could not be more pertinent to us now as we live with coronavirus. After seeing how quickly it can spread and how catastrophic its results can be, we now know how precarious our human life is. Because even a small outbreak can become massively threatening to health and to our economic wellbeing, our hopes naturally turn to the discovery of a vaccine. Around the world huge resources are being put into research and development.

VACCINE DISTRIBUTION

So far so good. The question that faces us all, however, is whether once it is developed the vaccine will be made available freely to the whole world, will be priced in a way that poorer nations with the most need cannot afford, or be hoarded by wealthy nations for their own citizens, and only then trickled down to others. We hope, with Pope Francis, that it will be shared 'in a just and respectful manner'. But we are also aware of the way in which rich nations have bought up all available supplies of drugs once thought to be helpful to treat CV. This is consistent with policies that put one's own nation first and sees other nations as rivals who are to be helped only when that suits its own.

On every issue Pope Francis always points to the larger attitudes that are revealed in the way people and nations act, and to the consequences for the world of the decisions they take. If we pursue our own interests to the harm of others, and particularly of people who are poor, we not only act selfishly but poison the delicate relationships on which the health of our world depends.

UNIVERSAL THREAT

In the case of the coronavirus, we shall all be vulnerable to it unless we address it as a universal threat to each of us. If it is unchecked in any nation or any group in society it will threaten the whole of society and of the world. Because the welfare of nations is interrelated, too, the harm caused by the virus to the fragile economies of developing nations will be reflected in massive poverty and hunger, and this in turn leads to the destruction of the environment.

The growing severity of climate change that results will affect people throughout the world. When we share and respect the resources of the world each nation will benefit, as we have seen in our Australian response to the coronavirus. There we have all benefited when we put aside our individual interests and share together the restrictions it imposes.

In his intention Pope Francis had in mind more obvious plundering of the world's resources for private gain through deforestation, mining that pollutes rivers and fish breeding grounds and poisons communities, barbaric exploitation of land that destroys the patrimony of ancient peoples for minimal financial gain, ransacking of water needed to keep river systems alive, and the promotion of coal and oil for lasting use in transport, heating and power.

LONG-TERM LOSS

All these things impose short term gain for the few over the long-term loss of a liveable human world. They are lacking in justice and in respect.

Although we may feel powerless in the face of self-interested corporations and nations, Pope Francis reminds us that our prayer is important.

It makes us attend to the needs of our world, joins us to Jesus in his prayer for the world and gives us courage in the small actions we can take to insist on justice and respect in our own nation's dealings.

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