



# Together for the Life of the World

## *Hope for Change in the Face of the Climate Crisis*

A MESSAGE FROM ARCHBISHOP DERMOT FARRELL · NOVEMBER 2021

### Introduction

Jesus said to the crowds, ‘When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, “It is going to rain”; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, “There will be scorching heat”; and it happens ...’ (Luke 12:54–5)

What do we see? Our screens are filled with frightening images of climate change, which is increasingly called the climate crisis, or even the climate catastrophe.

This crisis is not something that is happening in other parts of the world; it is something that happens in the world, and there is only one world. The planet we all share is not just ‘our common home’; it is our only home. There is no Planet B. Our young people are right: ‘This is the biggest crisis the human race has ever faced,’ to cite Swedish activist Greta Thunberg.



That said, there are certain aspects of the response to the climate crisis that leave much to be desired. In particular, the ethos of threat and fear that appears to emanate from certain strands of commentary is less than helpful. Our faith is founded on the One who came to take fear away: 'perfect love drives out fear', as it says in the

First Letter of St John (4:18). The power of Christ is not a power that crushes the wicked, but that 'dispels all evil, casts out hatred, and brings us peace' (*Exultet*).

Therefore, in these days, on the occasion of COP26, I write again to encourage all to find a positive way forward in this crisis.

The leadership of Pope Francis and other church leaders puts before us the realisation that a deeper – what one might call a more spiritual – way is needed if the economic, political and very human costs of addressing the climate crisis are to be engaged in a way that will make a difference. One-sided, ideological responses fail to empower people for such change.

### **Multi-layered, Multi-generational Crisis – Greatest Issue Facing Humanity**

Climate change is a long-term and cross-generational crisis. Most people have not taken the enormity of its challenges on board. It is the defining issue of this generation, and will not be solved by sound bites, short-term actions, or 'easy' solutions. There is no magic bullet. Although scientists have been sounding the alarm for decades, there is still a long way to go to address it.

That said, it is not easy to take its enormity on board, as the climate crisis is not simply about climate. It is multi-layered and affecting all aspects of life: homelessness, housing, health, inequality, migration and the economy, as well as the quality of water, soil and air. It is vital that we see the human face of this crisis, that it is both immediate and long-term. We have to take into account its effect on people, especially the most vulnerable.

## Cry of the Poor and the Cry of the Earth

The cry of the poor and the cry of the earth go hand in hand. A core truth in this regard is that there will be no solution to this crisis without facing up to our obligations to our vulnerable and marginalised sisters and brothers whom the West has left behind. The ‘inseparable bond between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace’ (*Laudato Si*, 10) is the true foundation of the way out of this crisis, which is in fact the way to life. Our future – and the future of the planet – depends on facing up to our responsibility both globally and locally.

## Conversion and Faith

Responding to the cry of the earth and the allied cry of the poor demands significant changes in how we live, in our lifestyle. Changing our way of living merits being called a conversion, as real conversion is *not only* a change of practice, but requires a change of heart, a *transformation* from within.

Change from within can only happen in a sustained way when it is nourished by the One who lives within every person. Meeting the Lord in the word of God, in the life of the Church, and in each other is the food that transforms our lives. It is there that we discover the roots of ecological conversion. Of course, this can be expressed in different ways: some will name it as the discovery of the indwelling of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the rhythms of the natural world, in the beauty of creation and in each other that brings about conversion. Whatever names we use, the reality and the urgent call to change remain the same.

Prayer is a response to the beauty of creation and to the cry of the earth, and this crisis calls us to pray in new ways. Without that inner life we have little hope of an enduring, balanced, life-enhancing response to what is facing us.

## Young People and Climate Change

Finally, we must ask if it is just that those who contribute least to the climate crisis suffer the most from its effects, especially the poor, but also the



younger generations. Developed economies, which are primarily responsible for climate change, pretend to ignore what is happening the developing world and refuse to take decisive measures. Pope Francis asks a very important question: ‘What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?’ (LS, 160) This is the same question being asked of us right now by the young people of the world.



### **Conclusion: A Call to Act**

For Jesus, the Kingdom of God ‘is like a mustard seed ... which is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade’ (Mark 4:31–2).

The climate crisis is so complex and vast that we risk being overwhelmed and paralysed by it; however, as Pope Francis constantly points out, ‘the Lord of Life ... does not abandon us, he does not leave us on our own.’ The challenge for every

person is to respond. Christ shows us the way: it is the way of the Kingdom, a way in which the contribution of every person is vital and valued. Let us not forget the widow’s mite (Mark 12:41–4)!

Paralysis and wishing the crisis away is no longer an option. For our sakes, for the sake of our children, and for the sake of everyone and everything – all the creatures of this earth – let us resolve to make one change, no matter how little, so that this Earth, our common home, may be for all, the gift God creates it to be. May we so act that the small seed God plants in us – and among us – may become that place of shelter and welcome for all.

Show forth Your work to your servants;  
let your glory shine on their children.  
Let the favour of the Lord be upon us:  
give success to the work of our hands,  
give success to the work of our hands. (Psalm 90)