

‘IT TAKES COOL PEOPLE TO HELP A WARM PLANET’

Our world is incredible. Scientists say that for every disease, there is a natural cure somewhere on the planet. There are thousands of natural resources like wood, edible plants and fuels. Everything we need can be found on earth. Scientists who study cosmology and biology are so often overwhelmed by how seemingly perfect our world is. So many people rely on our world as their livelihood. But so many of us take it for granted. With climate change looming over us, it's time to change that.

The UN 2009 Global Assessment Report said in low-income areas such as the Middle East and North Africa, 20-40% of summers would have highly unusual heat extremes, affecting food production as well as health. The world's leading scientists agree that climate change is human-induced and warn that natural fluctuations in temperature are being exacerbated by human activity.

When you think of climate change, you probably think of heat, extreme weather and rising sea levels. The problem seems manageable when we can go home and wrap up warm and safe. One of the real issues however is how much Climate Change deepens the scar between rich and poor. Low-income countries carry 13 per cent of the global exposure to tropical storms but 81% of the risk of being killed by one. Climate change highlights the issues of injustice just as much as it destroys natural habitats and wildlife - maybe even more so. Climate change cannot be a separate issue to social justice because it is both a cause and result of social injustice. The result of rising sea levels due to the polar ice caps melting and expansion of water, will soon be that cities not high enough above sea level will start to flood. Bangladeshi rice fields are currently facing this threat. Around 23 million people living in several of Indonesia's coastal cities, including the capital Jakarta, are at risk of having their homes inundated in coastal flooding by 2050 as a result of rising sea levels caused by climate change. So often, the people it affects are the marginalised and the poorest. A term that often comes up is a climate refugee. By 2050, there could be up to 200 million people displaced by rising global temperature according to the International Organisation on Migration. People have to leave behind homes, jobs and sometimes families to escape flooding, extreme weather and drought.

Why is there flooding, extreme weather and drought? Because so many of us are trapped in an indulgent, consumerist lifestyle. Many of us are complacent even when people all around the world are suffering. Critical thinking is a key that can help us challenge others and ourselves. It could be the first step to us resolving the issue of climate change. It is more important than ever in the world today.

Yet combatting climate change is not something we have to face alone. I believe action and spirituality sit together. Prayer and action are two sides of the one coin. Spirituality is like the roots of a tree and action is the leaves inspired by God.

So much in the Catholic faith comes down to the creation story. We believe God is this omni-benevolent, omniscient and omnipresent creator. In Genesis 1, it says God gives us dominion over all of creation and so we as Christians have a responsibility to care for creation. We have been given stewardship. However, so often this stewardship is forgotten in our world, according to Pope Francis, “amid the noise and distractions of an information overload”. Looking inwards instead of outwards makes us think that all we are responsible for is ourselves, even when the world is so big around us. We lose the awe and wonder we used to have for the world when we were little. In Mathew 14, Jesus says, “For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” Maybe this awe and wonder, hand in hand with respect, is a window into God’s Kingdom, and maybe we need to open our eyes to the dignity of our beautiful world and every single person in it.

Religious people have the foundations of protecting the environment written into their very history. Along with religious people, climate change has also inspired millions of non-religious people to action. In a way, the issue of climate change is unifying people into looking after our world as exemplified in the actions of Greta Thunberg. In 1 John 4:16, it says, “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.” Love is working. There is something special in the solidarity found in caring together for our common home and as Pope Francis described it, “growing in holiness by responsibly and generously carrying out our proper mission.”

Finally, there is a hunger for doing good things and some might even say it is the work of the Holy Spirit. I was inspired when I saw this recently through organisations that are committed to helping to fight against the threat of climate change. The Paris agreement, signed by 195 countries in 2016 is one example of the world’s governing bodies trying to fight the effects of Climate Change. They have agreed on a 2°C cap in a bid to keep emissions down and ensure sure temperatures do not rise above this 2° threshold. We have to have the hope and courage to change.