

The Vincentian Charism and the Call of Creation



This year the Vincentian Family throughout the world are celebrating the 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian charism. For Vincent, people struggling with poverty, hardship or injustice were real people not statistics, he saw the need to look beneath the surface.

“In this simple act of seeing he broke through the class barriers in the France of his day. For a man who always started from people and not from theories about them Vincent built up a veritable empire of works and organisations. He mobilised a multitude of diverse people to help him. And what an astonishing list it was - all those living in poverty, refugees, people who were caught in war torn France, those who were wounded in battle, people who were homeless, sick or orphaned. For Vincent they all had one thing in common. They were people. He could see where others could not. For Vincent saw reality in depth and the way he saw it was in the light of the Gospel of Jesus who always saw things so clearly and so humanely. Vincent stirred up the complacency of his age and helped so many others to see the misery and injustice inherent in society”. *Frank Mullan CM, 1978.*

Vincent could truly say “your pain is my pain”. His compassion for fellow human beings was the source of the extraordinary initiatives he and his colleagues took, in response to the economic and social injustices of his day. If he was alive today his compassion would extend to the whole of creation – to the web of life. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines compassion as “consciousness of other’s distress with a desire to alleviate it”. While Vincent would celebrate the beauty of creation he would seek to alleviate the damage being done to the environment knowing that those who would suffer most would be the world’s most vulnerable people. This edition Just.Now presents some reflections on one of the greatest contributors to the destruction of the environment today – the pollution created by plastics.

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice consists of

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, The Vincentian Congregation, The Daughters of Charity and The Sisters of the Holy Faith. *Working for social and economic change, tackling poverty and social exclusion*

Our Contact Details

Ozanam House
53 Mountjoy Square
Gardiner Street
Dublin 1

T: 01 8780425

vpj@eircom.net

www.justicematters.ie
www.budgeting.ie
www.vote.ie
www.misc.ie

PLASTIC POLLUTION – WHAT IS IT?

Plastic, the cheap and practical material is used for a large quantity of goods, it has revolutionised our lives. It was initially coined the 'material of 1,000 uses' by its inventor Leo Baekeland in 1907, who greatly underestimated the magnitude of its uses.

However, plastics are entering the world's oceans at an alarming rate. Between five and thirteen million tonnes of plastic is estimated to be leaking into the world's oceans each year, this is the equivalent of dumping a truck of plastic into the sea every minute. Micro-plastics are so small (less than 5mm diameter) they escape the filters of most water waste treatment systems.

People may be shocked to learn that plastic pollution has contaminated multiple foods and beverages that we consume everyday – including salt, honey, sugar, drinking water and beer.

In a recent experiment, scores of tap water from a dozen nations were analysed for micro-plastic contamination: 83% of the samples tested contained plastic contamination. The US had the highest rate at 94%, followed by Lebanon and India. European nations had the lowest contamination rate, but it was still a staggering 72%. ***

It is proving difficult to research the health effects of digesting plastic as scientists have yet to find a control group of humans who have not been exposed.

The preliminary concern is micro-plastics because of their small size, chemicals (or pathogens) that they harbour could penetrate cells or organs. Micro-plastics attract the bacteria found in sewage, it is known to absorb and contain these toxic chemicals. Research, on wildlife shows that these chemicals are then released in the body after the micro-plastics are digested. Plastics also contain "endocrine disrupters" that can be carcinogenic. ***

WHY IS IT HAPPENING?

Researchers believe that most of the pollution comes from single use plastics such as plastic bottles. *

One million plastic bottles are bought around the world every minute. More than four-hundred and eighty billion plastic drinking bottles were sold in 2016, less than half of these bottles were collected for recycling, and only 7% of those collected were made into new bottles. As the use of plastic bottles soars across the globe, efforts to collect and recycle these bottles are failing to keep up. *

In the EU alone, there is an estimated twenty-five million tonnes of post-consumer plastic and only 30% of this is being recycled. The problem has economic roots with a high cost of recycling in contrast to the low cost of the materials used to make new plastic items. The economic and consumer incentives need to be strengthened. There is also a need to highlight producer responsibility. ****

Major drink brands produce the greatest number of plastic bottles. Coca-Cola produces more than 100 billion throwaway plastic bottles annually or 3.400 a second. The top six drink companies in the world use a combined average of 6.6% Pet (recyclable plastic) in their products. Plastic bottles could be made out of 100% recycled plastic. *



PLASTICS IN IRELAND

Ireland is well advanced towards meeting some of its EU obligations across a broad range of waste legislation, according to Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) national statistics.

Ireland's recycling rates have dramatically increased in recent years, fuelled by tax on disposing waste in landfills (2013) - a Government levy of €75 payable per tonne of commercial waste disposed of in a landfill. The majority of waste generated in Ireland still goes to landfill, however Ireland was ranked joint third in Europe for reducing the amount of rubbish going to landfill in 2015.

Ireland made history with the introduction of the 'Plastic Bag Levy' (2002), to encourage the use of reusable bags. It successfully reduced the use of plastic bags by 90%.

The next step for Ireland is outlined in the Green Party's Waste reduction Bill 2017. The bill proposes a ban on single-use non-recyclable plastic coffee cups and cutlery, replacing them with recyclable or compostable products, in food and drink outlets. The bill would also introduce a recycling deposit scheme for bottles and cans, where consumers who return bottles or cans for recycling will get a monetary reward e.g. 10c per bottle.

THOSE MOST AFFECTED BY THE SURGE IN PLASTIC POLLUTION

Plastic pollution is a fast-evolving global problem. Ireland particularly relies on its surrounding water for food, tourism, employment, oil & gas, renewable energy and much more. There are many non-commercial benefits and leisure activities associated with the sea. It contributes to citizen's well-being, health and quality of life. Ireland has a strong and long maritime culture and tradition.

Ireland's coastline, inshore and offshore waters contain some of the largest and most valuable fisheries resource in Europe. They support a rich and diverse range of ecosystems, habitats and species, as well as, unique land and seascapes.

The developed world has the means to deal with the problems caused by plastic pollution, however many parts of the developing world don't have the same resources. This year 'The Guardian' has been reporting plastic pollution all over the world. There have been disturbing images of the hardships faced by beautiful and often rare wildlife, foraging for food in the heaps of plastic thrown up on the shore. Images of children and adults searching for food amidst piles of plastic refuse, is a reminder that when the environment is damaged it is the weakest and most vulnerable that suffer most. They have to respond to a crisis for which they are not responsible.

Plastic pollution is a fast developing global issue.



WHAT CAN WE DO?

Become better informed on the consequences of the accelerating use of plastic for our health, the environment and wildlife, and of our own responsibility to developing nations to respond to this global threat.

Raise awareness of the negative impact of non-recyclable plastics and commit ourselves to the promotion of recyclable and reusable products – Plastic Identification Codes (PIC) are displayed on the bottom of most plastic products. The codes range from one to seven:

1. Recyclable not reusable
2. Reusable not recyclable
3. Not recyclable but can be repurpose
- 4-5. Reusable
- 6-7. Avoid.

Take steps to change our behaviour e.g. simply switching to a plastic or non-plastic reusable bottle (stainless steel flasks or glass bottles) would dramatically decrease the demand for single use plastic items.

Advocate and lobby for the introduction and acceptance of the Green Party's Waste Reduction Bill 2017. Evidence suggests that the best way to tackle plastic pollution is to stop it from entering the environment in the first place.

Olivia McEvoy, VPSJ

* The Guardian (28.6.17) ** The Guardian (8.9.17)

The Guardian (6.9.17) *European Commission (2017)



13 million tonnes of plastic leaks into the world's ocean each year – the equivalent to dumping a truck of plastic into the sea every minute.

Prayer and Reflection

Look and See

This morning, at waterside,
a sparrow flew to a water rock and landed,
by error, on the back of an eider duck;
lightly it fluttered off, amused.
The duck, too, was not provoked,
but, you might say,
was laughing.

This afternoon a gull sailing over
our house was casually scratching
its stomach of white feathers with one
pink foot as it flew.

Oh Lord, how shining and festive
is your gift to us, if we
only look, and see.

Mary Oliver

To Quote Pope Francis from LAUDATO SI

LAUDATO SI, mi Signore – “Praise be to you my Lord” in the words of this beautiful canticle, St Francis of Assisi 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. “Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs. (1)

“The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth”. In many parts of the planet people lament that once beautiful landscapes are now covered with rubbish.”. (1.21)

“These problems are closely linked to a throwaway culture which affects the excluded just as it quickly reduces things to rubbish.” (1.22)



Prayer

Creator Father

We pause in awe and wonder at
the beauty of our world,
The grandeur of mountains, lakes and seas,
The splendour of sunrises and sunsets,
The exquisite fragile beauty of wild flowers,
The myriad forms of wildlife with which we
share our world,
For the companionship, uniqueness and dignity
of all that is human,
And the blessedness of the web of life,
We say Glory to You O' Lord.

Forgive us for the blindness, greed,
ignorance, and indifference,
Which lead us to harm and endanger what you
have so wonderfully made.

We pray for the love, wisdom,
understanding, knowledge and commitment,
To begin anew to walk with gentleness,
respect and responsibility on our Earth,
Conscious of our responsibility
to creation and to one another,
Recognising your presence with us
as we seek to live in harmony,
With all you have made.

Editor: Sr. Bernadette Mac Mahon DC