A lesson not learnt

Thirty years ago, Pope John Paul II began his message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 1990, with this introduction:

In our day, there is a growing awareness that world peace is threatened not only by the arms race, regional conflicts and continued injustices among peoples and nations, but also by a lack of due respect for nature, by the plundering of natural resources and by a progressive decline in the quality of life. The sense of precariousness and insecurity that such a situation engenders is a seedbed for collective selfishness, disregard for others and dishonesty.

Laudato Si’ continues this message highlighting the prevalence of collective selfishness, disregard for others and dishonesty:

- evasiveness serving as a licence to carrying on with our present lifestyles and models of production and consumption (#59)
- our freedom handed over to the blind forces of the unconscious, of immediate needs, of self-interest and of violence (LS #105)
- false belief that “an infinite quantity of energy and resources are available, that it is possible to renew them quickly, and that the negative effects of the exploitation of the natural order can be easily absorbed” (LS #106)
- the “use and throw away” logic which generates so much waste, because of the disordered desire to consume more than what is really necessary... (LS #123)
- the need for honesty to question models of development, production and consumption #138
- the critical importance of reducing greenhouse gases requires honesty, courage and responsibility, above all on the part of those countries which are more powerful and pollute the most. (LS #169)
- the need for honesty and truth in scientific and political discussions (LS #183)

Pope Francis implores us to “take up an ancient lesson, found in different religious traditions and in the Bible. It is the conviction that less is more” (Laudato Si’ #222).

We need “to regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it” (LS #229).

Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth. Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.

An excerpt from A Prayer for our Earth, Pope Francis