

## BULLETIN – JUNE 21

**Congratulations** to parishioner and part-time church maintenance man **José Anleu**, who was the subject of an award-winning essay by St. Stephen's 8<sup>th</sup> grader Clare Hart. Even while providing us and St. James and St. Adalbert's with part-time service, José has worked full-time maintenance at St. Stephen's for 12 years. In that time, he has gotten to know the students and their families very well. For a statewide essay contest, Clare decided to write about José and the human qualities he brings to his job. Amen to that!

**And congratulations** to parish alumna **Debra Sikanas**, daughter of Ray Sikanas, who has been named as the recipient of this year's San Damiano Award at the Autumn Gala of our Franciscan Sisters in Pittsburgh this coming October. The annual award is given to an individual or an organization which has demonstrated a longtime commitment to the Sisters, their mission, and their ministry. As the oldest of a family of eight, Debra attended our school and was drawn to the Sisters and their work. She spent her freshman year of high school at St. Francis Academy in Pittsburgh, where our late beloved Sister Mary Clarita Kadis was her prep mistress and became a lifelong friend and mentor. Debra not only continues her support of the Sisters and their work, but engages in charity work of her own in the Holland area where she lives. See how the seeds of charity sprout and grow!

**What about that encyclical on climate change?** There is much fuss about Pope Francis' recently-released encyclical. Some feel vindicated because they think the Pope took "their side" of the discussion. Some are enraged because they think the Pope insists on only one way of looking at the origins of climate change. There are several things to keep in mind as you ACTUALLY READ the text. I have not done that yet, but I certainly intend to. And if you don't intend to read the actual document, but are content to get all your impressions from the media of any and every stripe, you have no grounds to comment on the encyclical, one way or another.

Pope Francis, as George Weigel reminded us, is an old-fashioned Jesuit superior. He teaches and preaches by way of exhortation. He uses impersonal examples of misbehavior to illustrate dangers. This happened all the time in the seminary, when we heard exhortations to virtue and righteousness. An example is this sentence which appeared in the DRAFT of the encyclical: the earth "is protesting for the wrong that we are doing to her, because of the irresponsible use and abuse of the goods that God has placed on her. We have grown up thinking that we were her owners and dominators, authorized to loot her." Now a statement like that could make some tree-huggers very smug, and get some climate change "deniers" very angry. I look at it this way:

The earth is not a person. Giving the earth personality is a figure of speech, much like Jesus on Palm Sunday telling the religious leaders of Jerusalem that if he ordered his followers to keep silent, "the very stones would cry out" (Luke 19:40). The Pope clearly is not solemnly defining the earth as a kind of pantheistic orb which has feelings and emotions. However, his reflection and use of language make me think of the tragedy of that huge area in the Pacific Ocean, verified by countless observers on the sea itself and in the air above, which has become a Texas-size, huge floating waste dump of plastic

containers and other non-degradable refuse. That wasn't the result of natural forces. Scientists are concerned that this layer of human detritus can interfere with the natural need of the ocean and its creatures for oxygen and light. I didn't personally contribute to it, but it's a problem, and it needs to be addressed and cleaned up. How will that happen when every nation says, "Not my problem"?

"We have grown up thinking that we were . . . authorized to loot her." No, we haven't! At least, I sure haven't. "Don't you dare throw your trash out the car window," Mom and/or Dad taught me from my earliest youth. "The world is not your wastebasket, Mister! Pick that up," Sister Virgo Potens ordered me when I carelessly and thoughtlessly missed the trash barrel discarding a paper cup while leaving school one day. Those lessons remain with me to the present day. I faithfully recycle. I rejoice to see people using our Paper Gator. Neighbors see me policing the grounds, picking up even the cigarette butts along the sidewalks on our parish property. I consider it our responsibility and part of our Christian witness to present our church and grounds as a verdant oasis here on our little corner of the Lord's vineyard on the West Side. We plant trees, we pick up after the neighborhood dogs (and often invite their owners to do likewise!). I have extensively used public transportation and my bicycle for most of my life. But I don't take umbrage at the Pope saying "We have grown up thinking . . ." any more than I have taken umbrage at general statements like "Modern man has no respect for human life." Many do, and many don't. If the shoe fits, wear it. Such statements are intended to REINFORCE good behavior as much as they are intended to REFORM bad behavior. That's the way it was in the seminary and, I'm sure, in the Jesuit institutions in which the Pope grew up.

The encyclical is not intended to make people say, "I told you so," nor to make other people throw up their hands in disgust. It should call each of us and all of us to a greater sense of responsibility for the creation of which we are clearly stewards (cf. Genesis 1 and 2), not "owners and dominators." There is something in the encyclical from which all of us can benefit. It is a fine piece of spiritual reading. And I still think that those bloated egos who engage in trading "carbon credits" so they can blame others while flying around on their own corporate jets are political and moral hypocrites. The Pope blasts them as well. You might have had reservations similar to mine about climate change "hysteria." There has been a good deal of that, with great financial profit for some and at great cost for others. I suggest that when you encounter someone who tells you, "Well, I guess the Pope told YOU off," you might ask them why they have not given equal weight to the frequent and consistent papal teachings on contraception and abortion. Ultimately, all these issues are about LIFE, which Christ wants us all to have to the full (John 10:10).

**Church teaching in a nutshell.** We do not believe in separating life-giving and love-giving in the marital act. If you deliberately withhold either life or love in sexual relations, you are seriously frustrating the loving, life-giving plan of God for the human body and soul and family. This is the context of the Church's consistent teaching about the immorality of birth control or contraception. God bless you!

Fr. Den

**Modern reality check.** Teacher: “All right, class, today we’re studying diet and nutrition. Who would like to tell us the definition of trans-fat?”

Too-eager student: “I will, teacher. It’s an overweight guy who has spent his whole life really feeling deep down that he is meant to wear a bikini.”