

by Samantha Panchèvre

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

June 19, 2020
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint
(The Bliss Bean)

READ

Chapter 6, sections 1 and 2

Pope Francis explores spirituality and consumerism at the start of chapter 6. He writes: "The emptier a perso's heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume. It becomes almost impossible to accept the limits imposed by reality. In this horizon, a genuine sense of the common good also disappears… Obsession with a consumerist lifestyle, above all when few people are capable of maintaining it, can only lead to violence and mutual destruction" (204).

However, the effects of an ecological education can completely change a person – even society – for the better: "Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning. We are able to take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge our deep dissatisfaction, and to embark on new paths to authentic freedom. No system can completely suppress our openness to what is good, true and beautiful, or our God-given ability to respond to his grace at work deep in our hearts" (205).

This is why it's important to raise awareness and empower others to make changes when they can. Fransis says: "Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us, such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices. All of these reflect a generous and worthy creativity which brings out the best in human beings" (211).

REFLECT

For me, one of the most empowering tenets of the Christian faith is the belief in our God-given free will. I discussed the power of free will in an earlier post, but it's especially relevant in the context of consumerism. The pope says we have a moral imperative to assess "the impact of our every action and personal decision on the world around us." Furthermore, "If we can overcome individualism, we will truly be able to develop a different lifestyle and bring about significant changes in society."

There are some things that are worth being a bit selfish about, such as setting healthy boundaries when working from home. But I'm sure we're all guilty of weighing individualism over selflessness from time to time. In what areas of your life can you reel in immediate desires for the benefit of others?

ACT

Something you can do right now is embrace the "less is more" mantra that comes with a minimalist mindset. The video above describes ten easy habits that can help you achieve this – along with the refreshing mental clarity that comes with it!

Lifestyle changes can even place positive pressures on powerful entities to do better, such as choosing to boycott brands with reprehensible business practices. Boycotts are one of the more accessible means of peaceful protest. Francis says: "When social pressure affects their earnings, businesses clearly have to find ways to produce differently. This shows us the great need for a sense of social responsibility on the part of consumers" (206).

For boycotts to have a real impact, the emphasis needs to be on a company's reputation, not their revenue, because companies will only change if their reputation

is on the line. This is why successful boycott campaigns are those that call out a particularly egregious business practice and name specific actions the company can take to evolve for the better.

Source material:
Document
LS 6.1-2.pdf

Advertisement

This story appears in the **Digging Into Laudato Si'** feature series. View the full series.