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Faith AND works – the way forward for our common home.

Marian Pallister, Pax Christi Scotland Chair,

Week 1

James 2, 14-17

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

In his document *Laudato Si*, in which he explores today's ecological crisis, Pope Francis writes: "The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation. In fact, the deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet.' (LS V: 48)

To paraphrase St James and Pope Francis, we cannot say to the poor living in a village where the water is polluted, 'Go in peace – buy some bottled water.' We can't say to small fishing communities devastated by factory fishing, 'Go in peace; we are considering legislation that could replenish fish stocks in 20 years' time. For now, buy Bird's Eye fish fingers from the supermarket.' We can't say to impoverished coastal populations affected by rises in the sea level, 'Go in peace; pack up your belongings and migrate inland.'

As Pope Francis says, there are any number of problems 'insufficiently represented on global agendas' that increasingly create imbalance between rich and poor. He quotes from a 2012 Pastoral Letter on the Environment and Human Development in Bolivia, which said "Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest".

If as people of faith we do nothing - do not clothe the naked, feed the poor, make the changes that will halt devastating climate change affecting the most vulnerable, we have surely to accept that OUR faith is dead. If we simply shed a crocodile tear and switch channels when the news tells us that the elderly, the sick, children, and animals are dying because of an extreme heatwave caused by global warming, 'what', as St James says, 'is the good of that?'

We have a voice – not to utter platitudes, but to lobby politicians ahead of COP26 to make the changes that will stop the deterioration of the environment - and to make them fast. We can be activists within our own communities, seeking divestment from fossil fuels; seeking effective recycling processes (no use putting everything in the right colour bin if it then all goes off to a poor country and burned, further polluting the atmosphere at every stage of its journey); seeking to promote Pope Francis's seven-year 'Laudato Sí Action Platform' aimed at helping communities become 'totally sustainable, in the spirit of integral ecology'.

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Marian Pallister, Pax Christi Scotland Chair, July 2021.