

The Mysticism of *Laudato Si'* 19

OCEANS

Seas and oceans cover 70% of the surface of the globe. They offer us a rich world for contemplation in their varied moods, in the steady ebb and flow of the tides, in the play of sunlight and moonlight, in the power of wind and storm. As a child I remember that when my father was upset or in a dark mood he would walk four miles to the coast and spend time contemplating the sea, then return home a different man. Think back to the time you saw the sea for the first time. Watch small children on the beach and recover your experience of awe and delight at something so wonderful and strange. The seas are also home to 80% of all life on earth. That life began in the oceans and nurtured it until it was ready to step ashore. We and all living things have 70% water in our make-up. If Earth is our Mother, the seas are as a grand-mother to us!

Because they cannot be tamed, the seas give us a feeling that we are faced with formidable power, charming but also threatening. But in Hebrew understanding the sea is a creature subject to divine command. Yahweh dries up the Red Sea to create a safe path for his people as they fled from Egypt. Jesus' power to calm the Sea of Galilee and to walk on its waves hints at his divinity. God's power over the sea symbolises divine mastery over the storms of human history, and in the closing book of the New Testament a sea of crystal symbolises the luminous peace of a renewed universe.

But each of the five great oceans bears a toxic wound—a vast island made of floating plastic, which generates a 'plastic soup' that is finding its way into marine life and thus into the food chain. The plastic we throw away is coming back to haunt us. Many coral reefs are already barren. The pope asks: *'Who turned the wonder-world of the seas into underwater cemeteries bereft of colour and life?'* (41) and he argues that the oceans need to be made part of our *"global commons"* (174).

So, contemplate the sea; allow yourself to be moved by its beauty, power and restless energy. Then grieve for the oceans of the world, support marine

conservation groups, and pray that the destruction of so precious a resource may soon be reversed.