

## The way forward is back

In our quest for ecological sustainability and justice, the temptation is to look forward, to new technologies and ways of living which ensure lighter carbon footprints and cleaner energy sources. There are growing calls for us to also look back, to appreciate and learn from our first nation peoples who have cared for this continent for tens of thousands of years.

Baustina (2016) explains,

*“Indigenous people are sensitively attuned to the voice of creation ... In our ecological age, we modern humans can learn from them. It is high time for us to revisit their cultures and wisdom traditions and learn from their creative relationship with the natural world, from their sensitivity to the pervasive and numinous presence of the Spirit ... pp 79,80.*

The destructiveness of the recent bushfires is a prime example of how we should all advocate for the environment and also listen to the first nation peoples whose knowledge of fire and care for the land, at the time of the crisis was ignored.

As Pope Francis (2015) reminds us in *Laudato Si'*:

*... they [indigenous communities] are not merely one minority among others, but should be the*

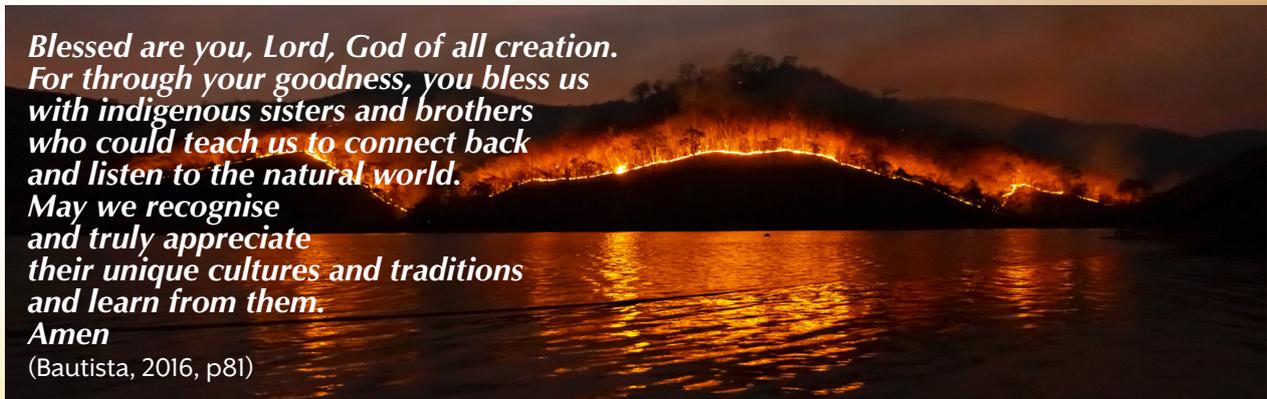
*principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values. When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best (section 146).*

In Australia we need to recognise the depth and value of our first nation peoples knowledge and incorporate their skills in environmental management.

Murrandoo Yanner, a Gangalidda leader and the director of the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, said, “the way forward is back, if we can understand, learn from and imagine our place through the laws and stories of our ancestors then we will have true knowledge on how to live, adapt and survive in Australia, just as our ancestors did” (Yanner as cited in Wright, 2020).

The situation is critical – our environment is warming, the incidence of severe weather events increasing and the destruction of the natural world escalating as the environment takes last place behind overpopulation, economic expansion and greed.

***Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation.  
For through your goodness, you bless us  
with indigenous sisters and brothers  
who could teach us to connect back  
and listen to the natural world.  
May we recognise  
and truly appreciate  
their unique cultures and traditions  
and learn from them.  
Amen  
(Bautista, 2016, p81)***



### REFLECTION

- > Indigenous culture and wisdom traditions can teach us how to live in unity with the natural world - how does your ministry seek to listen to and learn from our first nation peoples?

### REFERENCES

1. Pope Francis. (2015). *Laudato Si'* [Encyclical letter]. Retrieved from [www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)
2. Bautista, M. (2016). *Living Laudato Si: The Ecological Challenge of Pope Francis*. Philippines: Claretian Communication Foundation, Inc.
3. Wright, A. (2020, January 15). *Want to Stop Australia's Fires? Listen to Aboriginal People*. The New York Times, Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com>