

The Environment

“Praise be to you, my Lord.”
“LAUDATO SI’, mi’ Signore”
– “Praise be to you, my Lord.”

These are the words that open Pope Francis’ encyclical on ecology and care for God’s creation. These words, quoting St. Francis of Assisi’s beautiful canticle, remind us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.

Pope Francis’ encyclical letter *Laudato Si’* was released in June 2015. Five years later, in 2020, Pope Francis invited all Catholics and people of good will to celebrate its fifth anniversary by protecting families and future generations through action to care for our common home. Here are themes that Pope Francis highlighted in *Laudato Si’* which require our urgent response today.

- **A Moral and Spiritual Challenge.** The ecological crisis, Pope Francis writes, is a summons to profound interior conversion—to renew our relationships with God, one another, and the created world.

- **Care for God’s Creation.** God created the world and entrusted it to us as a gift. Now we have the responsibility to care for and protect it and all people, who are part of creation. Protecting human dignity is strongly linked to care for creation.

- **We are All Connected.** We are connected to the rest of the human family, to the created world, and to those who will come after us in future generations.

- **Impact on the Poor.** People in poverty have contributed least to climate change, yet they are disproportionately impacted by it. As a result of excessive use of natural resource by wealthy nations, those who are poor experience pollution, lack of access to clean water, hunger, and more.

- **Called to Solidarity.** We are one human family and have a shared responsibility for others and for creation. Wealthy countries have a responsibility to reduce consumption of non-renewal resources and

should help poorer nations develop in sustainable ways.

- **Technological and economic development must serve human beings and enhance human dignity, instead of creating an economy of exclusion, so that all people have access to what is needed for authentic human development.**

- **Supporting Life, Protecting Creation.** Concern for nature is incompatible with failure to protect vulnerable human beings, such as unborn children, people with disabilities, or victims of human trafficking.

- **A Time to Act.** Pope Francis calls for a change in lifestyle and consumption. We can make important changes as individuals, families, and communities, and as civil and political leaders.

- **Hope and Joy.** “Injustice is not invincible” (no. 74) and

we act knowing that we seek to live out God’s vision of renewed relationships with God, ourselves, one another, and creation.

How You Can Respond

Each of us are called to take concrete steps – from reducing consumption to working for political change – to better care for creation. Here are some ideas.

1. Become more aware of our connectedness. Care for one another and creation includes understanding that “everything is connected” (no. 91) and that the economy, politics, community involvement, and technology all affect the future of the planet and humankind. How can we become more aware of our connectedness?

2. Changes to lifestyle and consumption habits can make a big difference. For example, get a re-usable water bottle, take shorter showers, walk, bike or take public transportation instead of driving, recycle, compost food waste, and buy energy efficient appliances.

3. Make changes institutionally at your parish, school, or workplace. For example, start recycling and composting, use washable dinnerware in cafeterias, share electronically instead of printing, do an energy audit, and install solar panels.

4. Support local efforts to solve environmental problems. Community groups around the country are working to make city, county, and state-wide changes that can make a big difference. Find out what is going on locally and get involved.

5. Contact your members of Congress to share Pope Francis’ message and urge action to address climate change.

Prayer

Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love, teach us to contemplate you in the beauty of the universe, for all things speak of you. Awaken our praise and thankfulness for every being that you have made. Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined to everything that is. God of love, show us our place in this world as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth, for not one of them is forgotten in your sight. Enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live. The poor and the earth are crying out. O Lord, seize us with your power and light, help us to protect all life, to prepare for a better future, for the coming of your Kingdom of justice, peace, love and beauty. Praise be to you! Amen.

Excerpted from “A Christian prayer in union with creation,” in *Laudato Si’*, no. 246

For More Information: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops webpage on Environment and Environmental Justice (www.usccb.org/environment) • Catholic Climate Covenant(www.catholicclimatecovenant.org)

• WeAreSaltAndLight.org