

On Care for Our Common Home



Prepared by the NCCW Education Committee January 2019
Based on the Encyclical *Laudato Si*, by Pope Francis May 2015

Laudato Si: Introduction



In 1963, Saint John XXIII wrote his Encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, Peace on Earth, in response to looming nuclear threats. In 1971, Blessed Pope Paul VI expressed ecological concerns due to human activity. In his first Encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, Saint John Paul II called for a global ecological conversion and safeguards for human ecology. The statements by the popes have echoed the sentiments and findings of scientists and philosophers thereby helping to form our understanding. Pope Francis spends some time discussing St. Francis of Assisi, the saint from which he selected his papal name, who viewed the world as united with us, rather than one in which we seek a competitive edge.

Our Holy Father asks that we work together to better the world in which we live. Our throwaway culture and its impact on societal values, the “rapidification” of our industrial advance without consideration of the impact on culture and environmental issues, pollution leading to global warming as carbon dioxide levels increase, increasing shortages and pollution of our water supply, and the loss of our forests are outlined in Chapter 1 and beyond.

“What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (160) It is very personal for those who have children and grandchildren. I know that the consequences of my actions have implications for everyone whose lives follow mine. How about you?

We hope the Holy Spirit fills you in these next 30 days with opportunities to dialogue and create change. **“The Lord hears the cry of the poor, blessed be the Lord!” (Psalm 34)**

Laudato Si: Chapter One



Day1

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO OUR COMMON HOME?

Today begins our 30-day reflection on the second encyclical written by Pope Francis. Within the document, we see how man's relationship with nature is suffering and “to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it (19).

The first chapter of the encyclical paints a picture of what is happening to our earth and presents the most recent scientific findings on the environment as a way to listen to the cry of creation.

<https://www.carbonbrief.org/in-depth-the-science-behind-the-papal-encyclical>

Ponder this question which is at the heart of *Laudato Si*. “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (160)



Day 2

POLLUTION AND CLIMATE CHANGE (19) - Each year, hundreds of millions of tons of waste are generated, much of it non-biodegradable, highly toxic and radioactive from homes and businesses, from construction and demolition sites, from clinical, electronic and industrial sources. Our home is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth.

These problems are closely linked to a throwaway culture which affects the excluded just as it quickly reduces things to rubbish (21).

The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. Scientist indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (Carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides and others) released mainly as a result of human activity (22).

“Reducing greenhouse gases requires honesty, courage and responsibility, above all on the part of those countries which are more powerful and pollute the most,” said Pope Francis, defending the right of everyone including future generations and today’s vulnerable communities to live in a world that consists of more than “rubble, desert and refuse.” (23)

Spend a few moments reflecting on how climate change might affect the livelihood of the poor seeking to flee from the growing poverty or their inability to live in their native lands due to environmental degradation.



Day 3

THE ISSUE OF WATER AND LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY - Water is the essence of life. Safe drinking water is indispensable to sustain life and health (29). One particularly serious problem is the quality of water available to the poor. Every day, unsafe water results in many deaths and the spread of water-related diseases, including those caused by microorganisms and chemical substances (30). Access to water is being denied to many indigenous people as industry diverts rivers and deforests habitat. Yet access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right. Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity.

Imagine being extremely thirsty and parched with no water to drink!

On the issue of biodiversity, and its loss, Pope Francis writes that the earth's resources are also being plundered because of short-sighted approaches to the economy, commerce and production (32). The loss of forests and woodlands entails the loss of species which may constitute extremely important resources in the future, not only for food but also for curing disease and other uses. The United Nations reports that over 200 species go extinct every day, a rate faster than ever recorded before. Different species contain genes which could be key resources in years

ahead for meeting human needs and regulating environmental problems (34). But a sober look at our world shows that the degree of human intervention, often in the service of business interests and consumerism, is actually making our earth less rich and beautiful, ever more limited and grey, even as technological advances and consumer goods continue to abound limitlessly.

Contemplate: Do we seem to think that we can substitute an irreplaceable and irretrievable beauty given by our Creator with something which we have created ourselves?



Day 4

DECLINE IN THE QUALITY OF HUMAN LIFE AND BREAKDOWN OF SOCIETY (43).

Human beings are creatures of this world, enjoying the right to life and happiness, and endowed with unique dignity. So we cannot fail to consider the effects on peoples' lives of environmental deterioration, current models of development and the throwaway culture (44). Many cities are huge, inefficient structures, excessively wasteful of energy and water. Neighborhoods, even those recently built, are congested, chaotic and lacking in sufficient green space (45). Frequently, we find beautiful and carefully manicured green spaces in so-called "safer" areas of cities, but not in the more hidden areas where the disposable of society live.

What is your reaction to the idea that we were not meant to be inundated by cement, asphalt, glass and metal, and deprived of physical contact with nature?

Furthermore, when media and the digital world become omnipresent, their influence can stop people from learning how to live wisely, to think deeply and to love generously (47). Real relationships with others, with all the challenges they entail, now tend to be replaced by a type of internet communication which enables us to choose or eliminate relations at a whim.

How has the digital world affected you, your family and friends? Pros and Cons.



Day 5

GLOBAL INEQUALITY - WEAK RESPONSES - A VARIETY OF OPINIONS (48)

The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental destruction unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation (51). Inequity affects not only individuals but entire countries; it compels us to consider an ethic of international relations (52). We need to strengthen the conviction that we are one single human family.

It is remarkable how weak international political responses have been (48). The failure of global summits on the environment make it plain that our politics are subject to technology and finance. There are too many special interests, and economic interests easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected.

On many concrete questions, the Church has no authority to offer a definitive option; she knows that honest debate must be encouraged among experts, while respecting divergent views (61).

This concludes the first chapter on What is Happening to Our Common Home. In reading and praying over these issues, have you discovered or formed ideas as to what we can do about them?

Laudato Si: Chapter Two

Day 6



Ludwig Seitz (1844–1908), *Faith and Reason, united*

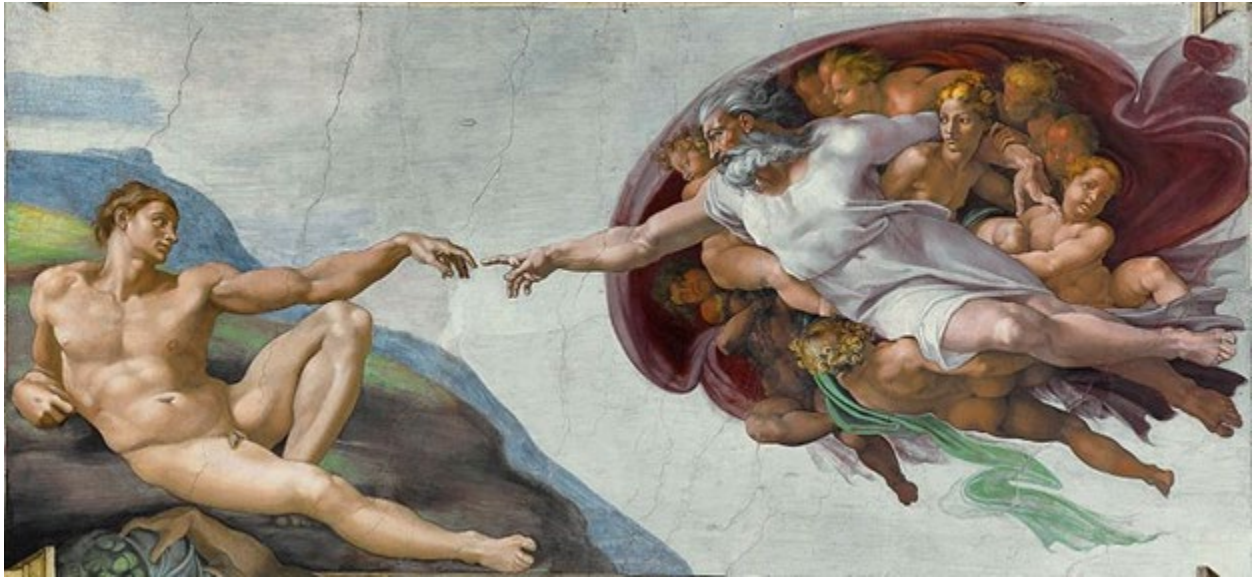
Chapter Two of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si* begins by examining the causes of the current ecological crisis. He notes that the complexity of such an issue, with numerous origins, should be examined through the lens of many schools of thought. The Church always searches for Truth and looks for it in all forms of “wisdom and science”, creating a unity between faith and reason (63). At the core of this issue, we should be concerned for the most vulnerable among us. Francis then discusses the relationship of human beings with creation, asserting that humanity was always within the foundation of God's plan (65). Created in God's image, we are imbued with great dignity, out of Love. Being willed by God Himself, we know that each of us is absolutely loved and necessary (65). Francis then describes the three fundamental relationships that exist within human existence through Scripture. They are:

1. With God
2. With neighbor
3. With Earth (66)

All these relationships have been marred by sin, and they have been disordered. At the center of original sin, man believes he can take the place of God, and as such, can dominate nature rather than being a steward of it (67). As all of creation is interconnected as we all came from God, and when we damage our relationship with nature, we damage our relationship with other human beings and God Himself (70). The only way that we can move towards a path of redemption is through recognizing and praising God as our Creator and meditating on His omnipotence and ability to carry us and heal us through every trial of our life (73).

Reflection Questions: Are there any relationships in my life that I can better? How can I work each day to trust God's providence in my life more?

Day 7



Michelangelo (circa 1511), *The Creation of Adam*

What does the word “creation” mean to you? The secular world would prefer to use the parameters of the scientific to define this term, however Pope Francis encourages a deeper view of this concept to all of us. “Creation” encompasses the entirety of God’s plan for us, it is a call to communion with others; an act and manifestation of God’s love (76-77). As such, we are charged to recognize God’s love and presence in even the lowliest of creation.

Our modern world, through countless technological innovations, allows us to see interconnectedness in action, and we should apply this concept to our spiritual lives as well.

God’s hand is always present in our lives, and it is our choice to use our gifts to work with God’s providence positively, or against it (79). God will never take our autonomy away from us. He “limits” himself through giving us free will, letting us choose to love Him and choose Him freely. Through new possibilities, hopes and dreams that develop in our lives, God continues His creative work daily (80).

As human beings, we have unique qualities that set us apart: reason and will, personal identity, and an ability to dialogue with God and others (81). As such, we can be “creators” in our own right, respecting all that is created around us. The ultimate purpose of ALL creation is God, so we are called as human beings to draw all of creation back to its Creator (83).

Reflection Questions: What are some ways I can choose to love God each day? How can I be a “creator” in this world, helping those around me to flourish?

Day 8



Thomas Cole (1838-1840) *Schroon Lake*

Within all of creation, we can see a message of God's love for us and feel His "caress" (84). Look outside your window--what do you see? All of us can point out a beautiful variety of plants and animals within creation. The beauty of variety within creation is the demonstration that God cannot be represented fully by one thing. Therefore, each plant and creature, like pieces of a puzzle help to reveal a part of His revelation and help us to contemplate the entirety of His plan for us (86).

Within all of creation, we can encounter a "locus of presence" for God--in a sense we can feel and connect to Him directly, as His "Spirit of Life" allows it to exist (88). This makes all of creation immensely precious. Nonetheless, creation does not contain the fullness of God's presence, only found in the Eucharist, so we need to recognize the proper order of creation. It is important to recognize that human issues and environmental issues should not be seen as existing in conflict, as they are inherently interconnected. The unique worth of each human being should always be upheld, and this can be done in part by recognizing the inequalities that currently exist and working to fix them (90). The way we treat creation affects how we treat others.

Reflection Question: What can I do to be a better steward of God's creation?

Day 9



Rembrandt (1638), *Landscape with the Good Samaritan*

As humans, we all need to recognize that our earth is a “shared inheritance”, and as such, we must have special care for the needs of the poor. God created each of us equally, and as such, one of us is not favored over another. This is crucial for us to begin to break the inequalities that exist within our earthly secular society.

The Church supports the idea of a “social” and “general” purpose of goods (93). Though we have a legitimate right to private property through a social standpoint, this right should not be abused to favor a few (93). In other words, by exercising our social right to private property, we should not impinge upon the “general” purpose of goods, which is in service to others. We need to recognize the responsibility that comes with having private property and goods.

Our central mindset should be that none of us actually “owns” any piece of creation, as this Earth and even our bodies are a gift to us from God. Regardless of socioeconomic status, we are all equal in dignity in the eyes of God. Our motivation to own goods should not come from a self-serving motivation but come from a desire to use them for the good of others (95).

Reflection Questions: Are there any ways that I can better serve the poor in my community, at a homeless shelter or at a soup kitchen? What are some ways that I can show God gratitude each day for the gifts He has given me? How can I ensure that those on the periphery are accorded the dignity they deserve? How can we ensure that the environment is seen as God’s creation and not as our property to use as we wish? How can we make the connection between stewardship of the environment and stewardship of our neighbor?

Day 10



Pompeo Batoni (1767) *Sacro cuore di Gesù*

Pope Francis ends Chapter II by contemplating on Jesus and his relationship with nature. He highlights the way that Christ used nature to share the messages of God with the disciples. We can ask ourselves: Who loved nature more than Christ? Through his earthly life, Jesus gave it “an attention full of fondness and wonder (97). We can recall the passages within the New Testament, where Jesus controls the wind and sea, demonstrating his intrinsic harmony with nature (98).

During his time on earth Jesus immersed himself in the created world and treasured it. He ate, drank, and created with his hands. Christ elevated work and toil for all of us, transforming it from a draining labor to something with which we can unite ourselves to him. (98) The Gospel of John speaks of how the “Word became flesh” (John 1: 1-18). This statement reveals how within the Incarnation, God united Himself to the created world in the most profound way: by becoming man. We are all charged to follow Christ’s example in our relationship with creation. We should always remember that the risen Jesus, who redeemed all of mankind, who gazed with love on the birds of the sky and the flowers of the fields with his own eyes are filled with his loving presence now (100).

Reflection Question: How can I mirror Christ’s love for creation in my own life?

Laudato Si Chapter Three



Day 11

For the past ten days, we have been looking at the symptoms of the ecological crisis. Let us reflect on the human origins of this crisis over these next five days.

TECHNOLOGY – Tremendous advances in transportation, communication, medicine and industry have occurred over the past two centuries. Through advances in technology, we enjoy healthy lives free from some of the diseases that once challenged human existence. However, some of this same technology is being used to harm and destroy human life (104). Despite the common belief that all advances in technology are good for society we know that unless used responsibly and with values and conscience; we risk inequity, abuse of power and greed.





Day 12

RESOURCES – Our current ideas on how our natural resources are obtained are clouded in myth and misconception (106). We are led to believe that Earth’s resources are abundant and will magically replenish themselves. The role of technology in our lives is dominant. It would be difficult for society to move “off the grid.” This gives technology power over our lives. In economics, we are reliant on technology to produce greater profits and more efficient methods of collecting resources. We need to foster a new vision focused on minimizing our costs to nature and the poor and less fortunate to affect a shift in the current paradigm. We see examples of this when cooperatives are formed or alternatives to petroleum based energies are used. Less pollution and a more caring response to people over profits is formed.

How may I affect changes in my community? Do a participate in a co-operative garden or plant and renew my own gardens responsibly?



Day 13

EFFECTS – Anthropocentrism is the view that humans have a higher value or worth in creation than plants and animals. This leads to the belief that anything can and should be manipulated for our benefits and needs, regardless of the cost. Nature is seen as a tool to be manipulated (116). When we fail to protect our environment, we fail in protecting the poor, the disabled, the old and the unborn. If we follow this path, humans become less important and valuable than technology. We see this today in how we devalue human life. Life is considered expendable. We have become a throw away culture. Instead of contributing to the tending and keeping of creation, we are acting as if we are God. "The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa" –Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, June 2009

We are nearly mid-way through our month of reflecting and praying on Pope Francis' *Laudato Si, Care for our Common Home*. How am I feeling about my place in this world? Am I a slave to technology? Am I a steward of creation? How can I affect a change in my life?



Day 14

How do we change this culture?

- Advance the understanding that we should not be a “throw away culture” both in our use of materials and in life. www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/life-issues-forum/opposing-the-throw-away-culture.cfm
- Protect employment. Human labor is spiritually meaningful and necessary. The ability of men and women to work contributes to their livelihoods, their feelings of self-worth and that of the economies in which they live.
- Support the ethical limits to new biological technologies. We should never eliminate ethics from technology and science advances. All modifications should be directed at enhancing creation as intended and designed by God. We must never sacrifice life for the advancement of technology or because technology allows us to do so.
- View our NCCW partner catholicclimatecovenant.org for webinars to learn more.