

Laudato Si' and healing our fractured world

The urgency of the pope's 2015 encyclical on Care for Our Common Home

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"If life's events, with all their bitterness, sometimes risk choking the gift of prayer that is within us, it is enough to contemplate a starry sky, a sunset, a flower... in order to rekindle a spark of thanksgiving."

Pope Francis pronounced those words at his general audience this past Wednesday, which was once again video-streamed from the papal study inside the Apostolic Palace because of the ongoing coronavirus lockdown.

Although people here in Italy are gradually returning to some semblance of life as it was before we were forced to take drastic measures to stop the spread of COVID-19, large gatherings are still not permitted.

It seemed timely that the pope [focused on prayer](#) this day, especially the way he connected it to pondering "the mystery of Creation".

"And behold it was very good"

"The beauty and mystery of Creation create in the human heart the first impulse that evokes prayer," he said, quoting the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

The 83-year-old pope described it this way:

The first page of the Bible resembles a great hymn of thanksgiving. The narrative of Creation has a rhythm with refrains, where the goodness and beauty of every living thing is continually emphasized. With his word, God calls to life, and every thing comes into existence. With his word, God separates light from darkness, alternates day and night, interchanges the seasons, opens a palette of colors with the variety of plants and animals. In this overflowing forest that quickly vanquishes the chaos, the last one to appear is man. And this appearance inspires an extreme exultation that amplifies God's satisfaction and joy: "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good (Gen 1:31). Very good, but also beautiful: the beauty of all creation can be seen!

It was no coincidence that Francis linked prayer to creation. His general audience came as the Vatican's department for integral human development was sponsoring something called "Laudato Si' Week".

The May 16-24 initiative is meant to mark the fifth anniversary of the pope's [encyclical](#) of the same name and re-launch its "urgent appeal for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet".

Our Sister, Mother Earth, now cries to us

The title of the 2015 papal document – which is from the old Umbrian dialect and translates as "Praise be to you" – comes from the *Canticle of the Creatures*, a work attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi.

"Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs," says one of the stanzas in the beloved saint's poetic song.

"It reminds 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," the pope says in his encyclical.

But he notes with a sense of urgency that "this sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her".

And he says we have to stop acting "as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will" and reverse the course that is destroying the home of all humanity.

"The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change," Francis continues in the introductory pages of this important and prophetic text.

"With every person living on this planet"

"I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all," the pope says.

Future generations will likely judge *Laudato Si'* as one of the most outstanding and – for a Vatican document – most non-dogmatic texts (in the sense of being open and inclusive of others) that a pope has ever written.

He specifically invites "every person living on this planet" – regardless of race, color or creed – to join together in the search for a sustainable way to stop "global environmental deterioration".

"In this encyclical, I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home," Francis writes.

The world is deeply fractured. But the pope has noted that the coronavirus has forced us to finally realize "that we are all in the same boat".

Just like the pandemic, the effect of environmental destruction cannot be contained within certain borders or blocked by setting up checkpoints.

Appealing to the goodwill, solidarity and engagement of all people

We are all in this together.

And it's to Pope Francis' credit and farsightedness that he used the global reach and moral authority of the papacy to help heal the fractures of our world by promoting dialogue and encounter on many different levels and in many areas.

But there is no one issue that should appeal to the goodwill, solidarity and engagement of all people, regardless of their differences, more than caring for our precious earth – our common home.

And, yet, there are even prominent Catholics who are scoffing at this. Among them are cardinals, some who even got their red hats from this pope!

"Obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers, can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions," Francis acknowledges in the encyclical.

But he is undeterred.

"We require a new and universal solidarity," he insists.

Indeed, we do.

If you have not already read *Laudato Si'*, please do so.

Read it slowly and carefully. Meditate on it. Think long and hard about the points it makes. And let it challenge you, as it surely is aimed to do.

And you don't even have to purchase a hard copy. It's free. You can read it on the internet.

That's not only the first step toward saving a tree, but it is an initiation into a global conversation on how we can better protect our common home.