



Laudato si'

On Care for Our Common Home

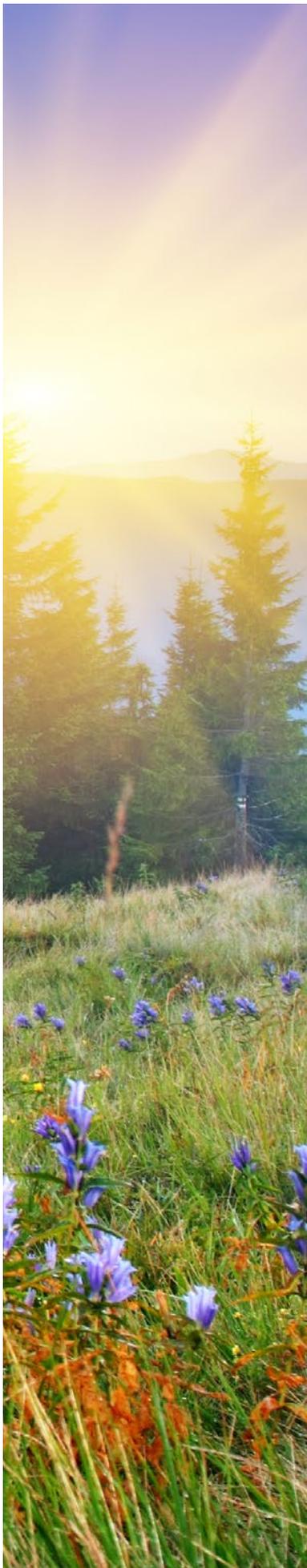
ENCYCLICAL LETTER OF POPE FRANCIS

Laudato si': On Care for Our Common Home is the second encyclical letter of the Holy Father Pope Francis that was officially published on June 18, 2015. The title *Laudato si'* is an Italian phrase from Saint Francis of Assisi's *Canticle of the Creatures* meaning "Be Praised" or "Praise Be To You." The main theme of this encyclical is the environment. At the very beginning, Pope Francis gives his reason for writing *Laudato si'*: "I would like to enter into dialog with all people about our common home." (#3) Pope Francis' teaching on the environment follows the long tradition of social doctrine and teaching of the Catholic Church. It is a lengthy document, almost 42,000 words, beginning with scientific data and conclusions on the climate, then moving to a detailed discussion of the implications of this not only for the environment but also for all the inhabitants of the world. The way that we treat the environment, the Earth, has a direct relation to the way we treat the people who inhabit the Earth!

One thing to always keep in mind when reading *Laudato si'* is the global context of the, environment and the Earth as our common home. Francis addresses this encyclical to "every person living on this planet." (#3) It is natural to think in terms of America, and the environmental issues that we face here. And that is very important — the best place to begin is right here in our own backyard! However, Pope Francis places all his concerns in the world-wide, global context. We must understand a world view and the universal implications of taking care of the environment. We need to remember all the stunning photos of the whole planet Earth captured by the astronauts from space. It is truly awe-inspiring to see the whole Earth from a totally different perspective, from space!

Laudato si' can truly be a teachable moment for children today. Many parishes and schools celebrate Earth Day with special activities. Studies on the environment and care of the Earth prove to be a perfect time to incorporate cross-curricular activities since the environment can be taught in so many subjects. Some of the issues that Pope Francis discusses are often ideas that are already being taught in the classroom. It is so encouraging to see our children enthusiastically embrace ecology. This generation of children seem to understand the grave importance of the environment for their future and the future of their home — the Earth!





There are many important ideas found in reading the six chapters of *Laudato si'*. Pope Francis writes his overview of the encyclical in paragraphs #15 and #16. Below are a few of the main ideas which may be a little more comprehensible for elementary-age children.

Saint Francis of Assisi and an integral ecology

Pope Francis says that Saint Francis, the patron saint of ecology, is his guide and inspiration. Francis of Assisi “shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.” (#10)

Pollution, waste, and throwaway culture

“The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth.” (#21) The problems of pollution and waste are “closely linked to a throwaway culture....” (#22)

Climate as a common good

“Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods.” (#25)

Right of water

“Access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights.” (#30) Many poor people in developing and third-world nations lack access to clean drinking water. Because of this, *“they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity.”* (#30)

Loss of biodiversity

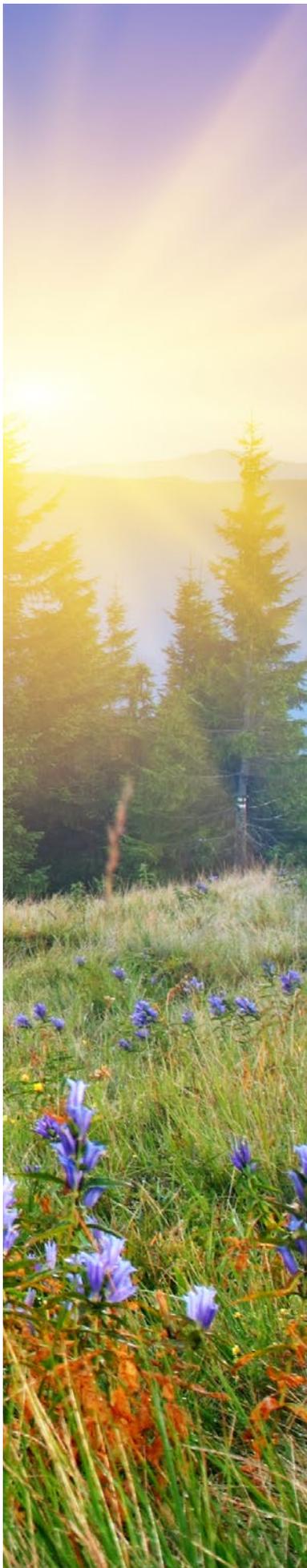
“Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right.” (#33) We are often aware of the extinction of animal species. However, there are other species that are in a critical stage — fungi and algae, insects and microorganisms, glaciers and forests, oceans and coral reefs. It is more than the animals that are in danger of extinction.

Global Inequality

“A true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.*” (#49)

The Gospel of Creation

Pope Francis gives a very insightful commentary of the creation story in Genesis (see #65 — #69). No longer should we understand that humans are to dominate creation; it is now the responsibility of humans to serve creation.



Integral ecology

Ecology must always respect its human and social dimensions. There are not two separate problems to deal with today, one environmental and the other social. It is one complex crisis which is both social and environmental (see #139). Pope Francis challenges us: "What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? ... It is no longer enough, then, simply to state that we should be concerned for future generations. We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity. Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is, first and foremost, up to us." (#160)

Consumerism

"The emptier a person's heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume." (#204)

Toward a new lifestyle

Pope Francis gives us hope for the future. "No system can completely suppress our openness to what is good, true, and beautiful, or our God-given ability to respond to his grace at work deep in our hearts. I appeal to everyone throughout the world not to forget this dignity which is ours. No one has the right to take it from us." (#205)

Prayers

The encyclical *Laudato si'* ends with two beautiful prayers: "A prayer for our earth" for all who believe in a God who is the all-powerful Creator, and "A Christian prayer in union with creation" for Christians to ask for inspiration to take up the commitment to creation set before us by the Gospel of Jesus. (#246)



Read the entire encyclical, *Laudato Si'* at:

http://m.vatican.va/content/francescomobile/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html#&ui-state=dialog



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