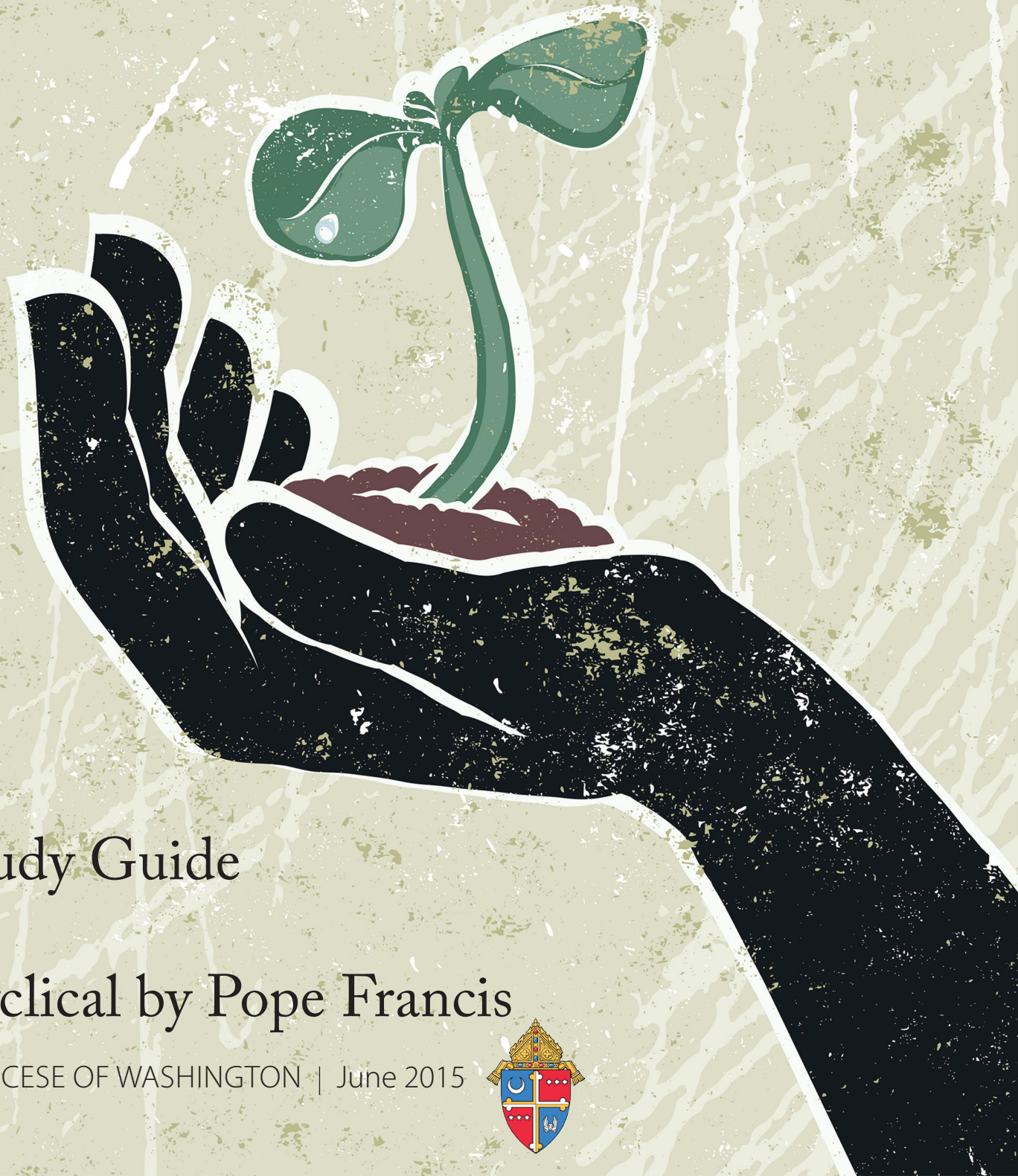


# Laudato Si'

ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME



A Study Guide

on the

Encyclical by Pope Francis

ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON | June 2015





## Study Guide

## OVERVIEW

*“This Encyclical is addressed to all: let us pray so that all may receive its message and grow in the responsibility towards the common home that God has entrusted to all.”*

– Pope Francis, June 14, 2015

From the very beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has spoken to what we ought to do with God’s gift to us in the beauty of the created world. Pointing to the example of Saint Joseph at his Mass of Inauguration, our Holy Father urged us to work for the protection of the whole of creation. Speaking to diplomats a few days later about his choice of a papal name, he said that Saint Francis “teaches us profound respect for the whole of creation and the protection of our environment, which all too often, instead of using for the good, we exploit greedily, to one another’s detriment.”

Our Holy Father now offers for our consideration his encyclical letter *Laudato Si' – On Care for Our Common Home*, which speaks to us of what it means to be authentically human as part of God’s plan in creation. In this teaching document, which challenges us in our view of the world around us, he touches on the themes of care for God’s creation, integral ecology, environmental deterioration, the throwaway culture and the call to build a culture of solidarity, voicing a concern that we are losing the attitude of wonder, contemplation and listening to creation.

The responsible use of the resources of the earth requires us to be concerned about future generations who will also need to derive their sustenance from the goods of the earth. The careful stewardship of natural resources and their prudent consumption is a challenge we face in a way far more demanding than earlier generations. Pope Francis invites each of us to now review how well we care for our common home, God’s gift of creation to us.

General Instructions: The following study guide for Pope Francis’ encyclical letter *Laudato Si' – On Care for Our Common Home* has been designed for use by both individuals and discussion groups. Although an encyclical is typically intended to be read in the order in which it is written, users of this guide may choose to alter the order of chapters for reading and discussion.

This study guide begins with prayer and provides a summary and a sample selection of reflection questions for each of the seven parts of *Laudato Si'*. Included also are sections on scriptural reflection and application of the encyclical’s teachings. These supplemental materials may be utilized separately or interspersed within the discussion on the parts of the encyclical:

- Prayers
- *Lectio Divina*
- The Opening Section of *Laudato Si'* (paragraphs 1-16)
- Chapter One – What is Happening to Our Common Home (paragraphs 17-61)
- Chapter Two – The Gospel of Creation (paragraphs 62-100)
- Chapter Three – The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis (paragraphs 101-136)
- Chapter Four – Integral Ecology (paragraphs 137-162)
- Chapter Five – Lines of Approach and Action (paragraphs 163-201)
- Chapter Six – Ecological Education and Spirituality (paragraphs 202-246)
- How to Live the Teaching





## Study Guide

### PRAYERS

To be fruitful and faithful, our study and reflections on *Laudato Si' – On Care for Our Common Home*, as with all things, should begin and end with prayer. Opening your heart to God our Creator, offer the prayers below, other prayers of the Church, or compose your own.

#### *Canticle of Saint Francis*

Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day and through whom you give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor; and bears a likeness of you, Most High.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather through whom you give sustenance to your creatures

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom you light the night, and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth, who sustains us and governs us and who produces varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs. . . .

Praise and bless my Lord, and give him thanks and serve him with great humility. Amen.

#### *Prayer of Saint Hildegard of Bingen*

Lord, no creature has meaning without the Word of God. God's Word is in all creation, visible and invisible. The Word is living, being, spirit, all verdant all creativity. This Word flashes out in every creature. This is how the Spirit is in the flesh – the Word is indivisible from God.

You, all-accomplishing Word of the Father, are the light of primordial daybreak over the spheres. You, the foreknowing mind of divinity, foresaw all your works as you willed them, your prescience hidden in the heart of your power, your power like a wheel around the world, whose circling never began and never slides to an end. Amen.

#### *Prayer of Pope Francis for Our Earth*

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes. Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction. Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace. Amen.



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### **LECTIO DIVINA**

In your study of *Laudato Si'*, consider supplementing your reflections with the practice of *Lectio Divina*, either as a separate activity or as part of your consideration of each chapter. *Lectio Divina* is a reflective and prayerful reading of Sacred Scripture in the context of the Church's understanding of the Word of God. This method of praying with Sacred Scripture, either alone or in a group, through the grace of the Holy Spirit leads to meditation on the Word of God and contemplation of God present to us. Begin with finding a quiet place and letting go in your mind all the busyness of the world. For each individual text below, read it slowly and prayerfully to get a sense of the whole text, opening yourself to what God may be saying to you. After a short period of silence, read the text again before reflecting on the following questions. Think about the scriptural text in the context of your own life and experience. Share what is on your mind and in your heart as if you are speaking with a close friend or a spouse.

#### *Selected Texts and Questions for Reflection:*

(1) *"Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm and said . . . 'I will question you, and you tell me the answers! Where were you when I founded the earth?'"* (Job 38:1, 3-4).

What is your response to God's question? Why is it important that we know the answer in how we lead our lives as part of creation?

(2) Read the accounts of creation and the fall of humanity in chapters 1-3 of Genesis.

Which passage means the most to you and why? What does God say about what he has made? What does God say to us about what he has created? What consequence does the sin of Adam and Eve have upon humanity in our lives, our social relations, upon the environment and how we interact with the world and each other? Can the world truly be a Garden again in the presence of sin?

(3) Read the parable and teaching of Jesus in Luke 12:13-34.

Is there a word, phrase or passage that made you stop or strikes you as beautiful, inspiring or challenging? What does the foolish rich man say to us about how we use the goods of the earth? While we store up treasures for ourselves, acquiring more than we really need, are we denying other people the food and other resources that they need? What does this passage teach us about our anxieties and the providence of God?

(4) The Lord often uses the imagery of the vineyard in his teaching. Read Matthew 21:33-43.

Is there a word, phrase or passage that made you stop or strikes you as beautiful, inspiring or challenging? How might this parable apply to the message of ecology? What are some of the things that the vineyard represents? What role do we play in this parable? Who is the owner and master of the vineyard, and who are the tenants? What is our obligation with respect to the vineyard, may we do with it whatever we please or should we take care of it as stewards?



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This is just a small sample of scripture passages concerning God's gift of creation. Here are some other texts for prayerful reflection:

Genesis 9:8-17 – God's covenant with Noah and all creation  
Exodus 23:10-11 – management of the land  
Leviticus 25:23-24 – The land is God's  
Job 12:7-10 – God's hand is the life of every living thing  
Psalm 8 – The majesty of God  
Psalm 65 – Thanksgiving for God's blessings  
Psalm 104 – Praise of God the creator  
Psalm 146 – Trust in God alone  
Psalm 147 – Zion's grateful praise to her bountiful Lord  
Psalm 148 – Hymn of all creation to the Almighty Creator  
Daniel 3:52-90 – Praise of God and Creation  
John 1:1-5 – Through Him all things came into being  
Romans 8:18-25 – Creation groaning in waiting for redemption  
Colossians 1:15-23 – In Christ all things have their being  
Revelation 21:1-5 – Promise of the new creation

Can you make a fuller collection of environmental texts in the Bible?



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### **THE OPENING SECTION OF *LAUDATO SI'*** (paragraphs 1-16)

Pope Francis begins his reflections by saying he would like to enter into dialogue with all people about how we are treating our common home, which God has entrusted to our care. In this teaching, our Holy Father points out that he is not offering anything new or radical by addressing our need to respect the world in which we live, but is affirming Church teaching. Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI each spoke to the need to act in the face of threats and damage to our natural and social environment. Authentically living an “integral ecology” like Saint Francis, the Pope says, takes us to the heart of what it is to be human as part of God’s creation.

#### *Questions for Reflection:*

- What did you know after reading this section that you did not know before?
- Which passage means the most to you and why?
- What does Pope Francis say about how we should view our relationship to nature and our social environment?
- In discussions about the environmental challenges before us, who needs to be part of the conversation and why, according to our Holy Father?
- What reasons does Pope Francis give for the Church’s concern for the environment?
- How central should environmental issues be in our lives?
- Read Saint John Paul II’s *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 27-34, and Pope Benedict XVI’s *Caritas in Veritate*, 48-51. How does the lesson of *Laudato Si'* compare to these magisterial teachings?
- What additional thoughts do you have for discussion on this section?



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### CHAPTER ONE

#### WHAT IS HAPPENING TO OUR COMMON HOME

(paragraphs 17-61)

In Chapter One, Pope Francis provides an extensive stark assessment of the present state of the environment. This sets the context for the teaching that is to follow. With respect to these environmental issues, our Holy Father later reiterates that “the Church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics” and wants “to encourage an honest and open debate” (188). Stating previously that he is “drawing on the results of the best scientific research available today” (15), the Pope cites a variety of substantial environmental problems, ways in which our common home is being harmed. This includes pollution, climate change, the depletion of natural resources such as clean water, loss of biodiversity, the breakdown of the human environment in our communities, and global inequality. With signs that things are reaching a breaking point, says Pope Francis, there is a need for solutions, not only in technology, but in a change of humanity.

#### *Questions for Reflection:*

- Which passage means the most to you and why?
- What are some of the causes of environmental degradation?
- How do we as individuals and in our families, workplaces, communities and other affiliations contribute to environmental damage by our own energy use, consumption, waste, etc.? How are we part of the solution?
- Some people dispute whether or not climate change is caused or affected by human activity. Is it really necessary to find a definitive answer to the question of climate change and other disputed issues before steps are taken to protect our home? If so, why? If not, why not?
- What does Pope Francis mean when he speaks of a “throwaway culture”?
- Do you consider water to be a daily blessing? What can you do to raise awareness of the vital issue of water?
- Who is affected by the ecological crisis? Who is most harmed by it?
- If many of environmental problems are caused by or exacerbated by human activity, are human beings themselves the problem? Could environmental problems, including the problems of the poor, be solved simply with population control?
- What additional thoughts do you have for discussion on this chapter?



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# CHAPTER TWO

## THE GOSPEL OF CREATION

(paragraphs 62-100)

At the heart of the Pope's teaching is what it means to be human as part of God's plan in creation. To gain a proper understanding of the relationship between human beings and the world, our Holy Father says, we must look to Christian anthropology as divinely revealed in the Book of Genesis. Here we learn that the earth is not ours to do with what we want, but to care for it and all that is in it. The creation accounts, he says, "suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself. [However,] these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us" because of sin (66). Because everything is interrelated, this breakdown has led to environmental deterioration.

### *Questions for Reflection:*

- Which passage means the most to you and why?
- How relevant is the voice of the Pope and the Church on this issue of the environment?
- In Genesis 1:28 and 2:15, we read that God gave newly-created humanity "dominion" over the earth, to "cultivate and care for it." How does Pope Francis interpret these passages? What does he say is our responsibility to God's earth and the creatures in it?
- For whom did God create the earth? Who is entitled to the goods of the earth? What is meant by the phrase "universal destination of goods"?
- During the preparation of the gifts at Mass, the celebrant prays, "Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you: fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life." To this we respond, "Blessed be God forever." How do these words express the relationship between God, humanity, the natural world, and his plan for creation?
- What is the ultimate destiny of the universe according to Pope Francis?
- What additional thoughts do you have for discussion on this chapter?





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# CHAPTER THREE

## THE HUMAN ROOTS OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

(paragraphs 101-136)

We might be tempted, in searching for answers to the ecological crisis, to look primarily to technology, science or economics, each of which has in many ways improved the quality of human life. However, these cannot save us in the end, warns Pope Francis in Chapter Three, pointing out also that they have also caused various harms. Our human relationship with nature cannot be renewed, he teaches, without a renewal of humanity itself and without a proper understanding of our true place in the world. Christianity, with its rich deposit of truth received from Jesus Christ, offers the way to this proper understanding.

### *Questions for Reflection:*

- What did you know after reading this chapter that you did not know before?
- Which passage means the most to you and why?
- Are there limits to what we should be able to develop scientifically? Are there forms of technical progress that are bad for society and the natural world? What are some examples given by the Pope? What are some more examples?
- What role does human labor play in the environmental question?
- Pope Francis asks, “How can we really teach the importance of concern for other vulnerable beings, however annoying or inconvenient they may be, if we fail to protect a human embryo, even when its presence is uncomfortable and creates difficulties?” (120) How do you respond? What should be done about it?
- Pope Francis asks, “In the absence of objective truths or sound principles other than the satisfaction of our own desires and immediate needs, what limits can be placed on human trafficking, organized crime, the drug trade, commerce in blood diamonds and the fur of endangered species?” (123) Do you agree that a relativistic attitude leads to environmental degradation and social decay? What should be done about it?
- What additional thoughts do you have for discussion on this chapter?



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# CHAPTER FOUR

## INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

(paragraphs 137-162)

In speaking of “the environment” in *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis means more than the world of nature – the oceans and trees, birds and animals. He means also human ecology – the social environment in our cities, towns and farms, as well as our own personal identity as human persons. Previously Pope Francis has touched upon the concept of “integral ecology,” and in Chapter Four, he expands upon this idea, emphasizing that everything is interconnected. This includes nature and culture, as well as the people of today and future generations. This interconnectedness should be reflected in the way we live our own lives, he urges, cooperating with God’s design in our relationship with one another and with the world around us in pursuit of the common good.

### *Questions for Reflection:*

- What did you know after reading this chapter that you did not know before?
- Which passage means the most to you and why?
- Pope Francis asks, “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (160) What must be done to provide for future generations? How does this inform us as to how we lead our lives personally and as a community, nation and world?
- What is our Holy Father’s assessment of conditions in our cities and what does he offer as solutions?
- What is the principal of the “common good” as described by the Pope and how does it apply to the issue of taking care of our common home?
- What additional thoughts do you have for discussion on this chapter?



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### **CHAPTER FIVE**

#### Lines of Approach and Action (paragraphs 163-201)

Because ecology involves all of us, we all need to come together to find answers and implement strategies. In Chapter Five, Pope Francis outlines some major paths of dialogue and possible practical solutions in addressing environmental deterioration. For example, he states that more needs to be done in conserving energy and natural resources, the use of fossil fuels needs to be replaced with cleaner and more sustainable options, and businesses need to undertake an assessment of environmental impact before proceeding on projects. The profit motive cannot rule over our obligations to care for creation, insists the Pope.

#### *Questions for Reflection:*

- What did you know after reading this chapter that you did not know before?
- Which passage means the most to you and why?
- What responses to ecological problems does Pope Francis offer?
- Does the Pope say that the answer lies in technology? Is so, how? If not, why not?
- What is Pope Francis' assessment of the practice of selling carbon credits? Are they a viable solution? If so, how? If not, why not?
- How can we recognize and confront the possible conflicts between environment and jobs, and work for the common good and solutions that value both people and the earth?
- How can we fulfill our obligations in justice to those who are poor in developing nations?
- Is there need for us to bring a distinctly Catholic voice to the debate on the ecology? Why?
- What additional thoughts do you have for discussion on this chapter?



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# CHAPTER SIX

## ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND SPIRITUALITY

(paragraphs 202-246)

Pope Francis in the final chapter of *Laudato Si'* reiterates that the ecological harm we see is due to a lack of awareness of our common origin, our mutual belonging, and of a world to be shared with everyone, including future generations. This presents an educational challenge in addition to a call for action, as well as a need for spiritual renewal. Each creature reflects something of God and has a message to convey, he reminds us. Our Holy Father prescribes ecological conversion – a change in lifestyle and thinking away from an individualistic culture of consumerism and possessing things to a simpler and more selfless way of life. “There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle,” he says (211). In small ways, we can leave the world a better place than we found it. Our Holy Father is asking that we orient our hearts to others, and renew our commitment to the practice of solidarity and interdependence.

### *Questions for Reflection:*

- Which passage means the most to you and why?
- How does the natural environment bring wonder and awe into your life?
- In the face of ecological damage to our common home, changes are needed, says Pope Francis. What needs to be changed the most according to him?
- What does the Pope mean when he refers to “ecological citizenship”?
- What is the relationship between the Trinity and God’s creatures?
- What is the example of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux that Pope Francis commends to us?
- Pope Francis asks, “Nature is filled with words of love, but how can we listen to them amid constant noise, interminable and nerve-wracking distractions, or the cult of appearances?” (225) Do you appreciate the need for a simpler, quieter life? What steps have you taken to accomplish this? What more could you do to live more simply?
- What additional thoughts do you have for discussion on this chapter?





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# HOW TO LIVE THE TEACHING

Pope Francis advises that in the face of the environmental deterioration that he outlines in *Laudato Si'*, “there is no one path to a solution. This makes a variety of proposals possible, all capable of entering into dialogue with a view to developing comprehensive solutions” (60). There is something that everyone can do at every level – international, national, local and personal.

In her social teaching generally, the Church offers moral guidance to help form consciences, leaving it to the individual person to exercise prudential judgment in the practical application of that teaching to specific situations (*See* Catechism of the Catholic Church 1806). Such “prudential judgment” does not mean a license to do anything one wants or to deny the truth of underlying moral principles. Although people may differ in their assessment of the state of the environment, there is no denying that we have responsibilities toward God’s gift to us. Meanwhile, there is room for reasonable disagreement regarding the best way to accomplish those responsibilities.

### *Questions for Reflection:*

- What are the primary values we need to develop and promote to respect creation?
- What concrete efforts need to be taken to respond to the environmental crisis?
- As Catholics, with our rich understanding of our role as stewards of creation, would it be responsible for any one of us to retreat from the global debate and allow other voices to carry the day, rather than ensure that policies on a national, local or family level help care for creation rather than advancing the throwaway culture of waste?
- How might I share the teachings of *Laudato Si'* with others?
- What can each of us do to encourage a serious dialogue and concrete action in our community and nation – in our homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, parishes, schools, colleges, universities and other settings – on the significant ethical dimensions of the environmental crisis?
- What steps have we already taken in our individual lives to be good stewards of the earth and what additional steps can we take to devise a sustainable and just world, even if it entails some degree of personal sacrifice?
- What creative initiatives are being taken in your local community?
- Pope Francis notes that in our discussions about a proposed solutions, a number of questions need to be asked in order to discern whether or not it will contribute to genuine integral development. What are the risks? What are the costs? (185) Of the various proposals being put forth in the debate on the environment, do you think certain solution(s) would cause more harm than good?
- Often we might tend to think of corporations as separate from us, but many people have investments in various companies. As a shareholder, would you be open to urging companies to consider the impact of policies/actions on the environment, even at the expense of lower dividends, pensions, etc.?
- Various composers have written musical pictures or poems about nature, such as Beethoven’s *Sixth Symphony*, Smetana’s *The Moldau*, and Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons*. Listen to these works and describe what they say to you. What do you envision as you hear the music?