



THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF PHILADELPHIA

Advent 2021 Reflections/Action Steps (Week One)

Care for Creation

Pope Francis' May 24, 2015, encyclical [*Laudato Si'*](#) calls on each of us to love, respect, and nurture the Earth—our sister and mother and our shared inheritance and home. As both Pope Francis and St. Francis have helped us to understand, the Earth is given by God for our sustenance and joy and entrusted to our committed care. This Advent season, we will reflect on passages from *Laudato Si'*. Meditating and praying on the passages can support us in taking actions inspired by Pope Francis' words and wisdom and by the seven multiyear [*Laudato Si' Action Platform*](#) goals.

(*Note:* For the action steps in this Advent guide, *Earth*, *Creation*, and *Nature* are capitalized to reflect their divinity and importance. Underlined passages in blue are internet links to additional useful information.)

Sunday, November 28, 2021

Saint Francis of Assisi 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. "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." (Laudato Si' [LS] para. 1)

Action Step: If you do not already subscribe to and read the weekly [*EarthBeat*](#) e-newsletter, consider doing so. (*EarthBeat* is a *National Catholic Reporter* publication.) Another valuable resource to explore is the website [*Eco Catholic*](#), which offers a wealth of informative videos.

Monday, November 29, 2021

We have come to see ourselves as [Earth's owners and superiors], entitled to plunder her at will. . . We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air, and we receive life and refreshment from her waters. (LS 2)

Action Step: Read, reread, or peruse selections from a book that explores our connection with all others and all Creation. Examples of helpful books include Teilhard de Chardin's *Hymn of the Universe* or *The Divine Milieu*, Richard Rohr's *The Universal Christ*, and Ilio Delio's *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being* or *A Hunger for Wholeness*.

Tuesday, November 30, 2021

If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of [brotherhood and sisterhood] and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no

mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled. (LS 11)

Action Step: For planting in the spring, select a native species that is food for pollinators. Meanwhile, during the cold months, you may choose to buy the seeds you will need or acquire a native-species plant to nurture indoors.

Wednesday, December 1, 2021

Saint Francis, faithful to Scripture, invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness. (LS 12)

Action Step: Begin and end a day this week by singing the hymn “For the Beauty of the Earth,” which [Folliott Sandford Pierpoint](#) (1835-1917) wrote after being inspired by the English countryside and Avon River. If you are led to do so, add a verse of your own—or compose your own hymn to the Earth.

Thursday, December 2, 2021

Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home. (LS 13)

Action Step: Meditate on your understanding of how caring for the Earth is at the heart of caring for life.

Friday, December 3, 2021

Exposure to atmospheric pollutants produces a broad spectrum of health hazards, especially for the poor, and causes millions of premature deaths. . . . There is also pollution that affects everyone, caused by transport, industrial fumes, substances which contribute to the acidification of soil and water, fertilizers, insecticides, fungicides, herbicides, and agrotoxins in general. Technology, which, linked to business interests, is presented as the only way of solving these problems, in fact proves incapable of seeing the mysterious network of relations between things and so sometimes solves one problem only to create others. (LS 20)

Action Step: Consider how technological approaches to solving climate change can have unintended negative consequences, such as allowing us to continue with potentially harmful behavior while feeling that “Everything’s under control.” You might, for example, research the pros and cons of electric vehicles or of nuclear energy.

Saturday, December 4, 2021

*The **Response to the Cry of the Earth** is a call to protect our common home for the wellbeing of all, as we equitably address the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and ecological sustainability. ([Laudato Si’ Action Platform](#))*

Action Step: Identify a repeated behavior or choice from your daily life that has potentially negative consequences for Creation. Reduce, modify, or eliminate this behavior or choice. For example, if you eat meat, what are the negative aspects of the way that meat was raised and slaughtered? Is a more environmentally sound and humane source available to you?

Numerous additional actions are suggested in the “[Overview of Laudato Si’ Goals and Actions](#).”

Advent 2021 Reflections/Action Steps (Week Two)

Sunday, December 5, 2021

[Pollution] problems are closely linked to a throwaway culture which affects the excluded just as it quickly reduces things to rubbish. (LS 22)

Action Step: Examine your habits to identify ways in which you may be a part of our “throwaway culture.” Determine one or more steps you can take to reuse resources such as food containers and to purchase fewer food and other items in wasteful packaging designed to be thrown away. For instance, are you drinking bottled water? Could you invest in a water filter instead?

Monday, December 6, 2021

[Global warming] is aggravated by a model of development based on the intensive use of fossil fuels, which is at the heart of the worldwide energy system. Another determining factor has been an increase in changed uses of the soil, principally deforestation for agricultural purposes. (LS 23)

Action Step: Learn about practices that result in deforestation. Then change your buying and consuming practices to reduce any indirect participation in deforestation. A helpful resource for this effort is the [Rainforest Alliance](#).

Tuesday, December 7, 2021

Many of those who possess more resources and economic or political power seem mostly to be concerned with masking the problems or concealing their symptoms, simply making efforts to reduce some of the negative impacts of climate change. However, many of these symptoms indicate that such effects will continue to worsen if we continue with current models of production and consumption. There is an urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy. (LS 26)

Action Step: Meditate (and write if you are moved to do so) on how caring for the Earth is synonymous with loving God.

Wednesday, December 8, 2021

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. . . . It is not only a question of industrial waste. Detergents and chemical products, commonly used in many places of the world, continue to pour into our rivers, lakes, and seas. (LS 29)

Action Step: Learn more about the additives and contaminants in your local drinking water and about their sources and potential hazards. As part of your research, learn about “forever chemicals,” also known as [PFAS](#).

Thursday, December 9, 2021

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. Different species contain genes which could be key resources in years ahead for meeting human needs and regulating environmental problems. It is not enough, however, to think of different species merely as potential “resources” to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves. (LS 32-33)

Action Step: Learn about species loss in your region. For example, sources of information for the Mid-Atlantic include the [Delaware Nature Society](#) and the [Nature Conservancy in Pennsylvania](#). Information sources for the West Coast include the Nature Conservancy in [California](#) and in [Washington](#). The [Nature Conservancy](#) has chapters throughout the United States and worldwide.

Friday, December 10, 2021

*The **Response to the Cry of the Poor** is a call to promote ecojustice, aware that we are called to defend human life from conception to death, and all forms of life on Earth. ([Laudato Si' Action Platform](#))*

Action Step: Share your voice, insight, and wisdom in behalf of human or other life (such as plants or animals) that you believe needs more advocates. Consider sending a letter to a publication or representative or composing a blog or social-media post. Numerous additional actions are suggested in the “[Overview of Laudato Si' Goals and Actions](#).”

Saturday, December 11, 2021

***Ecological Economics** acknowledges that the economy is a subsystem of human society, which itself is embedded within the biosphere—our common home. ([Laudato Si' Action Platform](#))*

Action Step: Determine the source of a product you often buy, making changes in your buying habits if you find that the present source is exploitive. Numerous additional actions are suggested in the “[Overview of Laudato Si' Goals and Actions](#).”

Advent 2021 Reflections/Action Steps (Week Three)

Sunday, December 12, 2021

The good functioning of ecosystems also requires fungi, algae, worms, insects, reptiles, and an innumerable variety of microorganisms. . . . Often a vicious circle results, as human intervention to resolve a problem further aggravates the situation. For example, many birds and insects which disappear due to synthetic agrottoxins are helpful for agriculture: their disappearance will have to be compensated for by yet other techniques which may well prove harmful. (LS 34)

Action Step: Research the relative merits of an organically grown fruit or vegetable compared to the same fruit or vegetable when it is commercially grown (i.e., using farming techniques that include herbicides, pesticides, and other interventions such as genetic modification). For the fruit or vegetable you are studying, compare the effects of organic farming and commercial farming on the land, on other plant and animal life, on farm workers, and on those consuming the produce. Will you change your buying and eating habits as a result of your research?

Monday, December 13, 2021

Oceans not only contain the bulk of our planet's water supply, but also most of the immense variety of living creatures, many of them still unknown to us and threatened for various reasons. What is more, marine life in rivers, lakes, seas, and oceans, which feeds a great part of the world's population, is affected by uncontrolled fishing, leading to a drastic depletion of certain species. . . . Particularly threatened are marine organisms which we tend to overlook, like some forms of plankton; they represent a significant element in the ocean food chain, and species used for our food ultimately depend on them. In tropical and subtropical seas, we find coral reefs comparable to the great forests on dry land, for they shelter approximately a million species, including fish, crabs, mollusks, sponges, and algae. Many of the world's coral reefs are already barren or in a state of constant decline. (LS 40-41)

Action Step: Study an endangered species, large or small, and then determine—and if possible, take—a step in behalf of that species.

Tuesday, December 14, 2021

The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation. In fact, the deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet. (LS 48)

Action Step: Compose a poem or journal entry in the voice of someone whose life is filled with hardship exacerbated by environmental deterioration.

Wednesday, December 15, 2021

Inequity affects not only individuals but entire countries; it compels us to consider an ethics of international relations. A true "ecological debt" exists. . . . The export of raw materials to satisfy markets in the industrialized north has caused harm locally, as for example in mercury pollution in gold mining or sulphur dioxide pollution in copper mining. . . . The warming caused by huge consumption on the part of some rich countries has repercussions on the poorest areas of the world, especially Africa, where a rise in temperature, together with drought, has proved devastating for farming. (LS 51)

Action Step: Learn about the effects of climate change and environmental degradation on our neighbors in another region of the world and consider how our own behaviors are contributing to the problems these more distant neighbors are facing.

Thursday, December 16, 2021

It is foreseeable that, once certain resources have been depleted, the scene will be set for new wars, albeit under the guise of noble claims. War always does grave harm to the environment and to the cultural riches of peoples, risks which are magnified when one considers nuclear arms and biological weapons. (LS 57)

Action Step: Reflect on the fact that “The [United Nations Environment Programme \(UNEP\)](#) has found that over the last 60 years, at least 40 percent of all internal conflicts have been linked to the exploitation of natural resources, whether high-value resources such as timber, diamonds, gold and oil, or scarce resources such as fertile land and water. Conflicts involving natural resources have also been found to be twice as likely to relapse.” For more information, watch the short United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs ([DPPA](#)) video “[What is the link between climate change and conflict?](#)”

Friday, December 17, 2021

*The **Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyles** is grounded in the idea of sufficiency and promoting sobriety in the use of resources and energy. ([Laudato Si’ Action Platform](#))*

Action Step: Increase your reliance on locally grown produce. Reduce your consumption of out-of-season produce that has traveled long distances to reach you. Numerous additional actions are suggested in the “[Overview of Laudato Si’ Goals and Actions.](#)”

Saturday, December 18, 2021

***Ecological Education** is about rethinking and redesigning curricular and institutional reform in the spirit of integral ecology in order to foster ecological awareness and transformative action. ([Laudato Si’ Action Platform](#))*

Action Step: Compose a poem, brief story, or short article with the theme of loving and protecting Creation. Consider sharing your composition on social media, with young relatives and other family and friends, or in a newsletter or newspaper. Alternatively, for a more ambitious project, create (or help a child to create) a children’s version of *Laudato Si’* and then share this version with other children in your life. (A children’s video introduction to *Laudato Si’* is available from [Eco Catholic.](#))

Numerous additional actions are suggested in the “[Overview of Laudato Si’ Goals and Actions.](#)”

Advent 2021 Reflections/Action Steps (Week Four)

Sunday, December 19, 2021

The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. This in turn distorted our mandate to “have dominion” over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28), to “till it and keep it” (Gen 2:15). As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual (cf. Gen 3:17-19). It is significant that the harmony which Saint Francis of Assisi experienced with all creatures was seen as a healing of that rupture. Saint Bonaventure held that, through universal reconciliation with every creature, Saint Francis in some way returned to the state of original innocence. This is a far cry from our situation today. . . . (LS 66)

Action Step: Find, read, and consider memorizing a poem celebrating our close connection with Nature or wider Creation. Alternatively, stand outside at night, absorbing Nature’s sounds and sights and thinking about the vast expanse of Creation.

Monday, December 20, 2021

Our insistence that each human being is an image of God should not make us overlook the fact that each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God’s love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God. (LS 84)

Action Step: Identify five passages from Scripture that speak to care of the Earth. Memorize these passages or refresh them in your memory.

Tuesday, December 21, 2021

Ecological culture cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and partial responses to the immediate problems of pollution, environmental decay, and the depletion of natural resources. There needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational program, a lifestyle, and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm. . . . To seek only a technical remedy to each environmental problem which comes up is to separate what is in reality interconnected and to mask the true and deepest problems of the global system. (LS 111)

Action Step: Compose (and if you have the means, deliver) a Gospel-based homily or sermon on care for the Earth.

Wednesday, December 22, 2021

We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it. Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behavior patterns, and the ways it grasps reality. Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem. It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature. (LS 139)

Action Step: Identify a source of ongoing pollution in a local area and try to determine some of the contributing social and economic factors in the continuance of this pollution. Determine a small step to take to begin addressing one of the elements in the situation.

Thursday, December 23, 2021

Ecological Spirituality recovers a religious vision of God's creation and encourages greater contact with the natural world in a spirit of wonder, praise, joy, and gratitude. ([Laudato Si' Action Platform](#))

Action Step: If the weather allows, find a welcoming natural setting in which to pray. If you prefer, take a leisurely walk in Nature and then compose a prayer when you return from the walk. If the weather is inhospitable, meditate and pray using a painting or photograph or a scene in your memory for inspiration.

Numerous additional actions are suggested in the "[Overview of Laudato Si' Goals and Actions.](#)"

Friday, December 24, 2021

Community Engagement and Participatory Action encourage the development of cultures and policies that protect our common home and all who share it. ([Laudato Si' Action Platform](#))

Action Step: Host a discussion session on *Laudato Si'*. At the conclusion of the discussion, ask each participant to determine a next step she or he will take in behalf of the Earth and our neighbors nearby and around the globe.

Numerous additional actions are suggested in the "[Overview of Laudato Si' Goals and Actions.](#)"



Saturday, December 25, 2021

Merry Christmas!

The Lord was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world because he himself was in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder. As he made his way throughout the land, he often stopped to contemplate

the beauty sown by his Father, and invited his disciples to perceive a divine message in things: "Lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest" (Jn 4:35). . . . Jesus lived in full harmony with creation, and others were amazed: "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?" (Mt 8:27). (LS 97-98)

Action Step: Celebrate Jesus' birth in part by honoring God's presence in all of Creation. Celebrate in such a way that you protect our sister Mother Earth and all for whom she is home. For example, can you save and reuse (for future gifts or for crafts) the wrapping paper from the gifts you receive this Christmas?