

Rejoice in the Lord

By Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.
Archbishop of Newark

Care for all God's creation

On the 1st day of September 2020, Pope Francis offered a special reflection for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation and the beginning of the Season of Creation which concludes on the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi on the fourth of October. "During this period," the pope says, "Christians worldwide renew their faith in the God of creation and join in prayer and work for the care of our common home." It's been more than five years since our Holy Father first shared with the world his vision for the care of all God's creation:



"LAUDATO SI', mi' Signore" ("Praise be to you, my Lord.") In the words of this beautiful canticle, St. 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' #1).

These are the opening sentences of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato, si'* (*Praised be to you*). With these words, the Holy Father summarizes all that is to come. Our world, indeed, all of God's creation, is not an object to be manipulated by us. It is like a sister, our "Mother Earth," to be treated with reverence, respect and loving care.

Laudato si' is not a political, economic or scientific treatise. It is an encyclical, a "profound letter" addressed by the pope to Church leaders, to the faithful and to all women and men of good will on a matter of great importance to the Church and the world. In this case, the letter addressed by Pope Francis to the world community is about our responsibility to nurture and protect all that God has made.

This encyclical is deeply rooted in a hymn of praise whose final verse concerning Sister Death was composed by St. Francis of Assisi on his deathbed in A.D. 1226. We call this magnificent Franciscan hymn *The Canticle of the Sun*, and unless we appreciate its significance as an expression of authentic Christian ecology, we cannot grasp the full importance of the Holy Father's teaching in *Laudato si'*.

Pope Francis tells us “I do not want to write this Encyclical without turning to that attractive and compelling figure, whose name I took as my guide and inspiration when I was elected Bishop of Rome. I believe that St. Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly concerned for God’s creation and for the poor and outcast. He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his openheartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.”

Laudato si’ addresses this “inseparable bond” between care for the environment and the love of humanity which alone makes justice and peace possible. The pope tells us we cannot be authentically eco-friendly unless we are also unselfish, loving and fair in our treatment of our fellow human beings—especially those who are most vulnerable, the poor, the sick and the unborn. A profound reverence and respect for all God’s creatures (for all things visible and invisible) springs not from philosophy or science but from the deeply personal love each of us is called to have for our Creator God. Because we love God, we love every good thing that God has made.

Awareness of our sinfulness, of our culpability in the serious challenges we face environmentally is central to *Laudato si’*. Pope Francis does not shy away from his responsibility to speak with a prophetic voice whenever necessary to remind us that indifference is a sin and that we will all—each one of us—be held accountable for our stewardship of God’s creation.

The pope’s message for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation and the beginning of the Season of Creation is included below because of its timeliness and its message of hope. Let’s sing with St. Francis and Pope Francis this verse of The Canticle of the Sun: “Praised be you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.”

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph W. Tobin" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.
Archbishop of Newark

Archdiocese Increases Church Attendance Capacity

Sept. 1, 2020

The Archdiocese of Newark announced today that the attendance limit for its 212 churches in Bergen, Essex, Hudson, and Union counties has increased. Based on the latest New Jersey public official guidelines, the number of faithful now permitted indoors for public liturgies and Baptisms, weddings and funerals has increased to **150 participants or 25 percent** of the church's capacity, whichever is lower. The guidelines remain in place to ensure the safety and well-being of the faithful.

All protocols from Phase Three of the archdiocesan Directives for Re-Opening Churches remain in force. Masks still are required, and social distancing continues to be enforced. Parishes continue to sanitize pews and other common surfaces after each Mass.

Mass attendance remains voluntary. Those who do not feel safe or who have compromising health conditions should not participate at this time.

The dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days remains in place, and many parishes continue to offer livestream Masses on their websites or Facebook pages to maintain a spiritual connection with their parish communities. For a full list, check this link: www.rcan.org/parish-mass-livestreams-and-more.

"While Mass is not obligatory, those who feel comfortable doing so should make an attempt to join their parish community for Mass," stated Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R., Archbishop of Newark. "If, for any reason, one should refrain from physically attending Mass, do your best to pray the Mass via livestream. Our common prayer in the Church of Newark is important during these challenging times. May our Lord bring comfort and peace to all those who are affected by the pandemic in any way."

The Archdiocese remains committed to the health and well-being of its people and will continue to monitor trends and consult with the expert guidance of public health, state and federal officials, and will adjust restrictions as appropriate.

More information about COVID-19 protocols and expectations of parishes and Mass participants is available on the Archdiocese of Newark's COVID-19 Response website at www.rcan.org/Covid19.

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am very pleased that the theme chosen by the ecumenical family for the celebration of the 2020 Season of Creation is Jubilee for the Earth, precisely in this year that marks the fiftieth anniversary of Earth Day.

In the Holy Scriptures, a Jubilee is a sacred time to remember, return, rest, restore, and rejoice.

1. A Time to Remember

We are invited to remember above all that creation's ultimate destiny is to enter into God's eternal Sabbath. This journey, however, takes place in time, spanning the seven-day rhythm of the week, the cycle of seven years, and the great Jubilee Year that comes at the end of the seven Sabbath years.

A Jubilee is indeed a time of grace to remember creation's original vocation to exist and flourish as a community of love. We exist only in relationships: with God the Creator, with our brothers and sisters as members of a common family, and with all of God's creatures within our common home. "Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth" (LS, 92)

A Jubilee, then, is a time of remembrance, in which we cherish the memory of our inter- relational existence. We need constantly to remember that "everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others" (LS, 70).

2. A Time to Return

A Jubilee is a time to turn back in repentance. We have broken the bonds of our relationship with the Creator, with our fellow human beings, and with the rest of creation. We need to heal the damaged relationships that are essential to supporting us and the entire fabric of life.

A Jubilee is a time to return to God our loving Creator. We cannot live in harmony with creation if we are not at peace with the Creator who is the source and origin of all things. As Pope Benedict observed, "the brutal consumption of creation begins where God is missing, where matter has become simply material for us, where we ourselves are the ultimate measure, where everything is simply our property" (Meeting with Priests, Deacons, and Seminarians of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone, 6 August 2008).

The Jubilee season calls us to think once again of our fellow human beings, especially the poor and the most vulnerable. We are asked to re-appropriate God's original and loving plan of creation as a common heritage, a banquet which all of our brothers and sisters share in a spirit of conviviality, not in competitive scramble but in joyful fellowship, supporting and protecting one another. A Jubilee is a time for setting free the oppressed and all those shackled in the fetters of various forms of modern slavery, including trafficking in persons and child labour.

We also need once more to listen to the land itself, which Scripture calls *adamah*, the soil from which man, Adam, was made. Today we hear the voice of creation admonishing us to return to our rightful place in the natural created order – to remember that we are part of this interconnected web of life, not its masters. The disintegration of biodiversity, spiraling climate disasters, and unjust impact of the current pandemic on the poor and vulnerable: all these are a wakeup call in the face of our rampant greed and consumption.

Particularly during this Season of Creation, may we be attentive to the rhythms of this created world. For the world was made to communicate the glory of God, to help us to discover in its beauty the Lord of all, and to return to him (cf. SAINT BONAVENTURE, *In II Sent.*, I, 2, 2, q. 1, conclusion; *Breviloquium*, II, 5.11). The earth from which we were made is thus a place of prayer and meditation. “Let us awaken our God-given aesthetic and contemplative sense” (*Querida Amazonia*, 56). The capacity to wonder and to contemplate is something that we can learn especially from our indigenous brothers and sisters, who live in harmony with the land and its multiple forms of life.

3. A Time to Rest

In his wisdom, God set aside the Sabbath so that the land and its inhabitants could rest and be renewed. These days, however, our way of life is pushing the planet beyond its limits. Our constant demand for growth and an endless cycle of production and consumption are exhausting the natural world. Forests are leached, topsoil erodes, fields fail, deserts advance, seas acidify and storms intensify. Creation is groaning!

During the Jubilee, God's people were invited to rest from their usual labour and to let the land heal and the earth repair itself, as individuals consumed less than usual. Today we need to find just and sustainable ways of living that can give the Earth the rest it requires, ways that satisfy everyone with a sufficiency, without destroying the ecosystems that sustain us.

In some ways, the current pandemic has led us to rediscover simpler and sustainable lifestyles. The crisis, in a sense, has given us a chance to develop new ways of living. Already we can see how the earth can recover if we allow it to rest: the air becomes cleaner, the waters clearer, and animals have returned to many places from where they had previously disappeared. The pandemic has brought us to a crossroads. We must use this decisive moment to end our superfluous and destructive goals and activities, and to cultivate values, connections and activities that are life-giving. We must examine our habits of energy usage, consumption, transportation, and diet. We must eliminate the superfluous and destructive aspects of our economies, and nurture life-giving ways to trade, produce, and transport goods.

4. A Time to Restore

A Jubilee is a time to restore the original harmony of creation and to heal strained human relationships.

It invites us to re-establish equitable societal relationships, restoring their freedom and goods to all and forgiving one another's debts. We should not forget the historic exploitation of the global South that has created an enormous ecological debt, due mainly to resource plundering and excessive use of common environmental space for waste disposal. It is a time for restorative justice. In this context, I repeat my call for the cancellation of the debt of the most vulnerable countries, in recognition of the severe impacts of the medical, social and economic crises they face as a result of Covid-19. We also need to ensure that the recovery packages being developed and deployed at global, regional and national levels must be regeneration packages. Policy, legislation and investment must be focused on the common good and guarantee that global social and environmental goals are met.

We also need to restore the land. Climate restoration is of utmost importance, since we are in the midst of a climate emergency. We are running out of time, as our children and young people have reminded us. We need to do everything in our capacity to limit global average temperature rise under the threshold of 1.5°C enshrined in the Paris Climate Agreement, for going beyond that will prove catastrophic, especially for poor communities around the world. We need to stand up for intra-generational and inter-generational solidarity at this critical moment. I invite all nations to adopt more ambitious national targets to reduce emissions, in preparation for the important Climate Summit (COP 26) in Glasgow in the United Kingdom.

Biodiversity restoration is also crucially important in the context of unprecedented loss of species and degradation of ecosystems. We need to support the U.N. call to safeguard 30% of the earth as protected habitats by 2030 in order to stem the alarming rate of biodiversity loss. I urge the international community to work together to guarantee that the Summit on Biodiversity (COP 15) in Kunming, China becomes a turning point in restoring the earth to be a home of life in abundance, as willed by the Creator.

We must restore with justice in mind, ensuring that those who have lived on the land for generations can regain control over its usage. Indigenous communities must be protected from companies, particularly multinational companies, that “operate in less developed countries in ways they could never do at home” (LS, 51), through the destructive extraction of fossil fuels, minerals, timber and agro-industrial products. This corporate misconduct is a “new version of colonialism” (SAINT JOHN PAUL II, Address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 27 April 2001, cited in *Querida Amazonia*, 14), one that shamefully exploits poorer countries and communities desperately seeking economic development. We need to strengthen national and international legislation to regulate the activities of extractive companies and ensure access to justice for those affected.

5. A Time to Rejoice

In the biblical tradition, a Jubilee was a joyous occasion, inaugurated by a trumpet blast resounding throughout the land. We are aware that the cries of the earth and of the poor have become even

louder and more painful in recent years. At the same time, we also witness how the Holy Spirit is inspiring individuals and communities around the world to come together to rebuild our common home and defend the most vulnerable in our midst. We see the gradual emergence of a great mobilization of people from below and from the peripheries who are generously working for the protection of the land and of the poor. We rejoice to see how young people and communities, particularly indigenous communities, are on the frontlines in responding to the ecological crisis. They are calling for a Jubilee for the earth and a new beginning, aware that “things can change” (LS, 13).

We also rejoice to see how the Laudato Si’ Special Anniversary Year is inspiring many initiatives at local and global levels for the care of our common home and the poor. This year should lead to long-term action plans to practise integral ecology in our families, parishes and dioceses, religious orders, our schools and universities, our healthcare, business and agricultural institutions, and many others as well.

We rejoice too that faith communities are coming together to create a more just, peaceful and sustainable world. We are particularly happy that the Season of Creation is becoming a truly ecumenical initiative. Let us continue to grow in the awareness that we all live in a common home as members of a single family.

Let us all rejoice that our loving Creator sustains our humble efforts to care for the earth, which is also God’s home where his Word “became flesh and lived among us” (Jn 1:14) and which is constantly being renewed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Pope Francis, September 1, 2020

Libreria Editrice Vaticana

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200901_messaggio-giornata-cura-creato.html

My Prayer for You

“Laudato si, mi Signore” (“Praised be to you my Lord”) sings the great saint from Assisi who reminds us that the earth we inhabit, our common home, is more like a sister or a mother than an indifferent material object or a place where we happen to dwell. Mother Earth opens her arms to embrace us, but how do we respond?

Let’s pray that God’s grace will help us to see the world with new eyes and open hearts. May we learn to respond generously to all our sisters and brothers in the one family of God. May we praise God by our loving care for our common home and for all God’s gifts.



Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.

