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In early March, Pope Francis invited Catholic communities around the world to participate in *Laudato Si* Week from May 16 to 24, to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the publication of his encyclical “On Care For Our Common Home.” In his announcement, the pope asked what kind of home we want to leave to the children growing up and renewed his urgent call to hear the “cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor” by taking “care of creation, a gift of our good Creator God.”

We recall some of the major points of the 2015 ground-breaking encyclical, *Laudato Si,* addressed to all people. The pope raises up St Francis of Assisi as an outstanding example of care for both the poor and the earth and insisted on the “immediacy and urgency” of the ecological crisis. Based on scientific studies, he insists that global warming is “a result of human activity” (n23) and notes that the environment is “defenseless before the interests of a deified market, which becomes the only rule” (n56).

In the second chapter, Francis speaks poetically about creation. For example, God calls us to “till and keep the garden of the world,” which is “a caress of God” and a “precious book” of the “exhaustible riches of God” (n30-48). Chapter three analyzes the role of technology, recognizing its accomplishments in improving human life, but warning of its “ironclad logic” to gain “lordship over all.” An authentic eco-spirituality does not seek to dominate the earth but aspires to a “responsible stewardship” of the earth. Since “everything is interrelated,” we must join care for the earth with care for all human beings, including the unborn and the poor (n49-66). In chapter four, Francis calls for an “integral ecology” that provides human beings with “a secure living space,” including livable cities, adequate housing and good public transportation. We must protect indigenous cultures and hand on to the next generation a “habitable planet” (n67-71). Chapter five urges international cooperation to protect the environment and suggests that the Church has a role to play by promoting dialogue and providing a spiritual perspective.

The final chapter is a rich resource for cultivating a Christian eco-spirituality. To counter consumerism, we need to adopt a simpler lifestyle: for example, using less water, cooking only what is needed and carpooling. We need to develop “ecological virtues,” solid habits formed by a healthy family life and nourished by the Church, which incline us to combine care for the earth and love for the most vulnerable. Pope Francis concludes his beautifully written, faith inspired encyclical with a prayer asking the “Lord of life” to help us “protect all life” and prepare for the kingdom of “justice, peace, love and beauty.”

Since the publication of *Laudato Si* in May of 2015, our common home has experienced serious disasters. For example, the Australian bush fires, which burned from June of 2019 to March of 2020, decimated some 72,000 square miles, destroyed almost 6,000 buildings, and took the lives of more than 450 persons. It also killed an estimated one billion animals (an astounding number attested by competent experts) and sent polluted air almost 7,000 miles across the South Pacific Ocean to Chile and Argentina.

During the last few years, depletion of the Brazilian Amazon rain forest has accelerated. Between August 2017 and July 2018, deforestation destroyed 3,100 square miles of the forest, and the rate of deforestation more than doubled in January of 2020 compared with the same month in 2019. We are losing forests at an alarming rate, something like the size of one football field every minute. This trend, fueled by the economic interests of cattle ranchers and others, has many long-term deleterious effects, including endangering the lives of indigenous Amazonian peoples, causing the loss of irreplaceable biodiversity and contributing to global warming.

In 2018, there were at least five major natural disasters in the United States. Early in the year, mudslides in Montecito, California, flattened homes, covered freeways and killed 21 persons. In the spring, flash floods devastated Ellicott City, Maryland, causing millions of dollars of damage to buildings and sweeping away to his death an Air Force veteran who tried to help others. In September, Hurricane Florence hit the Carolinas destroying many homes and directly causing the death of 24 persons. Just a few months later, Hurricane Michael left a trail of destruction across Florida, Georgia and the Carolinas, destroying many cities, including Panama City, Florida, and taking more than 50 lives. Near the end of 2018, wild fires swept through California, with the Camp Fire in the northern part of the state killing 85 people, the deadliest fire in the history of the Golden State. The dire warnings in *Laudato Si* of imminent disasters are proving to be all too accurate.

Pope Francis explicitly intended his encyclical to support the proposed Paris Climate Agreement, which was later adopted by consensus of 195 countries and officially signed April 22, 2016. All countries agreed to make progress reducing greenhouse gas emissions with each nation free to set their own specific goals and timing. Despite this universal support, President Trump announced in June of 2017 that the U.S. was withdrawing from the Paris Agreement, a process that will be completed in November, 2020. In addition, the Trump administration has rolled back many environmental rules, imposed by previous presidents, including restrictions on fossil fuel emissions. Since Vice-President Joe Biden supports staying in the Paris Agreement and restoring environmental regulations, voters will have the opportunity to express their views on this issue in the 2020 presidential election.

Since the publication of *Laudato Si* in 2015, there also have been impressive positive developments, including many discussions of its importance and effective concrete efforts to put its suggestions into practice. On the fourth anniversary of its publication, the Catholic Climate Covenant co-sponsored a major conference at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, attended by 200 invited guests, including scholars and activists from around the country, three bishops and a Vatican representative. Participants shared success stories of universities reducing their carbon foot print, hospitals eliminating the use of bottled water, parishes using more solar energy and Catholic institutions divesting stocks in fossil fuel companies. They also called for greater participation in the cause by various segments of the Catholic community: the American bishops, by making ecological concerns a higher, more prominent concern; pastors, by giving greater attention in their homilies to caring for the earth and the poor; and parishioners, by supporting political candidates committed to dealing with the ecological crisis and backing legislation that protects the environment.

Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego, who gave the keynote address, urged parishes and schools to become “centers of truth-telling” that challenge those “industries and economic interests that despoil our planet.” He also recognized young people as “the prophetic voice of environmental justice in our nation,” who have the power to open the minds of their elders to the threat climate change poses on future generations.

Pope Francis envisions a nine-day observance (a novena) of the fifth anniversary of Laudato Si that involves online workshops, daily prayer petitions and a concluding Day of Prayer on Sunday May 24, at noon local time in countries around the globe. The theme for the week is “Everything is Connected,” a call for universal solidarity in the common cause of caring for our wondrous earth and for human beings banished to the margins. The American bishops have provided resources online (go to catholicclimatecovenant.org, click on Resources then go to *Laudato Si* Week, 2020) for celebrating the anniversary, including the complete text of the encyclical, study guides and daily prayers. It will be up to all of us to figure out what this celebration means and how we can participate in the midst of the pandemic: for example, reading the encyclical, organizing our recycling process, planting a tree and joining our prayers with millions of others on Sunday May 24, at noon.

For those who want to compose their own daily meditation, here are some suggestions. Read a passage from Scripture: for instance, Job 12:7-10, that advises us to learn from the earth and its creatures; Psalm 96: 11-12, that portrays the heavens and earth singing for joy; Genesis 1: 1-31, where God declares everything he made was very good; Luke 12:27-31, where Jesus uses the lilies of the field to teach a spiritual lesson; and Romans 8:16-25, that suggests the whole created world will share in the final victory of freedom over slavery. Reflect on the Canticle of the Creatures, attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, which speaks poetically of Brother Sun, Sister Moon and Stars, Brother Wind and Air, Sister Water, Brother Fire and Sister Earth our mother. Join in a litany addressed to God with the response “Lord, hear our prayer” to various petitions: Grant us the grace to grow deeper in our respect and care for your Creation; Help us recognize the sacredness of all your creatures as signs of your gracious love; Strengthen us to resist the glamour of consumerism and embrace the cause of justice for all. Perhaps these suggestions will prompt more creative and fitting devotions as part of a multifaceted global effort to preserve our common home.