

LAUDATO SI'

ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME



ENCYCLICAL LETTER
Includes Discussion Questions

POPE FRANCIS

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for every being that you have made.
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined
to everything that is.

God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.
Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good, advance the weak,
and care for this world in which we live.
The poor and the earth are crying out.
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you!
Amen.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION

"What is the purpose of our life in this world? ... What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us?" In Laudato Si', Pope Francis strives to answer the questions at the very heart of our existence. He says, "Unless we struggle with these deeper issues, I do not believe that our concern for ecology will produce significant results."

There are several themes that unify this encyclical. They are:

- the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet
- the conviction that everything in the world is connected
- the critique of new forms of power derived from technology
- the call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress
- the "value proper to each creature" and the human meaning of ecology
- the need for forthright and honest debate
- the serious responsibility of international and local policy
- the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new life-style

Discussion Questions

1. In his opening words, Pope Francis calls the earth “a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.” In what ways is the earth our sister? In what ways is she our mother?
2. Referring to his namesake, St. Francis, Pope Francis says, “Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.” What does it mean to you to think of the world as a “joyful mystery”?

Discussion Questions

CHAPTER ONE:

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO OUR COMMON HOME

In the first chapter of Laudato Si', Pope Francis draws upon the most recent scientific research on such areas as pollution and climate change, access to water throughout the world, the loss of biodiversity in our plant and animal species, a decline of the quality of human life, and an overall breakdown of society.

1. “The continued acceleration of changes affecting humanity and the planet is coupled today with a more intensified pace of life and work which might be called ‘rapidification.’” Pope Francis says. In what ways has your life and your family been negatively affected by “rapidification”?
2. Why is the impact of climate change disproportionately felt by the poor?
3. In some places, water is becoming a “commodity subject to the laws of the market.” Why does Pope Francis say that water cannot be treated like other natural resources — available for purchase for those who can afford it?
4. How does our “throwaway culture” contribute to feelings of hopelessness in the face of our environmental problems? How can we combat this in our lives?
5. “The developed countries ought to help pay this [ecological] debt by significantly limiting their consumption of nonrenewable energy and by assisting poorer countries to support policies and programs of sustainable development,” Pope Francis writes. How can you live out in your own life?

Discussion Questions

CHAPTER TWO: THE GOSPEL OF CREATION

In the second chapter, Pope Francis shares several biblical accounts and calls us to the “tremendous responsibility” of humankind for creation, the intimate connection among all creatures, and the fact that “the natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone.”

1. In the biblical account of creation, what are the “three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships” that ground human life?
2. Why is the traditional understanding of humanity’s “dominion” over the earth an incorrect interpretation?
3. What does the “priority of *being* over that of *being useful*” mean to you?
4. Pope Francis writes, “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.” What evidence do you see of this in your own life and family?
5. “The Spirit of God has filled the universe with possibilities and therefore, from the very heart of things, something new can always emerge.” How does this give you hope for the future of both humanity and the earth?

Discussion Questions

CHAPTER THREE: THE HUMAN ROOTS OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

In Chapter Three, Pope Francis explores the power imbalance inherent in technological advancement and calls us to re-examine our definition of progress in relation to human relationships. He reminds us that human life is important and should not be disregarded in our increasingly throwaway society.

1. How can we both appreciate and respect the progress that technology has afforded us and still be cautious of the evils that can accompany such technology?
2. Pope Francis writes that, at times, life can become “a surrender to situations conditioned by technology, itself viewed as the principal key to the meaning of existence.” Have you experienced this among your family and friends?
3. Reflect on this statement: “We cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships.” What does this mean to you? How can you begin to heal your “fundamental human relationships”?
4. How is concern for the environment incompatible with abortion?
5. How does “the rise of a relativism which sees everything as irrelevant unless it serves one’s own immediate interests” lie at the heart of our environmental issues?

CHAPTER FOUR: INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

In Chapter Four, Pope Francis stresses that everything is interconnected in the web of life. With renewed vigor, he calls for a preferential option for the poor and disenfranchised throughout the world, who often bear the brunt of our disconnected society. He also says that technological solutions to environmental issues must respect the "rights of peoples and cultures" around the globe.

1. Pope Francis says: "It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected. Time and space are not independent of one another, and not even atoms or subatomic particles can be considered in isolation." What are some examples of the "interconnectedness" of the universe that you have experienced in your own life? How does seeing everything as connected change the way you see the world?
2. "Lack of respect for the law is becoming more common," we read. Do you agree or disagree?
3. Pope Francis says, "Ecology, then, also involves protecting the cultural treasures of humanity in the broadest sense." What link do you see between protecting cultural treasures and ecology? Are there examples you can think of from current news?
4. In what ways must technological solutions to environmental issues need to respect the "Rights of peoples and cultures"? Why is the loss of human culture as serious as the extinction of plants and animals?
5. "Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology," Pope Francis says. Have you considered that how you take care of your body has repercussions on the world at large? How can you become a better caretaker of your own body?

CHAPTER FIVE: LINES OF APPROACH AND ACTION

In Chapter Five, Pope Francis answers the question of what we can and must do to heal our broken world. He stresses that analyses are not enough; rather, we need proposals for dialogue and action which would involve each of us individually no less than international policy.

1. Pope Francis says that to solve the issues facing us today we must think of ourselves as "one world with a common plan." Do you believe that is possible? What would have to change to have this happen?
2. What are some of the "common plans" that Pope Francis encourages the world to embrace? What can you do to help this become a reality?
3. Although Pope Francis says the richer nations carry a great deal of accountability for environmental issues, why are rich and poor nations alike responsible for caring for the environment?
4. Pope Francis reminds us, "Environmental protection cannot be assured solely on the basis of financial calculations of costs and benefits." What is your reaction to this statement? How does it challenge both the politics of the right and the left?
5. The pope asks us to begin "redefining our notion of progress." What does progress mean to you? In light of what has been written in *Laudato Si'*, how might your definition change?

CHAPTER SIX:

ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND SPIRITUALITY

The final chapter calls each of us to a new lifestyle. Pope Francis stresses that education and training are key to real transformation: "Change is impossible without motivation and a process of education." All educational sectors are involved, primarily at school, in families, in the media, in catechesis and elsewhere. Finally, we are each called to reflect seriously on how we are living in communion, not only with God, with others, and with ourselves, but also with all creatures and with nature as a whole.

1. Pope Francis speaks about "compulsive consumerism." What does this phrase mean to you? What is the relationship between consumerism and selfishness? Between self-centeredness and greed? Between emptiness and consumption?
2. Why is the family the first place where environmental concerns must be taught and lived? What is your family doing in this regard?
3. What does Pope Francis mean when he says that we must undergo an "ecological conversion"? In what ways should our encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in our relationship with the world around us?
4. Pope Francis asks us to develop an attitude of "less is more." How can you do this in your own life?
5. How are the sacraments, and the Eucharist in particular, concrete signs for us of God's love and care for his creation? Why does Pope Francis call the Eucharist "a sign of cosmic love"?

ENDNOTES

- 1 *Canticle of the Creatures*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1, New York-London-Manila, 1999, 113-114.
- 2 Apostolic Letter *Octagesima Adveniens* (14 May 1971), 2i: AAS 63 (1971), 416-417.
- 3 *Address to EAQ on the 25th Anniversary of its Institution* (16 November 1970), 4: AAS 62 (1970), 833.
- 4 Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), 15: AAS 71 (1979), 287.
- 5 Cf. *Catechesis* (17 January 2001), 4: *Insegnamenti* 41/1 (2001), 179.
- 6 Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 38: AAS 83 (1991), 841.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 58: AAS 83 (1991), p. 863.
- 8 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), 34: AAS 80 (1988), 559.
- 9 Cf. *Id.*, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 37: AAS 83 (1991), 840.
- 10 *Address to the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See* (8 January 2007): AAS 99 (2007), 73.
- 11 Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 51: AAS 101 (2009), 687.
- 12 *Address to the Bundestag*, Berlin (22 September 2011): AAS 103 (2011), 664.
- 13 *Address to the Clergy of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone* (6 August 2008): AAS 100 (2008), 634.
- 14 *Message for the Day of Prayer for the Protection of Creation* (1 September 2012).
- 15 *Address in Santa Barbara, California* (8 November 1997); cf. John Chryssavgis, *On Earth as in Heaven: Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*, Bronx, New York, 2012.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 *Lecture at the Monastery of Ulstein*, Norway (23 June 2003).
- 18 "Global Responsibility and Ecological Sustainability," *Closing Remarks*, Hald Summit I, Istanbul (20 June 2012).
- 19 Thomas of Celano, *The Life of Saint Francis*, I, 29, 81; in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1, New York-London-Manila, 1999, 251.
- 20 *The Major Legend of Saint Francis*, VIII, 6, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 2, New York-London-Manila, 2000, 590.
- 21 Cf. Thomas of Celano, *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, II, 124, 165, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 2, New York-London-Manila, 2000, 354.