

Statement on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation

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“Listen to the voice of creation”

In the United States, the Season of Creation coincides with the beauty of the fall season, when the bounty and blessings of our nation’s land, waters, and skies are on full display. Our gratitude for plentiful harvests and the beauty of colorful leaves, early sunsets, and cooler air invites us to make some interior space to listen more carefully to creation, to each other and to God. Fittingly, on this World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, Pope Francis has invited all Christians to reflect on the theme: “Listen to the voice of creation.”¹

Listening, after all, is integral to faith itself. As the encyclical *Lumen Fidei* teaches, faith is a synthesis of hearing, seeing and touching. Each of the senses of faith highlights one of its aspects: such as sight and the ability to see the Lord’s works; or touch and the incarnational, down-to-earth dimension of God’s presence in our daily lives. To believe is to see, hear and feel.²

St. Paul proposes “a formula which became classic: *fides ex auditu*, ‘faith comes from hearing’” (*Rom* 10:17).³ Hearing emphasizes the personal, mysterious presence of God and the invitation to discipleship. Even in times of darkness when sight fails or the body cannot feel, God’s voice comes to us – directly, or through creation and other people – to remind us of his love, presence, and mercy. While we can direct our gaze and reach with our bodies, listening is the most passive of the senses of faith, reminding us of the Lord’s initiative and activity. It is God who reaches out to us, “he first loved us” (1Jn 4:19), or as Pope Francis loves to say: “He is already there.”⁴ Faith is our response to God’s action rather than the product of our Promethean making.

We must learn the art of listening to sustain our faith, lest we end up among those, as the Old Testament prophets wrote, “who have ears, but hear not.”⁵ We must also learn the art of listening to protect the environment. With careful attentiveness, the Holy Father rightly identifies a dissonance in the world, also resoundingly true in the United States. The beauty of the natural

¹ Pope Francis, “Message for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation,” 1 September 2022.

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2022/documents/20220716-messaggio-giornata-curacreato.html#_ftnref5.

² See, Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, no. 30.

³ Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, no. 29.

⁴ Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exultate*, no. 135; Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 24.

⁵ Cf. Is. 6:10, Jer. 5:21, Ex. 12:2.

world and the harmony that comes from the integrity of creation speaks to us. Yet we also hear the “cry of the earth and cry of the poor,”⁶ the “little ones” being wounded by a throwaway culture fueled by greed, over-consumption, technocratic power, and indifference. We continue to experience the destructive force of natural disasters, floods, fires and heat waves and the consequent suffering of people, animals and ecosystems.

However, by listening attentively, we can also catch the sound of hope emerging from our collective actions to protect creation, perhaps surprisingly, from our national politics and within our pilgrim Church. We will soon be celebrating the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, which also commemorates the promulgation of *Fratelli Tutti*, an encyclical on fraternity and social friendship, in which the pope called for “a better kind of politics.” This invitation implicitly includes an appeal for a better kind of “eco-politics” that protects, rather than exploits, the environment and green ideologies for partisan gain. The need for a better eco-politics today echoes Pope Benedict XVI’s appeal to the German parliament over a decade ago when he lauded the ecological movement for realizing that “... matter is not just raw material for us to shape at will, but that the earth has a dignity of its own and that we must follow its directives. We must listen to the language of nature and we must answer accordingly.”⁷

Within the Catholic Church in the United States, we can hear some hopeful responses. As a Church, we are embarking on a synodal journey at the invitation of the Holy Father, which is centered on cultivating a “Church which listens... in which everyone has something to learn.”⁸ The initial fruits are already a great blessing. Among the preliminary results, one voice that emerges, especially among the youth, is a need for the Church to care for creation.⁹

Recently the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops updated its socially responsible investment guidelines, and the section with the largest revisions was on “Saving our global common home,” introducing five different categories for responsible investment, including climate change, biodiversity, water and natural resources, technology and environmental impact.¹⁰ The Catholic Campaign for Human Development continues to increase its support of community organizations around the country to address environmental problems. Catholic Charities continues to assist communities around the country affected by natural disasters, Catholic Rural Life engages farmers and agricultural leaders and beyond our borders Catholic Relief Services continue to prove themselves experts in climate adaptation among the

⁶ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 49.

⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, “Visit to the Bundestag,” (Sept. 22, 2011). https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110922_reichstag-berlin.html.

⁸ Pope Francis, “Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops,” (Oct. 17, 2015). https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html.

⁹ See, e.g., Archdiocese of Seattle Releases Synod Synthesis Report. <https://archseattle.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Synod-Results-Release-Final-Eng.pdf>; Synod for a Synodal Church – Diocese of Davenport, Iowa. <http://www.catholicmessenger.net/2022/06/synod-for-a-synodal-church-diocese-of-davenport-iowa/>; Diocese of Buffalo *Synod Report to the United States Catholic Conference of Catholic Bishops*. <https://www.buffalodiocese.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Diocese-of-Buffalo-Synod-Report-to-USCCB.pdf>

¹⁰ See Socially Responsible Investment Guidelines For The United States Conference Of Catholic Bishops, (Nov. 2021). [https://www.usccb.org/resources/Socially%20Responsible%20Investment%20Guidelines%202021%20\(003\).pdf](https://www.usccb.org/resources/Socially%20Responsible%20Investment%20Guidelines%202021%20(003).pdf)

poor.¹¹ Numerous U.S. Catholic institutions, religious orders, dioceses, parishes, communities, families, and individuals are responding to the invitation of *Laudato Si'*.¹²

Amidst our country's political divisions, there are liberal and conservative lawmakers who share concerns about both the world's climate and the welfare of our nation.¹³ They are doing the hard work of considering bi-partisan policies that can preserve the environment, promote energy security, and grow the economy. We pray that now, and in the future, both parties will continue to put forward their best environmental policies and work together to protect our "common home which God has entrusted to us."¹⁴

While these actions give us hope, we are also aware that they are far from sufficient to meet the challenges of our times. The safeguard against complacency and hubris is a listening faith, always aware of God's action preceding and increasing our own efforts. This Season of Creation, we give thanks to the professionals and everyday citizens who work to protect the environment and promote the common good.

¹¹ See, Archbishop Paul S. Coakley, "Convening of Catholic Leaders with Senate Climate Solutions Caucus Co-Chairs," (October 1, 2020). https://www.usccb.org/resources/2020-10-01-Environment-Archbishop%20Coakley-Remarks%20for%20%20Hill%20Briefing%20on%20Environment_0.pdf

¹² See, e.g., United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Summary of Activities of the U.S. Church in Response to *Laudato Si'*," (June 17, 2020). <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/upload/summary-activities-laudato-si.pdf>.

¹³ For the latest USCCB advocacy on the environment, go to www.usccb.org/environment.

¹⁴ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 232.