

Celebration of the 50th anniversary of Earth Day

The interconnectedness of the entire creation

My dear brothers and Sisters,

Pax et Bonum, Laudato Si!

On April 22nd we celebrated not only the 50th anniversary of the Earth Day, but also the anniversary of the signing of the Paris Agreement to take climate action. Moreover, in May this year, we will be celebrating the 5th anniversary of the Papal encyclical "*Laudato Si: On the Care for Our Common Home*". Indeed while the coronavirus (COVID-19) has been spreading around the world and dominating news headlines, thoughts and attention, these major events remind us the need to take climate action has remained as urgent as ever. In his remarks on Earth Day, the UN's Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated "*Mother Earth is clearly urging a call to action. Nature is suffering. Australian fires, heat records and the worst locust invasion in Kenya. Now we face COVID -19, a worldwide health pandemic link to the health of our ecosystem-We must act decisively to protect our planet from both the coronavirus and the existential threat of climate disruption.*" (<https://www.un.org/en/observances/earth-day>).

In the last 5 Months, swarms of desert locusts hang like shimmering dark clouds on the horizon as they scour the countryside in what are already some of the world's most vulnerable countries, including Kenya, Yemen, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Uganda. The locusts are extremely dangerous, they destroy everything in their way, and they cause extensive damage to crops in a region already experiencing constant risk of drought or flooding, war and conflict. As I speak my country Kenya is experiencing devastating floods and landslides that have left several people dead and many others displaced due to the ongoing heavy rains. This is despite the current efforts to combat the deadly Coronavirus. In all these, the poor and the vulnerable are the ones who suffer most, children, women, the elderly, the small-scale farmers, and the refugees. (Laudato Si 24)

The holy scriptures are very clear on how our activities have caused havoc in the entire creation. Prophet Isaiah says "*The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore, a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore, the inhabitants of the earth dwindled, and few people are left.*" Is 24:4-6.

But God also offers us hope as we heard from the letter of St. Paul to the Romans "...*For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God...*" Rm 8:18-25. Here the Apostle Paul looks forward to the permanent eschatological transformation of creation when Christ returns. The damage that the fall caused to nature will be reversed and nature will be perfected, so that it shares in the glory of the resurrected children of God. By "creation," Paul seems to refer to all God has made, from plants and animals, to other people to the air, water, and sky. And all of it, all of us, are waiting for a moment when everything will finally be made right. This implies our fundamental purpose or fulfilment, our connectedness- how we are all moving together

God is the sole creator of all that exists, he is the maker of heaven and earth and all its inhabitants, and we are all connected. From the simplest food chain to a complex web, we are all dependent on each other and connected for our existence and survival, "There is not one thing"; there is, instead, a web of connection. "*Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another*" (LS 42)

But the mother earth is crying, and nature is here with its wrath because we have abused nature for quite a long time; as was stated by the Nobel Peace Prize Winner the late professor Wangari Maathai that “*If we destroy nature, nature destroys back.*” God in His love has endowed us with vast intelligence and knowledge but then *how much has it enabled us to be co-creators?* In most occasions, we have been the weapons of mass destruction through the clearing of forest, wetlands, overexploitation of earth resources, fossil fuels, gas and oil, gene cloning, human trafficking, and violence against each other. All these are now disturbing the web of connections, impacting our contemporary world so adversely. 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)

The current state of the world is wanting and quite disheartening but then there is so much hope with all of us present willing to act to soothe the *groaning of creation*. It is not that nothing is being done, it is just that, we need to increase our efforts. Looking to God’s Word, as always, we get a firm starting point for addressing this often-emotional issue. Sparrows (*Mat 10:29*) and lilies of the field (*Mat 6:30*) have value in his eyes, and he delights in even the playfulness of creatures (*Ps 104:26*). Many times, Scripture celebrates the beauty of what God has made.

My dear brothers and sisters, the prophets of the Old Testament, and in the new testament, John the Baptist and even our Lord Jesus Christ himself called people to repent, to *metanoia* or a total transformation, and indeed for the conversion of heart and of behaviour. Today this message is being renewed. The anniversaries that we celebrate remind us of our moral responsibility, to be good stewards of the environment. St. Francis of Assisi called for a cosmic fraternity, one creaturehood under one God that respects the intrinsic value of each creature. Pope Francis in LS is calling us to think of the future generation “*What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?*” (LS 160). And the UN on Earth day called for bold climate action, “*We must fight climate change with the same determination we are fighting the coronavirus*”. And indeed the GCCM is like a voice calling in the desert, calling for an ecological conversion- to encourage a change of heart, for a footprint reduction – to lead by example, and for Prophetic advocacy to raise our humble voices for climate justice, calling for bold policies. This is the time to act, as St. Francis would implore his friars, “*Let us begin again, for up until now, we have done little or nothing*”. (1st*Celano, the life of St. Francis*)

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Earth Day and the 5th anniversary of *Laudato Si*, we pray for divine intervention for climate action. We also pray for the victims of climate change, and more urgently we pray for our brothers and sisters here and around the world who are sick due to the coronavirus, and for those who have died may they Rest in Eternal Peace

Thank you, God bless you

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