



**PASTORAL LETTER FOR THE SEASON OF CREATION
TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME - 28TH AND 29TH SEPTEMBER 2024**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Care for creation is a subject which has long and rich tradition in the Catholic Church, from the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament through to the teachings of successive Popes. Pope St John Paul II said that care for creation, “is not simply a physical ecology ...but a human ecology, capable of protecting the radical good of life in all its manifestations and of leaving behind for future generations an environment which conforms as closely as possible to the Creator's plan.”ⁱ

His successor, Pope Benedict XVI, taught that, “The world is not something indifferent, raw material to be utilized simply as we see fit. Rather, it is part of God's good plan, in which all of us are called to be sons and daughters in the one Son of God, Jesus Christ.”ⁱⁱ Benedict also went on to say that, “We are called ...to exercise responsible stewardship of creation, in order to protect it, to enjoy its fruits, and to cultivate it, finding the resources necessary for everyone to live with dignity...The protection of the environment, of resources and of the climate obliges all international leaders to act justly and to show a readiness to work in good faith, respecting the law and promoting solidarity with the weakest regions of the planet.”ⁱⁱⁱ

In his 2015 encyclical letter *Laudato Si': On Care For Our Common Home*, Pope Francis develops the idea of an “ecological conversion”^{iv}, a concept proposed by John Paul II and extended by Benedict XVI. The Holy Father calls for a spirituality which “can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world”.^v This spirituality is not something new though. Indeed, the early Fathers of the Church often spoke of creation and Holy Scripture as two divine books: the first, creation, reveals to us some of the attributes of God imprinted by Him as Creator on the natural world; the second, Scripture, “teaches the truths revealed by God for our salvation, permitting us to ‘recognize the inner nature, the value, and the ordering of the whole of creation to the praise of God’.”^{vi}

Our Catholic tradition clearly and directly summons us to protect the life and dignity of the human person; a task which cannot be separated from the care and protection of all creation. As such, the stewardship of creation is one of the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. Bishops and pastors are called therefore to make known “the correct relationship of human beings with nature ...human beings are set at the centre of creation as stewards of the Creator.”^{vii}

We are now in the last week of the annual celebration of the Season of Creation^{viii}. It will conclude on 4th October, the Feast of St Francis of Assisi and will mark 45 years since Saint John Paul II designated this 13th Century Saint as the Patron “of those who promote ecology”^{ix}. St Francis, he said, “offers Christians an example of genuine and deep respect for the integrity of creation”^x. St Francis’ fondness for the natural world was not separate from his love and care for humanity, but part of a shared responsibility for the stewardship of creation. He renounced a life of wealth, choosing instead a simple existence.

As Catholics, our worldview and concern for the environment must be informed by, and rest firmly upon the foundation of, both sound reasoning and divine revelation. The respect we owe to creation originates from the majesty of its Creator. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: “The beauty of creation reflects the infinite beauty of the Creator and ought to inspire the respect and submission of man’s intellect and will.”^{xi} For this reason, our care for the earth should be “motivated not by catastrophic visions but by hope in the future”^{xii} and a deep love for the God in whom we “live and move and have our being”^{xiii}.

It is generally recognised that climate change is accelerating, and we are at a critical period if we are to repair the environmental damage which threatens the very survival of our world. Therefore, in this period of prayer in preparation for the Church's Jubilee Year of Hope, let us be inspired to take hopeful, but urgent, positive action as stewards of creation.

The CAFOD Live Simply Award^{xiv} provides a framework for this hopeful, positive action in our local communities. It involves us in a shared endeavour: to answer the call to care for our common home and to stand in solidarity with our sisters and brothers around the world. I encourage all parishes and schools to work towards 'living simply' as a way of "protecting this world which God has entrusted to us".^{xv}

We are people of hope, each one of us encouraged by Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself to live our lives according to His teachings and to give witness to the Good News He offers to all people. These works we cannot just leave to others. We may lack the power to change the whole world, but we do have the ability to make our views known to those who govern our country, and to make changes in our own lives, homes and communities*.

In this Season of Creation, and throughout the Jubilee Year of Hope, let us take to heart the words of the Holy Father Pope Francis, "May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope."^{xvi}

**✠ Marcus
Bishop of Leeds**

Given at Leeds on 19th September 2024, and appointed to be read at celebrations of Mass, and made available to be taken away from the churches and chapels of the Diocese, on the Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Saturday 28th/Sunday 29th September 2024.

* We are currently recruiting for a Diocesan Trustee with specific responsibility for the environment to work alongside our Diocesan Laudato Si' Sustainability Group. Our Environmental Policies and initiatives are available online and all the clergy and lay faithful are warmly encouraged to communicate your own ideas and proposals.

ⁱ *Pastores Gregis* §70, Pope John Paul II, 2003,

ⁱⁱ *Sacramentum Caritatis* §92, Pope Benedict XVI, 2007

ⁱⁱⁱ *Safeguarding of Creation*, Pope Benedict XVII, General Audience, 26 August 2009

^{iv} *God made man the steward of creation* §4, Pope St John Paul II, General Audience, 17 January 2001 & *Caritas in Veritate* §51, Pope Benedict XVII, 2009, and *Laudato Si'* §217, Pope Francis, 2015

^v *Laudato Si'* §216, Pope Francis, 2015

^{vi} *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §337 (with quote from *Lumen Gentium* n.36, §2)

^{vii} *Pastores Gregis* §70, Pope John Paul II, 2003

^{viii} The Season of Creation is an annual celebration uniting Christians in prayer and action for the protection of our common home. The idea of celebrating 1 September as a day of prayer for creation began at the wish of the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios in 1989 and was endorsed by Pope Francis in 2015. The season runs from 1 September to 4 October, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

^{ix} Bull *Inter Sanctos*, Pope John Paul II, 29 November 1979.

^x *Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*, 1 January 1990.

^{xi} *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §341

^{xii} *Gubbio Charter*, 'Terra Mater international Seminar on the 800th Anniversary of the birth of St Francis of Assisi', 1982

^{xiii} Acts 17: 28

^{xiv} <https://cafod.org.uk/campaign/livesimply-award>

^{xv} *Laudato Si'* §242

^{xvi} *Ibid.*, §244