

How can we help each other to live out the Encyclical, in our spiritual life, our family life, and in our parishes?

1. In your Family life

- “In the family we first learn how to show love and respect for life; we are taught the proper use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures” (No. 213).
- *Care for Our Common Home*, refers to the earth as “sister earth.” Families are the perfect place to foster the deeper attitudes that *Laudato Si’* calls for:
 - in developing our attitudes toward God, other people and the created world.
 - as the most important setting for ecological education.
 - parents can model connectedness and interdependence in the way they care for others.
 - in the way spouses treat one another, their neighbours, and anyone who is struggling in their own community.
 - living out gratitude for everything we have as gift.

Reflection Questions

1. Why is the family the first place where environmental concerns must be taught and lived? What is your family doing in this regard?

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2. 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?

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Jot down your ideas to share with your group

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2. In your Spiritual life

The word “spirituality” appears 17 times in the encyclical, and “God” is cited almost 200 times. Indeed, Pope Francis devotes an entire chapter (the sixth) to the topics of education and spirituality. And he concludes his document with not one but two prayers — one offered for “all who believe in a God who is the all-powerful Creator” (No. 246) and another specifically for Christians.

“Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things ...” (No. 222).

We are called to try to change the way we relate to people and to nature. To live contemplatively in holy wonder, we must remember that we are called to be in relationship to God within his creation, viewing others and our world as a gift from God.

“The best way to restore men and women to their rightful place, putting an end to their claim to absolute dominion over the earth, is to speak once more of the figure of a Father who creates and who alone owns the world” (No. 75).

We’re so busy, we can plan to enjoy “our common home” (as the pope calls it) more. We can, as a discipline, sit in silence by the window and just look. And remember that looking at a human being, seeing and appreciating the depth of that person, honours God’s creation as well.

Pope Francis emphasizes the important place of the sacraments in a spirituality that embraces creation. He calls them “a privileged way in which nature is taken up by God to become a means of mediating supernatural life.” Water, oil and other created goods are “incorporated in our act of praise.” The pope reserves especially strong words for the Eucharist in *Laudato Si’* - “The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation” (No. 236).

Reflection Questions

1. 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”?
2. “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 silence open us to hope for the future of both humanity and the earth?
3. 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, our mother and how does that deepen our prayer journey?

Jot down your ideas about growing in prayer to share with your group

Pope Francis wants to awaken us to recognize God’s goodness, manifest in the created world. To open our eyes to God’s presence and grow deeper in prayer, we could:

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3. Our ideas about spending and consumption

David McCarthy

“Many people know that our current progress and the mere amassing of things and pleasures are not enough to give meaning and joy to the human heart, yet they feel unable to give up what the market sets before them” (No. 209). **The heart of Laudato Si’** is not so much about climate change as it is about consumerism.

What is consumerism? Though Pope Francis says much about consumerism, he offers no definition. “Since the market tends to promote extreme consumerism in an effort to sell its products,” he writes, “people can easily get caught up in a whirlwind of needless buying and spending.” Consumerism “prioritizes short-term gain and private interest” (No. 184) and makes people “believe that they are free as long as they have the supposed freedom to consume” (No. 203).

These ideas are consistent with the teaching of Francis’ predecessors, especially Pope St. John Paul II. When we are in the grip of consumerism, we look to possessions to fulfil us, and when we are unfulfilled, we seek more possessions.

I don’t think we can avoid consumerism, but we can try to put limits on it. Some suggestions are that we need to spend more face-to-face time with our family and neighbours. We can develop common spaces and activities, like a community garden, and stop worrying about what others think of our possessions.

I think that the heart of the Pope’s message is an affirmation:

- Live joyfully and make friends of God’s friends: the holy ones among us and the poor.
- Any good message on consumerism will have as its foundation the grace and freedom of the Gospel — God with us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the message that we can give to others that will change our own lives.

Reflection Questions

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. Pope Francis asks us to develop an attitude of “less is more.” How can you apply this to your life?
3. 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?

Less is more

Laudato Si’ encourages us to live more simply and with greater awareness of the effect of our spending habits. Some ways to do this include:

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4. In your Parish Community

Fran Szpylczyn and Father Haydock

“Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds....The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion” (No. 219). Small changes in our communities can make a big difference.

Though *Laudato Si'* makes no explicit mention of Catholic parish life, the document does insist that social problems are best tackled by groups rather than individuals. Thus - parishes can play an important role in in making that vision better understood by:

- Helping parishioners to live more sustainably.
- Looking after parish grounds: this is God’s creation; there are the plants and flowers all around, and those bring tuis and butterflies. It is all interconnected.
- Some parishes offer a community garden where parishioners share plots of land to grow their own food or flowers. The project serves to allow members of the parish to eat more locally-grown food, save some money and get to know one another better.
- Running courses on *Laudato Si'*.
- Thinking of the energy efficiency of the parish buildings.
- Looking to the parish as the central place to care for the poor – support St Vincent de Paul.

Reflection Questions

1. 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?
2. 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 for this to happen?
3. 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?

Parish, Community life

Pope Francis reminds us that all of reality is interconnected. What are your suggestions on how we can better connect with our parish community and help our planet?

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