

Caring for God's Creation

We Hold These Treasures

Chapter 7, Updated 2019



The Sign of the Cross

Gathering and Report on Actions

Opening Prayer

Hallelujah!

Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights.

Praise him, all you his angels; give praise, all you his hosts.

Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all shining stars.

Praise him, highest heavens, you waters above the heavens.

Let them all praise the LORD's name; for he commanded and they were created,

Assigned them their station forever, set an order that will never change.

Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all the deeps of the sea;

Lightning and hail, snow and thick clouds, storm wind that fulfills his command;

Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars;

Animals wild and tame, creatures that crawl and birds that fly;

Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all who govern on earth;

Young men and women too, old and young alike.

Let them all praise the LORD's name, for his name alone is exalted,

His majesty above earth and heaven.

- Psalm 148: 1-13

Scripture Reflection

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be.

What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

- John 1:1-5

Then God said: 'Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the earth.' ... God also said: 'See, I give you every seed-bearing plant on all the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food.'

- Genesis 1: 26, 29

- For what purpose did God create the earth and all its creatures?
- What does it mean for man to have dominion over the earth and its creatures?

Social Inquiry

As Christians we believe that the earth and everything on it was created by an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving God. He gifted all of creation to the one creature made in God's own image and likeness – man. “The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it.” (Genesis 2:15) As caretakers of God's creation, we act as his stewards, and, therefore, are charged with protecting and preserving the environment.

Having “dominion” over the earth and its creatures (Genesis 1:26) does not mean man has the right to abuse the earth. Rather, man has the responsibility to “cultivate and care for” the earth (Genesis 2:15). There are many programs and organizations devoted to protecting the environment, animal life and human life. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has an environmental justice program called “Caring for God's Creation.” This program works to bring Catholics to a deeper respect for God's creation and encourages parishes to participate in activities that address environmental issues, especially as they affect the poor. This program advocates for environmental policies which protect the poor, promote environmental health and safety, ensure that the right to private property is balanced with the claims of the common good, and promotes sustainable environmental and economic development. See more about this resource at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/upload/ecology-resource-all.pdf>

"The notion of the common good also extends to future generations. The global economic crises have made painfully obvious the detrimental effects of disregarding our common destiny, which cannot exclude those who come after us. We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity. Once we start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations, we look at things differently; we realize that the world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others. Since the world has been given to us, we can no longer view reality in a purely utilitarian way, in which efficiency and productivity are entirely geared to our individual benefit. Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us." (Pope Francis, encyclical, "On Care for Our Common Home, *Laudato si*," 2015, #159)

In his 2009 [Encyclical, “Caritas in Veritate \(Charity in Truth\)”](#), Pope Benedict XVI addressed the need to protect the environment for future generations while emphasizing that nature is not more important than humanity. “Today the subject of development is also closely

related to the duties arising from *our relationship to the natural environment*. The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole. When nature, including the human being, is viewed as the result of mere chance or evolutionary determinism, our sense of responsibility wanes. In nature, the believer recognizes the wonderful result of God's creative activity, which we may use responsibly to satisfy our legitimate needs, material or otherwise, while respecting the intrinsic balance of creation. If this vision is lost, we end up either considering nature an untouchable taboo or, on the contrary, abusing it. Neither attitude is consonant with the Christian vision of nature as the fruit of God's creation... But it should also be stressed that it is contrary to authentic development to view nature as something more important than the human person.” (#48).

Being a steward of God's creation involves appreciation, protection and preservation of nature. It also means respect for human life, God's highest creation. In addition, we are called to collaborate with God in the work of creation through our human achievements and our work. “Christians see human achievements as “a sign of God's greatness and the flowering of his own mysterious design” (Guadium et Spes, no. 34)” (USCCB, 2002, 25). For example, we work at jobs, we create and appreciate art in various forms, and we utilize technology. All of our work is a partnership with God in building up the Kingdom of God (USCCB, 2002, 42-43).

Observe

1. Share a time when you have experienced God through His creation.
2. In what ways does your family act to respect God's creation?
3. What are the natural resources in your area? What steps are being taken in your community to preserve these resources for future generations?
4. Research a news report where environmental concerns come into conflict with other interests (economic, social, political, etc.). How do the affected communities attempt to manage these conflicts? Report on these news items to your group.

Judge

1. What are the attitudes/beliefs in our culture that challenge our ability to be good stewards of God's creation?
2. How can we find the right balance between respecting the environment and meeting the needs of the people in that area? What can we do?

3. Reflect on the diverse wonders of God's creation. How does the beauty of God's creation draw us closer to him? What does it reveal about the nature of God?
4. How do we feel about God's creation when a natural disaster strikes?
5. Many areas of the world suffer from a lack of natural resources. What is our responsibility toward the people in these areas?
6. To what extent can equal distribution of natural resources actually be achieved?

Act

1. Plant a garden in your backyard to experience the miracle of food growing from seeds. Share this task with your children. Join with other families to plant a garden at your parish to provide fresh produce for the local food pantries.
2. Learn about community gardens in your city and find out if there are ways you can help.
3. Identify things you can do in your family, parish or community to preserve the environment for the benefit of future generations.
4. Work for/support initiatives that provide clean water and sanitation in developing countries. You can learn more about these programs through Catholic Relief Services.
5. As a family, think about ways to reduce your consumption which, in turn, reduces your waste.
6. Become familiar with the benefits of consignment or re-use outlets. Before purchasing something new, ask yourself if you could find it secondhand.
7. Read one of the following short publications and identify an action you and your family can take:
 - US Bishops' *Care for Creation*, <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/care-for-creation.cfm>
 - Pope Francis' *Care for Our Common Home (Laudato si)*
http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

Preparation for the Next Meeting

Closing Prayer - Psalm 8: 2, 4-10

Side One:

O LORD, our Lord,

*how awesome is your name through all the earth!
I will sing of your majesty above the heavens.*

Side Two:

*When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and stars that you set in place—
What is man that you are mindful of him,
and a son of man that you care for him?*

Side One:

*Yet you have made him little less than a god,
crowned him with glory and honor.*

Side Two:

*You have given him rule over the works of your hands,
put all things at his feet: All sheep and oxen,
even the beasts of the field,
The birds of the air, the fish of the sea,
and whatever swims the paths of the seas.*

All:

*O LORD, our Lord,
how awesome is your name through all the earth!*