

CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME GUIDED REFLECTION

INTRODUCTION

At the end, we will find ourselves face to face with the infinite beauty of God (cf. 1 Cor 13:12), and be able to read with admiration and happiness the mystery of the universe, which with us will share in unending plenitude. Even now we are journeying towards the sabbath of eternity, the new Jerusalem, towards our common home in heaven. Jesus says: "I make all things new" (Rev 21:5). Eternal life will be a shared experience of awe, in which each creature, resplendently transfigured, will take its rightful place and have something to give those poor men and women who will have been liberated once and for all.

(Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, Paragraph 243)

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Vision of the New Jerusalem, Donald Jackson, Copyright 2011,
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Our world is headed somewhere. Somewhere good! God’s plan for humanity, and the whole universe, is to take us to a better future. As Pope Francis says in *Laudato Si’*, “At the end, we will find ourselves face to face with the infinite beauty of God, and be able to read with admiration and happiness the mystery of the universe, which with us will share in unending plenitude. Even now we are journeying towards the sabbath of eternity, the new Jerusalem, towards our common home in heaven. Jesus says: “I make all things new.” (Paragraph 243)



The vision captured in this illumination from *The Saint John's Bible* of the *Vision of the New Jerusalem* demonstrates this quote beautifully. God at the centre, human streets and squares in harmony and beauty, gardens with rich plant and animal life. All things are new.

In this moment, as we struggle to protect our planet, *Laudato Si’* offers a call to join in the work of bringing God’s vision into reality. This guide is designed to explore *The Saint John's Bible* illuminations, while prayerfully reflecting on the call to join God in building the new heaven and the new earth, as expressed in *Laudato Si’*. We hope and pray that through these reflections we will each more intentionally consider how we are caring for our common home.

ACTION:

Centre yourself with a moment of silent prayer.

Reflect on the awe inspiring wonders of the natural world and your place in creation.

NOTES:

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FAMILY, COMMUNITY, DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

Ecological education can take place in a variety of settings: at school, in families, in the media, in catechesis and elsewhere. Good education plants seeds when we are young, and these continue to bear fruit throughout life. Here, though, I would stress the great importance of the family, which is “the place in which life – the gift of God – can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with who constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of 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. In the family we receive an integral education, which enables us to grow harmoniously in personal maturity. In the family we learn to ask without demanding, to say “thank you” as an expression of genuine gratitude for what we have been given, to control our aggressivity and greed, and to ask forgiveness when we have caused harm. These simple gestures of heartfelt courtesy help to create a culture of shared life and respect for our surroundings.

(Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, Paragraph 213)

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Ruth and Naomi, Suzanne Moore, Copyright 2010, *The Saint John's Bible*, Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Families provide a foundation where we can grow and learn. The Bible describes many families, some of whom struggle to treat each other in the loving ways God calls us to care for each other. Our families may not be perfect either, but each matters in God’s plan for the world.

The Bible narrative about Ruth and Naomi, represented in *The Saint John’s Bible* illumination, begins sadly with the death of their husbands, but turns hopeful when they stick together as a family. God provides for them and their story is one of love, courage and compassion for each other. It tells of God’s love and faithfulness toward them, reflecting how he cares for us.

Families have a purpose: to bring life into the world, to love and nurture family members and to teach about God and our faith. Families are called to support each other, care for the sick and less fortunate and welcome newcomers to their communities. They are called to live in ways that respect God’s created world, since while we live in it, we are also called to care for it.

God loves us and wants us to love his created world. As expressed in *Laudato Si’*, “Human beings too are creatures of this world, enjoying a right to life and happiness, and endowed with unique dignity. So we cannot fail to consider the effects on people’s lives of environmental deterioration, current models of development and the throwaway culture.” (Paragraph 43) Pope Francis says we are a “family of families”, so together we must protect our world.



ACTION:

Start by including a prayer of thankfulness for creation in your family’s daily prayers. Then explore other ways your family can “live *Laudato Si’*” at <https://livelaudatosi.org/ways-live-pledge/>

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DIVINE CREATION

Our insistence that each human being is an image of God should not make us overlook the fact that each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God. The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning; we all remember places, and revisiting those memories does us much good. Anyone who has grown up in the hills or used to sit by the spring to drink, or played outdoors in the neighbourhood square; going back to these places is a chance to recover something of their true selves.

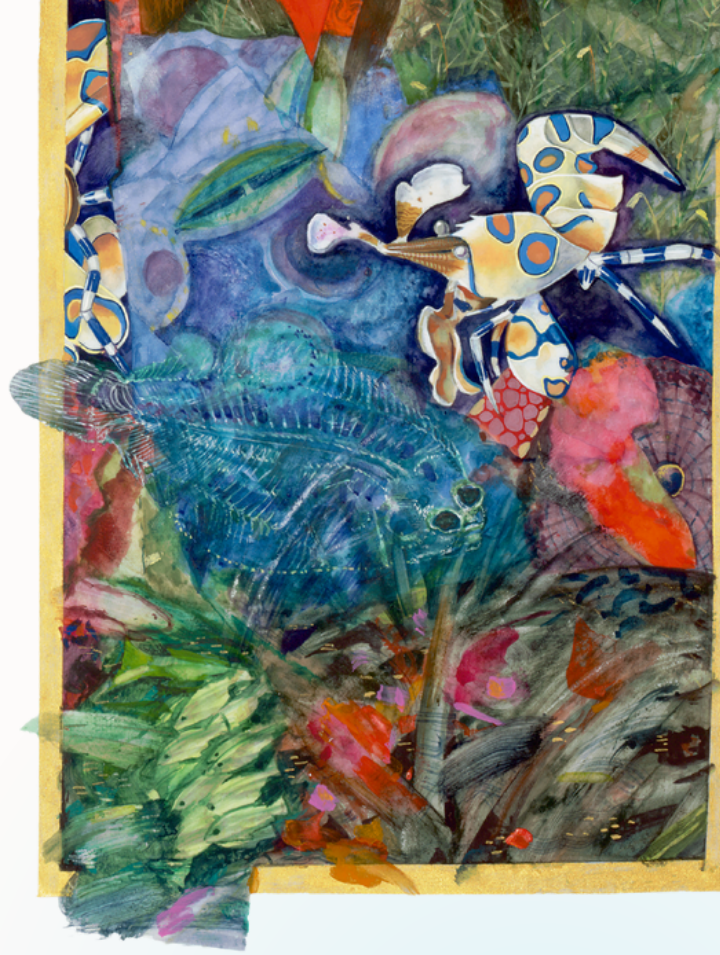
(Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, Paragraph 84)

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Garden of Eden, Donald Jackson with contributions from Chris Tomlin, Copyright 2003, *The Saint John's Bible*, Saint John's University, Collegetown, Minnesota, USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

In this paragraph of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis speaks a message of hope with an important reminder: that every creature and all parts of our natural environment matter. Everything God created was designed with purpose and intention, nothing is excessive or redundant. Everything and everyone is where it is supposed to be, playing a role that it was designed to play.

In the illumination from *The Saint John's Bible*, we see the *Garden of Eden*. It is filled with life! Large and small creatures, flora and fauna interconnect in a burst of movement. Along the top are echoes from another *Saint John's Bible* illumination, with the inclusion of the seven panels from the image of *Creation*. While it may not look organized, every animal and creature in this image contributes to the illumination, just as all living things contribute to our local and global ecosystems.



Paragraph 84 of *Laudato Si'* calls us to reflect on a place and experience within God's creation where we felt closely connected to God. Pope Francis lists many examples of where individuals may have felt that connection to our Lord. Take a moment to think of a time or place where you felt connected to God and His Creation. What natural spaces in your life have personal meaning for you and your family?

ACTION:

Go visit the natural space that holds personal meaning to you. If you don't have one, explore your local community's green space and try to intentionally take notice of the beauty of God's creation.

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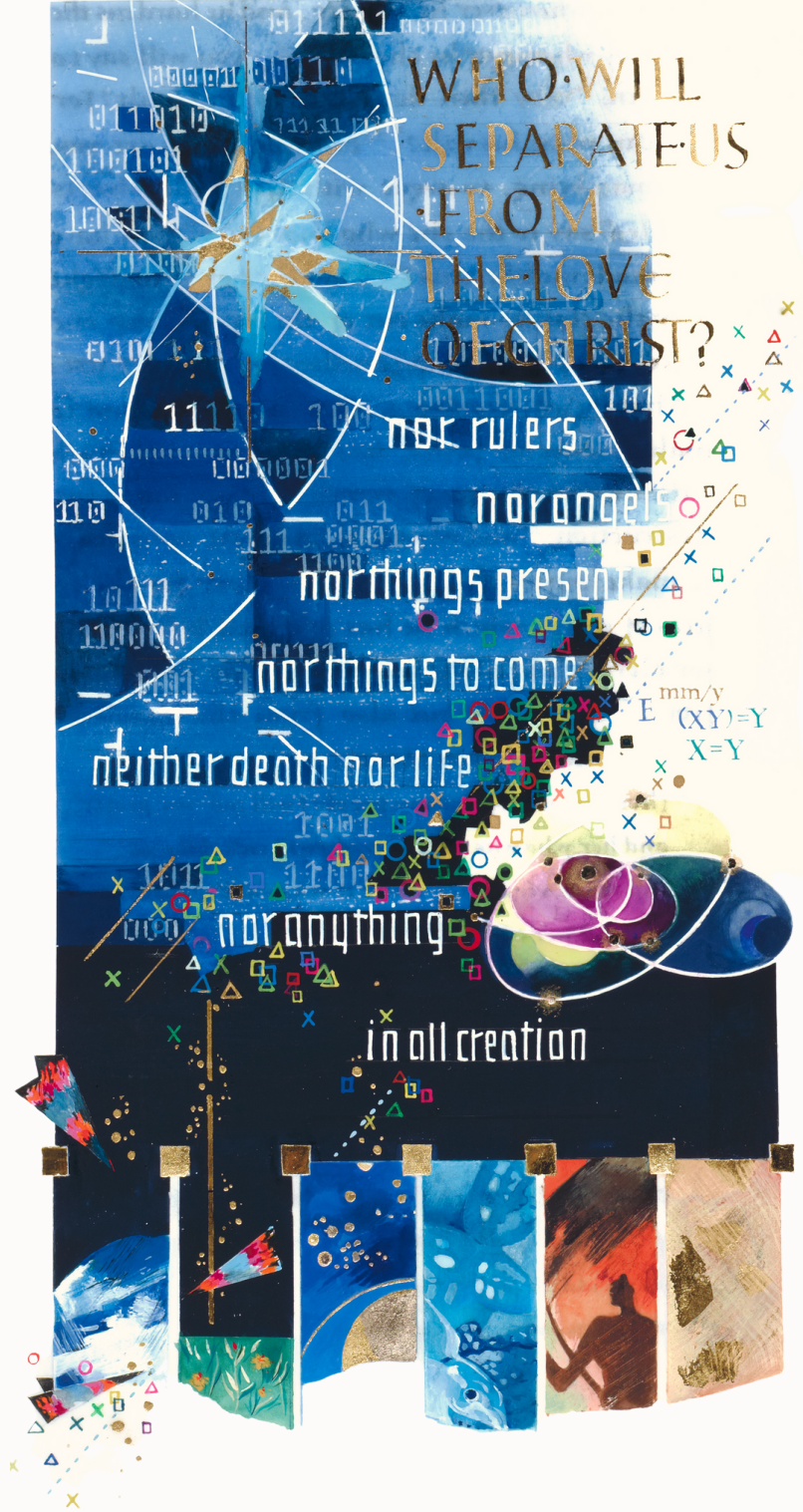
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SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY

Given the complexity of the ecological crisis and its multiple causes, we need to realize that the solutions will not emerge from just one way of interpreting and transforming reality. Respect must also be shown for the various cultural riches of different peoples, their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality. If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the

damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it. The Catholic Church is open to dialogue with philosophical thought; this has enabled her to produce various syntheses between faith and reason. The development of the Church's social teaching represents such a synthesis with regard to social issues; this teaching is called to be enriched by taking up new challenges.

(Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, Paragraph 63)



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When we think of technology and innovation, we think of new tools, methods and inventions. We often forget how creation is at the centre of everything we craft. We are inspired by natural systems, which work on their own without any human control and have always existed around us. Rivers and streams act as delivery systems and highways for nutrients, lifeforms and habitats. The sun provides solar energy used to warm, feed and energize all life. Soil, sand and rock produce filtration systems, water storage and sustain vegetation. The sciences help us understand that these precious gifts must be used to protect and preserve. We must remember we have been trusted with a sacred gift, one which we are called to care for, not waste by our reckless actions. The Earth protects us, feeds us, and heals us, which shows us the depth of God's love. In return we must protect, heal and love the Earth.

In *The Saint John's Bible*, through the illumination *Fulfillment of Creation*, we can see that God's creation is the foundation of humanity's innovations and explorations. The six panels along the bottom duplicate images found in the *Creation and Garden of Eden* illuminations in the Book of Genesis. Examples of binary code and Einstein's *Theory of Relativity* fill the page connecting Creation to our understanding of the world God made. The title of the illumination reminds us that we could not have made these innovations without God's creation.

ACTION:

Take up the challenge of making a positive impact in your community. Participate in a neighborhood clean-up, plant a garden, or join a group that promotes care for the common good.

NOTES:

He has told you
O mortal
what is good

and what does
the LORD require of you
but to do justice
and to love kindness
& to walk humbly
with your God

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FINAL THOUGHT

The Father is the ultimate source of everything, the loving and self-communicating foundation of all that exists. The Son, his reflection, through whom all things were created, united himself to this earth when he was formed in the womb of Mary. The Spirit, infinite bond of love, is intimately present at the very heart of the universe, inspiring and bringing new pathways. The world was created by the three Persons acting as a single divine principle, but each one of them performed this common work in accordance with his own personal property. Consequently, "when we contemplate with wonder the universe in all its grandeur and beauty, we must praise the whole Trinity".

(Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, Paragraph 238)

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He Has Told You, Sally Mae Joseph, Copyright 2005, *The Saint John's Bible*, Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

In the passage from the prophet Micah, highlighted in *The Saint John's Bible*, God is reminding us that our actions must be filled with love: love of God, love for each other and love for all creation.

Pope Francis calls us to an ecological conversion, one that will remind us that as created beings, we are an integral part of creation and that together with the whole of creation, we are making our way towards fulfillment in God. A conversion that will return us to once again value the diverse living species of our world, from the tiniest microorganism to all human life, from conception to natural death.

We are reminded of our obligation to strive in all things for the common good. Climate is a common good, as is water, as is human life. The unequal dignity and quality of human life between developed and developing nations has to be recognized and addressed. What happens in one part of the world has an impact on all of us because when one suffers we all suffer, as we are all part of the one body of Christ.

And finally, Pope Francis encourages us to live with a “healthy humility”. To recognize the truth that we are part of creation and not the Creator, and that we need to live in communion with each other and with creation. He teaches us that it is when we reach beyond ourselves to God, to neighbour and to creation that we find fulfillment in our lives.

ACTION:

Provide a helping hand to a loved one or newcomer to your community. Even simple acts such as offering to deliver groceries or a friendly smile can help build a caring environment.

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