

Teaching Kids to Care for God's Creation

REFLECTIONS, ACTIVITIES & PRAYERS
FOR CATECHISTS & FAMILIES



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INTRODUCTION

Catholics have a spiritually significant reason to be deeply sensitive to how our common home of Earth is treated. It is a reflection of God. It is sacred. The elements we use in the sacraments are affected by how we treat Earth. Think about the water of baptism, the bread and wine of the Eucharist, oil for baptism, confirmation, anointing of the sick, and holy orders. We want all of these elements to be unsullied by pollution. How about the legacy we are passing on to our children and grandchildren? Will they be able to say of us that we did everything we could to change our ways so that our Earth could be healthy for them?

In this set of thirty sessions, we explore Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*, *On Care for Our Common Home* (LS). We are encouraged to pray with, think about, and act on ways to deepen our care for Earth.

Our home is no longer a safe place for life to thrive. God, through Pope Francis, is calling on us to do something about this situation before it is too late.

As you prepare your classes, I hope you will find the suggestions in this book useful. You might take a two-minute time slot at the beginning of class to give what could be considered a "spotlight" on caring for God's creation. You may choose to use the prayer as a closing prayer for the class. Additional ideas for children to share with their families are included with each lesson.



one

On care for our common home

*“Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us.” LS, 1*

REFLECTION FOR CATECHISTS

Pope Francis says, “I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically” (LS, 10). St. Francis felt the oneness of all beings. Today, scientific advances help us to see that we are all part of one universe, and we are made of the same elements as the stars. We need to meditate on this reality and take it into our hearts. Our God is truly a God beyond all that is. Take time to be silent so as to listen to God speaking in your heart.

Pope Francis compares our love for our common home to the love between humans who fall in love with each other and want to do all they can to please and care for each other. St. Francis saw every creature as a brother or sister united to him by bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists. How can I begin to “fall in love” with our common home?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FAITH FORMATION

- Pope Francis chose his name to honor St. Francis of Assisi. St. Francis loved all creatures and especially people who were poor. Tell the story of St. Francis of Assisi and ask the children to make a drawing of their favorite part of the story.
- Have children name their favorite pet. Have the children take a photo of their pet and post the photos on the bulletin board.
- Show a picture of nature. Ask the children to tell you what they see. Ask them three times to look again to see if they see something new in the picture.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FAMILIES

- As a family, go on a nature walk. Talk together about how you each see God reflected in nature.
- What creatures in nature are your favorite? Have a family discussion about this.
- Plan an outing to a place where you can enjoy the gifts of God's creation. Take turns sharing what you enjoyed most about being outdoors.
- Find a place in your living room where you can set up a small "altar" of special things that can remind you of caring for our common home. Add special symbols and photos or pictures that help to keep your gaze on the beauty and wonder of creation.

PRAYER

Loving God, we thank you and praise you for the beauty in all of creation but most of all for _____ (each person says a favorite part of nature). Thank you for the beauty of our common home. Amen.



two

What is our common home?

If you don't know where you are, you don't know who you are.

RALPH ELLISON

REFLECTION FOR CATECHISTS

Father Thomas Berry, a Passionist priest who died in 2009 at the age of 94, gave us a new understanding of the relationship between Earth and all living things. He taught that Earth is a living organism and thus filled with life. All other beings need to be in good relationship with Mother Earth in order to live in a healthy way. We may have lost our sense of place and thus no longer have a reverence for Earth. We are called by Pope Francis to find our way back home.

Think about the place where you live. What do you like most about it? Name some of the natural features of your yard or the land on which your home is located. How do you protect the natural surroundings of your home from damage or destruction?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FAITH FORMATION

- Explain to the children that the title of Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment is *Laudato Si'* (*On Care for Our Common Home*). Invite the children to draw a picture of the earth "home" where they live. Encourage them to include the land formation, such as mountains, hills, valleys, rivers, lakes, and so forth. If possible, display the pictures in the parish under the banner "Our Common Home."
- Is there a history to the place you call "home"? Engage older children in researching the history of your geographical place. What happened many years ago in this place? Were there any indigenous people before others settled? Who were they? What are some practices of these native or indigenous peoples? Are there any streets or other places named for the First Peoples of this place?
- Explain that all forms of life are meant to have "homes." Use these questions to engage children in a discussion about homes for humans: *Do all humans have homes? What can you do for those who are too poor to have a home in your city, town, or village?* If possible, make arrangements for a visit to a local soup kitchen or food pantry.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FAMILIES

- God has given us all a home on Earth. God wants all creatures to have a home. What can your family do to share this gift of God with other species of life? For instance, when you see insects or other small creatures, you can make sure they have a chance to live safely in their habitat.
- Work together as a family to create a terrarium for a small part of life to grow indoors. Find an empty jar. Layer small stones, charcoal, and soil at the bottom. Plant tiny rooted plants in it and add a few drops of water. Put a lid on it. You do not have to water it again. The microscopic organisms in the soil breathe out carbon dioxide and the plants produce oxygen for the full cycle of life to continue.

PRAYER

Loving Creator God, we praise and thank you for the beauty of our Earth, our one true home. We ask you to forgive us for how we have been thoughtless in caring for her. Amen.



three

What is happening to our home now?

*The deterioration of the environment and of society
affects the most vulnerable people on the planet. LS, 48*

REFLECTION FOR CATECHISTS

Due to the rapid changes we humans have made to Earth, we have lost touch with nature. We may even lose touch with God, the Creator, who gave life to all things. This in turn causes great amounts of disconnection among humans and between humans and the environment. We can correct this by increasing our awareness. Awareness means taking a long, slow look at what happens around us.

One example of increasing awareness has to do with fresh drinking water. “Fresh drinking water,” Pope Francis says, “is an issue of primary importance, since it is indispensable for human life and for supporting terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Sources of fresh water are necessary for health care, agriculture, and industry. Water supplies used to be relatively constant, but now in many places demand exceeds the sustainable supply, with dramatic consequences in the short and long term” (LS, 28).

SUGGESTIONS FOR FAITH FORMATION

- Life today is hectic and fast paced. We need to stop and listen to nature to learn how we ought to live. Listening is one way we will hear God's will for us. Perhaps we are missing the words of God because we are moving too fast. Give the students time at the beginning of class to breathe deeply. Invite them before class to count their breath in and out twelve times just to slow down and become more aware of their surroundings.
- Ask the children to describe the ways we use water. Emphasize how important it is for people to have access to fresh drinking water. Brainstorm ways to conserve water by doing things like shutting off the tap while brushing teeth.
- In order to be more aware of how we use water in our daily lives, we need to slow down and think about it. How aware are you of the amount of fresh water you use in a day?
- Explain how Pope Francis wrote about the importance of fresh water for all people in the world. Show what this means with the following demonstration about how little fresh water there is for all living things.

Materials

2 liter bottle = all water on Earth

50 ml = fresh water on Earth

Of this amount 35 ml trapped in glaciers

Less than 1% of Earth's total water supply left for needs for agriculture, drinking, and washing as well as for lakes, rivers, and fresh water ecosystems.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FAMILIES

- In our home, there are many ways we can conserve water. For

example, we can save the water that is used to rinse off dishes before putting them in the dishwasher by putting a dishpan in the sink and rinsing the dirty dishes in the pan first instead of running the water to rinse them.

- We can save water that has been used in the shower by placing a bucket in the shower to catch some of the running water. This can be used to water the flower garden. Be sure to use only biodegradable detergents and soap because this water goes into the ground water beneath the surface.
- Since you want to save as much water as possible, use only biodegradable soaps and detergents in the home. Biodegradable liquids can be absorbed in the ground water without causing harm to living things.
- Save rainwater by using a rain barrel outdoors. This water can be used to wash the car or to water the grass.

PRAYER

Loving Creator God, we praise and thank you for the beauty of our Earth, our one true home. We thank you for the precious gift of fresh water. Help us to be more aware of how we use water. Amen.