

Seeds of Peace and Hope

Pope Leo XIV's Message for the 10th World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation 2025 (continued)

and trust forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places" (Is 32:15-18).

These words of the prophet will accompany the "Season of Creation," an ecumenical initiative to be celebrated from 1 September to 4 October 2025. They remind us that, together with prayer, determination and concrete actions are necessary if this "caress of God" is to become visible to our world (cf. Laudato Si', 84). The prophet contrasts justice and law with the desolation of the desert. His message is extraordinarily timely, given the evidence in various parts of the world that our earth is being ravaged. On all sides, injustice, violations of international law and the rights of peoples, grave inequalities and the greed that fuels them are spawning deforestation, pollution and the loss of biodiversity. Extreme natural phenomena caused by climate changes provoked by human activity are growing in intensity and frequency (cf. Laudato Deum, 5), to say nothing of the medium and long-term effects of the human and ecological devastation being wrought by armed conflicts.

As yet, we seem incapable of recognizing that the destruction of nature does not affect everyone in the same way. When justice and peace are trampled underfoot, those who are most hurt are the poor, the marginalized and the excluded. The suffering of indigenous communities is emblematic in this regard.

That is not all. Nature itself is reduced at times to a bargaining chip, a commodity to be bartered for economic or political gain. As a result, God's creation turns into a battleground for the control of vital resources. We see this in agricultural areas and forests peppered with landmines, "scorched earth" policies, [1] conflicts over water sources, and the unequal distribution of raw materials, which penalizes the poorer nations and undermines social stability itself.

These various wounds are the effect of sin. This is surely not what God had in mind when he entrusted the earth to the men and women whom he created in his image (cf. Gen 1:24-29). The Bible provides no justification for us to exercise "tyranny over creation" (Laudato Si', 200). On the contrary, "the biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to 'till and keep' the garden of the world [cf. Gen 2:15]. 'Tilling' refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while 'keeping' means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature" (ibid., 67).

Environmental justice – implicitly proclaimed by the prophets – can no longer be regarded as an abstract concept or a distant goal. It is an urgent need that involves much

more than simply protecting the environment. For it is a matter of justice – social, economic and human. For believers it is also a duty born of faith, since the universe reflects the face of Jesus Christ, in whom all things were created and redeemed. In a world where the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters are the first to suffer the devastating effects of climate change, deforestation and pollution, care for creation becomes an expression of our faith and humanity.

Now is the time to follow words with deeds. “Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience” (Laudato Si’, 217). By working with love and perseverance, we can sow many seeds of justice and thus contribute to the growth of peace and the renewal of hope. It may well take years for this plant to bear its first fruits, years that, for their part, involve an entire ecosystem made up of continuity, fidelity, cooperation and love, especially if that love mirrors the Lord’s own self-sacrificing Love.

Among the Church’s initiatives that are like seeds sown in this field, I would mention the Borgo Laudato Si’ project that Pope Francis bequeathed to us at Castel Gandolfo. It is a seed that promises to bear fruits of justice and peace, and an educational project in integral ecology that can serve as an example of how people can live, work and build community by applying the principles of the Encyclical Laudato Si’.

I pray that Almighty God will send us in abundance his “Spirit from on high” (Is 32:15), so that these seeds, and others like them, may bring forth an abundant harvest of peace and hope.

The Encyclical Laudato Si’ has now guided the Catholic Church and many people of good will for ten years. May it continue to inspire us and may integral ecology be increasingly accepted as the right path to follow. In this way, seeds of hope will multiply, to be “tilled and kept” by the grace of our great and unfailing Hope, who is the risen Christ. In his name, I offer all of you my blessing.

From the Pastor’s Desk

It is late on Wednesday evening, approximately 11:50 PM, and I am writing my piece for the bulletin since it needs to be completed by tomorrow (Thursday) due to Catherine’s (our parish secretary) surgery on Friday (it is minor surgery for the removal of her gall bladder – please keep her in your prayers for her recovery). It was a long day: I had to be both in Monroeville and Jennette for Medical reasons; I needed to work out several unexpected loose ends for the October Jubilee Pilgrimage: I needed to be in contact with the presenter for the October Clergy Conference as well as work out other details concerning the event; and I was working diligently to help an individual who will be homeless if I do not find some sort of housing for the person before Friday (which will be long past when you read this bulletin). After completing all that, I was preparing myself for the celebration of 5:30 Mass and Adoration, and I turned on the television to

see my first news of the day. I was overwhelmed by the news of the day as I am certain all of you were. The unfathomable mass school shooting that occurred in Minneapolis, Minnesota at Annunciation Catholic School during the celebration of the opening school Mass – the EUCHARIST! Two (2) children dead, 14 other individuals injured, most of them critically, the majority of whom were children, but also three adult parishioners who are in their eighties. My immediate reaction was to weep. I felt like Jesus before the tomb of his friend Lazarus, who wept knowing that death was anything but what God wanted for humanity - especially the innocent. I immediately thought, I must compose an intercession for Mass, and in writing it I wept again. I could not believe that a time of new beginnings, of friendship, and community building was marked by such devastation. I thought that the best thing to do was to remember them as I celebrated the Mass and as I would go forward to Eucharistic Adoration. I decided that at the beginning of Adoration I would read the telegram sent by Pope Leo where he expressed his "heartfelt condolences and the assurance of spiritual closeness to all those affected by this terrible tragedy, especially the families now grieving the loss of a child." The telegram said that the Pope commends "the souls of the deceased children to the love of Almighty God" and "prays for the wounded as well as the first responders, medical personnel and clergy who are caring for them and their loved ones. As a "pledge of peace, fortitude and consolation in the Lord Jesus," Pope Leo imparted his Apostolic Blessing upon "the Annunciation Catholic School Community, the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis and the people of the greater twin cities metropolitan area." As I read it, I became verklempt at times, still overwhelmed by the loss of innocence.

*The mayor of Minneapolis in his grief, dismissed thoughts and prayers as "not being enough" and while I can understand his outrage at what happened and his demand for action, prayer is the most appropriate vehicle for us to show our love, our concern for our neighbor, or to protest violence that is meaningless and mindless. By the same token, we do have responsibility to do what we can, through public advocacy, to work for greater assistance to those who are mentally challenged and to limit the availability of guns to those who are not fit to possess them. If we say that we can do nothing, then the guilt for such tragedy is somehow, and in some way, also assigned to us. We are our brother's keeper – in protest to Cain's cry in the book of Genesis. We can no longer be bystanders – it is the core of the message of the gospel. The refrain of the responsorial psalm today proclaims: "God, in your goodness, you have made a home for the poor." We are created in God's image and being formed into God's likeness. We must make a home for the poor, and the poor are all around us. On Wednesday, we saw the poor present themselves in the lives of innocent children. We need courage to transcend the divides of liberal or conservative, or Democrat, Republican or Independent. **We are Catholic.** By our baptism we are called to love our neighbor without counting the cost. We are called to be one in our embrace of the cross in its suffering that is rooted in love by reaching out to those in need, to the victims of the Minnesota school shooting catastrophe.*