

SEASON OF CREATION

THEME FOR THE WEEK - MOTHER EARTH

(Saturday 4TH September (First Vespers) – Saturday 11TH September)

SUNDAY (4TH – 5TH September 2021) The Challenge to Protect, Earth, our Common Home

1. What the Word of God says: (Readings from 23rd Sunday Year B)

1st Reading	Isaiah 35:4-7A	2nd Reading	James 2:1-5
Responsorial Psalm	Psalms 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10	Alleluia	Matthew 4:23
		Gospel	Mark 7:31-37

2. What Laudato Si' says:

“The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change.

The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home. Here I want to recognize, encourage and thank all those striving in countless ways to guarantee the protection of the home which we share. Particular appreciation is owed to those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world's poorest. Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded.” (# 13)

“Account must also be taken of the pollution produced by residue, including dangerous waste present in different areas. Each year hundreds of millions of tons of waste are generated, much of it non-biodegradable, highly toxic and radioactive, from homes and businesses, from construction and demolition sites, from clinical, electronic and industrial sources. The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth. In many parts of the planet, the elderly lament that once beautiful landscapes are now covered with rubbish. Industrial waste and chemical products utilized in cities and agricultural areas can lead to bioaccumulation in the organisms of the local population, even when levels of toxins in those places are low. Frequently no measures are taken until after people's health has been irreversibly affected.” (# 21)

3. Let us Reflect:

The man that is brought to Jesus has a double impediment. He can neither hear nor speak. People like him are lonely and often isolated. But he has friends that care for him.

The prophet Isaiah in the first reading promises that the waters shall break forth in the wilderness and the streams in the desert, the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water.

This represents the healing of the land. This healing of creation finds its fulfilment in the works of Jesus Christ and the religiously blind will see that creation is God's gift that we must till and shepherd (Gen 1:28-30).

The Gospel of today is the fulfilment of God's promises in the first reading.

Jesus healed the man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech. Touching the man with his finger, Jesus said to him “*Ephphatha*” which means “open”. The man's ears were opened immediately and his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. His life became a testimony that

people were astonished, and said “He has done all things well”. The statement “He has done all things well” is first found in Genesis 1:31 by God Himself immediately after creation. This signifies that Jesus Christ was introducing a new creation.

On this Sunday during the ‘Season of Creation’, we are invited to adopt Jesus’ gesture of restoring creation to its original goodness. By caring for the man with a double impediment, Jesus invites us to care for creation which is suffering so much at our hands. We can show our love and appreciation of creation by acknowledging that it is God’s special gift to us.

In paragraph 64 of *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis invites Christians to care for nature. Moreover, we can also avoid littering, plant a tree, plant a vegetable garden, take care of a flower garden, conserve energy and water.

Jesus has created a new life in us and in our society. Jesus has proclaimed *Ephphatha* in our life. Jesus has created a new world where he made all things good. In this new world, the dry land shall produce plenty of water, the deaf will hear and the dumb will proclaim the goodness of God which is revealed in His creation. David in Psalm 19:1 prayed, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork”. Let us ask Jesus to heal us from the blindness of not taking care of God’s creation.

Let us ask Jesus to heal us from the deafness of not hearing the cries of creation. Brothers and sisters, let us follow our Master, Jesus Christ. (*Fr. Dr. Nhlanhla Mchunu – St. Wendelin Parish Priest (Mariannahill)*)

4. Let us Pray:

Prayers of the Faithful for 23rd Sunday Ordinary Time

1. We agents of creation plead human need for counsel before using our God given gifts communally with many others to repair the harm of our greed with faith in your guidance.
Lord Hear us!
2. Our planetary home is hurting; global warming and climate change with millions of humans up-rooted, and fish, flowers and fauna facing dire extinction. Help us to recognize the sacredness of all your Creatures as signs of your wondrous love.
Lord hear us!
3. Lord call us towards an “ecological conversion” of the heart which involves gratitude, sobriety and moderation, the ability to be happy with little, in order not to succumb to unhappiness, thinking only of what we’re missing.
Lord hear us!
4. Humanity depends on a healthy earth in order to survive. The first to suffer are always the poor and most vulnerable, and so help us God to take stock, reduce our demands, and live a simple life.
Lord hear us!
5. Lord, grant us the wisdom to care for the earth and till it. Help us to act now for the good of future generations and all your creatures.
Lord hear us!
6. Lord keep us so mindful of the needs of our Mother earth and those of all with whom we share, that open to your Spirit we may discern and practice all that makes for her wellbeing.
Lord hear us!

PRAYER FOR MOTHER EARTH (We suggest that this prayer be said every day of the coming week)

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exist.

Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, so that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes. Bring healing to our lives that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Oh! Mother Earth! We behold in you the unfathomable mystery of the Creator: Unfolding in your love, beauty, diversity, creativity and generativity, you invite us to be co-creators awakening us to the mystery of oneness.

Oh! Mother Earth! In your dancing steps day and night form with the colours of seasons you are our only home we feel loved and secure.

Oh! Mother Earth! Your love echoes in the beauty of the flowers , melodies of the birds, majesty of the mountains , depths of the oceans, the thickness of the forests, lush green fields of the countryside and the arid sand dunes of the deserts.

Oh! Mother Earth! We walk with reverence and wonder at your magnificence; we pledge to make right choices, not to abuse or exploit but to preserve your goodness by being, in Communion and Oneness.

We praise you, Lord, for Mother Earth, who sustains us with her fruits, coloured flowers and herbs. We praise and bless you, Lord, and give you thanks and serve you in all humility.

We bless, praise and thank you through Christ our Lord. Amen

(From: Laudato Si, Presentation Sisters Union & St Francis)

MONDAY 6TH SEPTEMBER 2021
Radical conversion to God our creator

1. What the Word of God says (*Genesis 1: 1-2, 9-13, 20-23*)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear."

And it was so. God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky." So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

2. What Laudato Si' says:

"The creation accounts in the book of Genesis contain, in their own symbolic and narrative language, profound teachings about human existence and its historical reality. They suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. This in turn distorted our mandate to "have dominion" over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28), to "till it and keep it" (Gen 2:15). As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual (cf. Gen 3:17-19). It is significant that the harmony which Saint Francis of Assisi experienced with all creatures was seen as a healing of that rupture. Saint Bonaventure held that, through universal reconciliation with every creature, Saint Francis in some way returned to the state of original innocence. This is a far cry from our situation today, where sin is manifest in all its destructive power in wars, the various forms of violence and abuse, the abandonment of the most vulnerable, and attacks on nature." (Laudato Si' #66)

3. Let us Reflect:

Recently early in the morning I sat quietly with the intention to listen to the different kinds of noises around me which gradually became music to my soul. It was like sound of music due to the beauty of harmony of different kinds of birds chirping, doves cooing, the breezy sound of wind, the voices of people, the dogs barking, and noises from footsteps. I felt connected to the Unseen Presence who is holding everything with love. Suddenly a popular English hymn came to my mind; "Oh, the love of my Lord is the essence of all that I love here on earth. All the beauty I see, He has given to me and His giving is gentle as silence." I felt gratitude in my heart for this grace.

The Genesis creation narrative is important for us because it gives us the basis of our Christian faith in our relationship with God who also touches us through creation. This narrative evokes in us the faith that all of creation is from God. It is blessed by God and it is good before the eyes of God. We know now very well that in many indigenous cultures and traditional religions this web of connection in nature and humans was part and parcel of everyday living. This awareness of the unseen and unknown Presence evoked reverence and awe from human hearts through connection with nature.

In this third millennium the Genesis narrative is challenging us to return to the original close relationship with the Creator. Mother earth is being polluted and defaced. And our lack of awareness of the Creator and destructive behaviours are sins and brokenness by the humans which have separated us from one another. Now it is a call to heal and to restore relationships that have been broken. Scientists and Theologians are challenging world leaders both corporate and political to execute protocol plans to protect the environments. *Delio et.al* write; "Without a life of conversion supported by poverty (simple lifestyle) and prayer, brotherhood and sisterhood in creation is absurd." This is a strong call to radical conversion to the Creator God because it is then and only then that our hearts, eyes and ears will be opened to see and hear God in the cry of the poor and Mother Earth. As Christians this is our first vocation.

The question that arises is:

What is ours to do in our homes, parishes, communities?

The first step is to create a culture of awareness in us in order to wake up to the Unseen Presence in us, in the other and in creation while looking for other ways to be involved in big actions like gardening etc., keeping in mind the Covid19 pandemic regulations! (*Sr Basil Nzimande FSF*)

4. **Let us Pray:** (see prayer for the week)

5. **Let us Act:**

Hold a delicate flower and know how much more valuable you are to God than that. (Gen 1: 11)

TUESDAY 7TH SEPTEMBER 2021
Using the Goods of the Earth Responsibly

1. **What the Word of God says:** (*Genesis 2: 4-14, 19-20*)

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens. Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground.

Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.

The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.)

The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky.

He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.

So, the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

2. What *Laudato Si'* says:

Together with our obligation to use the earth's goods responsibly, we are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own in God's eyes: "by their mere existence they bless him and give him glory", and indeed, "the Lord rejoices in all his works" (Ps 104:31).

By virtue of our unique dignity and our gift of intelligence, we are called to respect creation and its inherent laws, for "the Lord by wisdom founded the earth" (Prov 3:19).

In our time, the Church does not simply state that other creatures are completely subordinated to the good of human beings, as if they have no worth in themselves and can be treated as we wish. The German bishops have taught that, where other creatures are concerned, "we can speak of the priority of being over that of being useful".

The Catechism clearly and forcefully criticizes a distorted anthropocentrism: "Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection... Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness.

Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things". (*Laudato Si'* #69)

3. Let us Reflect:

Climate change is real. It is one of the major challenges of our time and has considerable stress on societies and the environment. We are witnessing more and more shifting weather patterns that threaten food production and rising sea levels that create opportunities for flooding and drought. There is enough scientific evidence to support the narrative that changes in the Earth's climate are largely due to human activities (anthropogenic climate change). The bigger economies or wealthier nations in pursuit of their ambitious development programmes and rigorous exploitation of natural resources have contributed immensely to global warming and climate change.

Our Mother Earth has been harmed for a long time and is now crying out to all of us to stop harming her and begin to love and care for her. The damage that has been done on Mother Earth cannot be reversed, but something can surely be done to reduce the negative impact of our activities on Mother Earth. There is so much research that has been done on climate change and development, and valuable insights have been discovered, especially in the area of adaptation. But what is needed now is action, in this regard, Paul Frere points out that "a word without action is dead", and cannot transform the world. Therefore, the cry of Mother Earth requires each one of us to spring into action and demonstrate our care and love for her.

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis has provided us with an important resource, *Laudato Si'*, a ground-breaking document that challenges our understanding of creation and encourages us to understand it as a "holy gift from God" which we must care for. Pope Francis makes it clear that humanity has focused more on exploiting the earth and less on caring for it. It is now time to care for nature and the environment so that Mother Earth can continue to care and provide for our needs.

To this end, Pope Francis calls us into "ecological conversion", we need to change our attitude towards Mother Earth and listen to "her cry and the cry of the poor". As we reflect on Mother Earth, let us become aware of our own carbon foot prints (the heaps of dirt that we see in our streets and neighbourhoods), the harm that we inflict on Mother Earth and make a commitment to repent and find creative ways to express our love for Mother Earth. Let us draw inspiration from the spirituality of St Francis of Assis who loved creation and nature in an amazing way. And as young people in the Church and society, let us find creative ways to express our care and appreciation for Mother Earth. (*Fr Gideon Sibanda CMM*)

4. Let us Pray: (See suggested prayer for the week)

5. Let us Act:

1. Organise a workshop at your Parish to teach people about climate change
2. Organise a clean-up campaign in your community and clean the streets and your neighbourhood.
3. List two or three ways in which you have contributed to climate change (e.g. how do you dispose of plastic waste, bottles etc.).

WEDNESDAY 8TH SEPTEMBER 2021
We Have the Power to Heal our Earth

1. What the Word of God says: (*Psalms 148*)

Praise the LORD.

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

Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his heavenly hosts.

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

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

Let them praise the name of the LORD, for at his command they were created,
and he established them for ever and ever— he issued a decree that will never pass away.

Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,
lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding,
you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle,
small creatures and flying birds, kings of the earth and all nations,
you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and women, old men and children.

Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted;
his splendour is above the earth and the heavens.

And he has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his faithful servants,
of Israel, the people close to his heart.

Praise the LORD.

2. What *Laudato Si'* says:

“It is not enough, however, to think of different species merely as potential “resources” to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves. Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost for ever. The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right.” (# 33)

“It may well disturb us to learn of the extinction of mammals or birds, since they are more visible. But the good functioning of ecosystems also requires fungi, algae, worms, insects, reptiles and an innumerable variety of microorganisms. Some less numerous species, although generally unseen, nonetheless play a critical role in maintaining the equilibrium of a particular place. Human beings must intervene when a geosystem reaches a critical state. But nowadays, such intervention in nature has become more and more frequent.

As a consequence, serious problems arise, leading to further interventions; human activity becomes ubiquitous, with all the risks which this entails. Often a vicious circle results, as human intervention to resolve a problem further aggravates the situation. For example, many birds and insects which disappear due to synthetic agro toxins are helpful for agriculture: their disappearance will have to be compensated for by yet other techniques which may well prove harmful. We must be grateful for the praiseworthy efforts being made by scientists and engineers dedicated to finding solutions to man-made problems.

But a sober look at our world shows that the degree of human intervention, often in the service of business interests and consumerism, is actually making our earth less rich and beautiful, ever more limited and grey, even as technological advances and consumer goods continue to abound limitlessly. We seem to think that we can substitute an irreplaceable and irretrievable beauty with something which we have created ourselves.” (# 34)

3. Let us Reflect:

At this very moment, the Earth is above you, below you, all around you, and even inside you. The Earth is everywhere. You may be used to thinking of the Earth only as the ground beneath your feet. But the water, the sea, the sky, and everything around us comes from the Earth. We often forget that the planet we are living on has given us all the elements that make up our bodies. The water in our flesh, our bones, and all the microscopic cells inside our bodies come from the Earth and are part of the Earth. The Earth is not just the environment we live in. We are the Earth and we are always carrying her within us. All planetary systems are connected. Human health, human economics, health of water ways, survival of individual species, are all part of one flowing system to which we have responsibilities.

We have the power to change the course of rivers and create routes through mountains, to transplant hearts and kill cancer cells, to record the human genetic information and engineer pesticide resistant crops. We have the power to change the world, but only a very nascent wisdom to guide that power to return the favour to our mother Earth. Like leaving a child unsupervised near a camp fire, the results, although not intended, can be catastrophic. Every year the Storms are stronger and more frequent, (The floods killing people in Belgium and India at the moment), people, government and financial groups are involved in programmes that exploit and pollute the environment and cause unprecedented decertification. Serious damage is done to nature, to plant, animals to the atmosphere, clean water sources and soil. The Earth's systems are bringing us information about how we are harming them, but we have failed to listen in any way that has, so far, lead to helpful change, simply because of our anthropocentrism. We are yet to appreciate our role as members of the Earth's family and recognize our ability to cause irreparable harm to the Earth.

We read in Genesis that God created humans from the dust of the Earth and placed them in the Garden to “till and keep it” (GN 2:15). We have not done a very good job. What will it take for us to learn to respect our Mother Earth and allow her to heal her bio-systems, her other than human children, and ourselves? This healing calls for a respect for the complexity of Earth and a humility about our human wisdom. Pope Francis in *Laudato Si* (2015) wrote, “The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are the clear signs of the world that needs healing”. (Mr Tsepo Hlasoa)

4. Let us Pray: *(See suggested prayer for the week)*

5. Let us Act:

- Individually, or in small groups we can form an environmental group that raises awareness about the need to change our way of life.
- We can protect our water sources from contamination e.g. factories dumping waste toxic chemicals in rivers.
- We can gradually start using renewable energy like the energy from the sun.

THURSDAY 9TH SEPTEMBER 2021
Taking Better Care of Nature

1. What the Word of God says: (Psalm 8)

LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory in the heavens.
Through the praise of children and infants
you have established a stronghold against your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?

You have made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned themⁱ with glory and honour.
You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet:
all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild,
the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.
LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

2. What *Laudato Si'* says:

“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.” (# 43)

“A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings. It is clearly inconsistent to combat trafficking in endangered species while remaining completely indifferent to human trafficking, unconcerned about the poor, or undertaking to destroy another human being deemed unwanted. This compromises the very meaning of our struggle for the sake of the environment. It is no coincidence that, in the canticle in which Saint Francis praises God for his creatures, he goes on to say: “Praised be you my Lord, through those who give pardon for your love”. Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society”. (# 91)

3. Let us Reflect:

Nature is like a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness. “Through the greatness and the beauty of creatures one comes to know by analogy their maker” (Wisdom 13:5). God is indeed great. He has created human beings to join Him in caring for a creation. He made us rulers over the works of His hands and stewards of the earth. It is such a pity that the very same environment that is entrusted to our care is constantly under threat by the powers of chaos and injustice.

We (humanity) have great value in God's eyes. God empowers us to shape the world around us. We see God in the human work of enhancing the wellness of the creation. We are valuable to God. No other creature is said to be made "in the image of God"(Genesis 1:27) only you and me. No other creature was given responsibilities so vast. No other creature's redemption was counted worthy for Jesus to become one of them and die for their sins. There are no worthless people in this world for God crowned us all with glory and honor by making us human. God gave us unique dignity and reason; therefore, we cannot overlook how the breakdown of environment and throw away culture affects us as people.

It's difficult to think about this world disaster as having no relationship with our own reality, pretending to be absolute masters of our own life and of everything that exists since "everything is connected".

It is now the time when so many have to step back from the normal rhythm of life, to pause and examine the bigger picture, think our conditions as creatures and our part in the ecology. Hopefully, we will be able to reflect on some lessons that are common to both coronavirus pandemic and the climate crisis.

We are not just animals among God's animals because God has given us honor, glory, unique dignity and reason. And because of these gifts, God expects us to use them to follow his commandments and care for creation including care for the good of our families and other people. God is not the holy one who stands over against creation and fallen humanity. Rather God is the holy one who enters into life to bring healing and empowers other people to be healers with him. (Ms. Gladness Mashubuka)

Questions for Reflection

1. Where in your world do you see people exploiting the goodness of nature without limit?
2. What are the effects on people's lives of environmental deterioration, current models of development, and the throwaway culture?
3. How can you and those you know treat nature better in future? What can you do in order to take better care of nature?

4. Let us Pray: (See suggested prayer for the week)

5. Let us Act: Throwing away the 'throw away' culture

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| i. Instead of sandwich bags, use silicone washable bags | iv. Instead of a disposable water bottle, use a 'BuyMeOnce' bottle. |
| ii. Instead of throwaway straws, use paper, silicone or steel ones | v. Instead of a plastic shopping bag, use a cloth one or a tough one built to last |
| iii. Instead of a takeaway coffee cup, use a thermos or 'keep cup' | vi. Instead of plastic knives and forks, use a travel set |

FRIDAY 10TH SEPTEMBER 2021
Acting as Guardians of Creation

1. What the Word of God says: The Lord's Devastation of the Earth (Isaiah 24: 1-23)

See, the LORD is going to lay waste the earth and devastate it; he will ruin its face and scatter its inhabitants [...]The earth will be completely laid waste and totally plundered.

The LORD has spoken this word. The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the heavens languish with the earth. The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt. Therefore earth's inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left.

The new wine dries up and the vine withers; all the merrymakers groan.

The joyful timbrels are stilled, the noise of the revellers has stopped, the joyful harp is silent.

No longer do they drink wine with a song; the beer is bitter to its drinkers.

The ruined city lies desolate; the entrance to every house is barred. In the streets they cry out for wine; all joy turns to gloom, all joyful sounds are banished from the earth.

The city is left in ruins, its gate is battered to pieces.

So will it be on the earth and among the nations, as when an olive tree is beaten, or as when gleanings are left after the grape harvest.

They raise their voices, they shout for joy; from the west they acclaim the LORD's majesty.

Therefore in the east give glory to the LORD; exalt the name of the LORD, the God of Israel, in the islands of the sea. From the ends of the earth we hear singing: "Glory to the Righteous One."

But I said, "I waste away, I waste away! Woe to me! The treacherous betray!

With treachery the treacherous betray!" Terror and pit and snare await you, people of the earth. Whoever flees at the sound of terror will fall into a pit; whoever climbs out of the pit will be caught in a snare. The floodgates of the heavens are opened, the foundations of the earth shake.

The earth is broken up, the earth is split asunder, the earth is violently shaken. The earth reels like a drunkard, it sways like a hut in the wind; so heavy upon it is the guilt of its rebellion that it falls—never to rise again.

In that day the LORD will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and be punished^[a] after many days. The moon will be dismayed, the sun ashamed; for the LORD Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders—with great glory.

2. What Laudato Si' Says:

"Caring for ecosystems demands far-sightedness, since no one looking for quick and easy profit is truly interested in their preservation. But the cost of the damage caused by such selfish lack of concern is much greater than the economic benefits to be obtained.

Where certain species are destroyed or seriously harmed, the values involved are incalculable. We can be silent witnesses to terrible injustices if we think that we can obtain significant benefits by making the rest of humanity, present and future, pay the extremely high costs of environmental deterioration." (# 36)

3. Let us Reflect:

The sanctity and the goodness of all created order is apparent when we read the beginning of Genesis, verse 1 "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Again, we read in verse 31 of the same book that "God looked at everything he had made and he found it very good."

As human beings are the crown of creation, and it is our God-given responsibility to care for the earth we live in. We are stewards of creation, not masters of it, only God is its Master. God gave the earth to humans not to dominate it, but to care for it for the sake of all who live in it and for the sake of all generations to come. The goodness of creation and ecosystems are being destroyed by us in many ways, and that throws it off balance and creates lasting challenges which are detrimental to all life! It is evident that in pursuit of wealth and material success, people have overlooked the goodness of creation for the economic benefit. Those who believe in Christ cannot be silent in the face of such destruction. Industries emit pollution into the air. Now and again seas are flooded with pollutants that kill and destroy aquatic life. Burning of bushes destroys terrestrial life in great measures, as have been observed in many occasions, particularly in America and Australia in recent times. As if Isaiah was referring to this as he prophesied in chapter 24 that "Therefore earth's inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left." In our immediate residential locations, so much dirt and rubbish is piling up and unattended to, even by those affected. This is detrimental to human health. Because of global warming/cooling, glacier is melting on mountains, and this could throw the seas off balance. There are many more examples to this. Believers should cry out to all humans to care a little, to safeguard our mother earth. In all this, the blame is ours for our little care of lack of care, and the words of Isaiah again we should cry: "I waste away, I waste away! Woe to me! The treacherous betray! With treachery the treacherous betray!"

We should be far-seeing and be visionaries when it comes to our ecosystems. We do not necessarily have to do miraculous works, but only do what we can, where we are, at any time. That would make a difference. We should choose care than destruction, and health that wealth. Clean your yard and street; recycle used items if possible; choose eco-friendly products; care for animals and don't abuse them; plant a tree; be in love with creation, and do it for yourself and the generations to come. The difference is brought about many little people doing many little things in many little places. In that way, we would be collaborators with God in preserving creation. (Fr Ndumiso Khumalo OFM)

Question

How can you make a difference in your residential area when there a piles of rubbish unattended to?

4. Let us Pray: (See suggested prayer for the week)

5. Let us Act:

- Find out which species of animals have become extinct.
- What can you do to help protect endangered species?

SATURDAY 11TH SEPTEMBER 2021
Becoming Advocates of Change

1. What the Word of God says: Present Suffering and Future Glory (*Romans 8: 18 – 25*)

Consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

For in this hope we were saved.

But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?

But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

2. What *Laudato Si'* says:

“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.” (# 143)

“In the meantime, we come together to take charge of this home which has been entrusted to us, knowing that all the good which exists here will be taken up into the heavenly feast.

In union with all creatures, we journey through this land seeking God, for “if the world has a beginning and if it has been created, we must enquire who gave it this beginning, and who was its Creator”.

Let us sing as we go.

May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope.” (# 144)

3. Let us Reflect:

In our text, Paul wants us to understand that the present time is marked by sufferings because of man's fall into sin. When Adam sinned, the whole human race sinned in him. Death was not a part of the original creation, which God pronounced as good. Paul wants us to consider that our present suffering is relatively short compared to our eternal sharing in the glory of God and that the weight of our present trials is like a feather on the scale, which cannot compare with the glory that will be revealed to us.

The reading from *Laudato Si'* paragraph 243, continues Paul's reflection of a future of glory which is all about hope. This hope is built on the foundation of belief in God who constantly renews things: “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev 21:5). It is important for us to remember that God is present and working to the final day when all sorrow will be wiped away, all tears dried, and all broken hearts united in the loving Heart of God.

Our truest beauty and dignity will shine forth when we see that our hope was not in vain, but that God's all-embracing life-giving plan was always there accompanying us and leading us to the fullness of life in Christ.

Paragraph 244 is reminding us of the ministry and responsibility that God gave to humans, that we are stewards of creation, which means we should care for creation.

The paragraph also indicates that everything is interconnected including nature or creation. Thus, if we don't care for this creation we are destructing our own home.

The first two months of lockdown in March 2020 gave us a very interesting lesson. For the first time in many years, the earth was able to breathe as less fumes were released due to lesser cars on the roads and planes in the sky. The skies were bluer! The price of petrol even came down to its lowest ever.

However, the floods, wild fires and extreme weather patterns for instance that we are seeing around the world, are a reminder to us of the destruction that we have caused to our home. All these events should make us pause for a moment to ask ourselves how we have been playing our roles as stewards of our common home.

Southern Africa has a serious problem of plastic pollution where only 16% of the plastic is recycled while the rest of it ends up at landfill locations and in rivers and eventually in the ocean. You and I can be instruments of change by stopping the throw away culture as Pope Francis puts it. So, as we make our way through these uncharted waters, may we garner strength in knowing that we are not alone, as St Paul states: "The Lord is near; do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6). (Sr. Nkhensani Shibambu CSA)

4. Let us Pray: *(See suggested prayer for the week)*

5. Let us Act:

Identify an area where you live where there is a lot of rubbish lying around. Gather a small group who will join you in the clean-up campaign.