

The Transforming Power of the Liturgy

Our Common Home



Just before the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest solemnly places bread and wine upon the altar while he prays: “Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread [the wine] we offer you: fruit of the earth [of the vine] and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life [our spiritual drink].” This ritual element manifests “the eucharistic form of life” and brings about “a real change in the way we approach history and the world” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 92). The liturgy has power to transform us into people who care for our common home.

Theology

The refrain of the first creation account in the Book of Genesis is: “it was good.” God, who is good, creates, and creation participates in and manifests his goodness. On the sixth day, God creates man and woman, and looking at all that he has made, God finds it “very good.” This “very good” comes about because the human person is created in God’s image and, as God’s representative, exercises a godlike care or “dominion” on behalf of creation. This dominion is exercised in two ways. First, man and woman mediate God’s creativity by tilling and keeping creation for the wellbeing of all. Through the collaborative efforts of humanity, wilderness becomes a garden, grain becomes bread, and grapes become wine. These gifts are destined to be enjoyed and celebrated by all, and this is the second way that humanity exercises dominion – by together mediating creation’s thanksgiving, its *eucharistia* – to God. Creation praises God by its existence, but it does so mutely; humanity gives creation a voice. In the fullness of time, the Word becomes flesh, taking all creation to himself and transforming it. Creation serves the Paschal Mystery of Christ – the wood of the cross and



the rock of the tomb – and in establishing the sacraments which communicate his divine life to human beings, Christ makes use of created things.



“Through the collaborative efforts of humanity, wilderness becomes a garden, grain becomes bread, and grapes become wine.”



Liturgy

In addition to creation’s service in the liturgy and sacraments, a proper engagement with created things prepares the way for authentic liturgical participation. In *Laudato si’*, Pope Francis described the movement from a superficial understanding of creation to an integral one, which perceives the way creatures manifest God’s goodness (cf. nos. 233-234). The Holy Father described something similar in the liturgy, which requires Christians to read symbols, passing from the exterior sign to the interior reality (cf. *Desiderio desideravi*, nos. 44-46). Reading creation makes it easier for us to read the liturgy, and this authentic liturgical participation prepares us to be people who care for our common home.

In 2015, Pope Francis established for the Catholic Church the annual World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation on September 1, a celebration observed on this day since 1989 by the Orthodox Churches. In 2007, the World Council of Churches established the time from September 1 to the feast of St. Francis

on October 4 as an ecumenical “Season of Creation.” Communities may celebrate this day or season liturgically in a variety of ways, especially in the Homily, Universal Prayer, and musical selections.

The *Roman Missal* also contains Masses and Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions that are connected to the theme of creation:

- “For the Sanctification of Human Labor” (no. 26)
- “At Seedtime” (no. 27)
- “After the Harvest” (no. 28)
- “In Time of Famine or for Those Suffering Hunger” (no. 33)
- “For Rain” (no. 35)
- “For Fine Weather” (no. 36)
- “For an End to Storms” (no. 37)

The orations of these Mass formularies express: the divine origin of creation for the sustenance of all people; the origin, direction, and completion of human work by divine grace; thanksgiving and praise as the ends of human work; and earthly fruitfulness as a call to spiritual fruitfulness.

Action

One way to take action is to study Pope Francis’ encyclical on Care for Our Common Home, *Laudato si’*; a helpful discussion guide may be found at [USCCB.org/environment](https://usccb.org/environment). “Simple daily gestures” done in common may also have a huge impact (*Laudato si’*, no. 230): reducing the use of utilities and trash or recycling and composting. Additionally, in light of the Church’s teaching about the universal destination of goods (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 2402-2406), it is important to ask who does not have access to the goods of creation which they require for their wellbeing. It is often vulnerable populations who suffer most from the unequal distribution of resources (cf. *Laudato si’*, no. 230).



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