

HOMILY GUIDES for the Season of Creation (September 1-October 4, 2015)

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September 6, 2015
23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time B

Introduction:

This Sunday is the first of the five Sundays in celebration of the Season of Creation in the Archdiocese of Manila. It will end on October 4, the Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron of ecology. In this season, we are enjoined to reflect on God's creation as God's gift to us. We are also asked to reflect on our role as stewards of creation.

Incidentally on August 10, 2015, Pope Francis declared that a day of prayer be celebrated annually on September 1. And this was done at the Manila Cathedral with the Eucharistic Celebration led by none other than His Eminence Luis Antonio Tagle, DD. Other dioceses must have also done the same.

Our Sunday Readings will still be our priority in the liturgy. So our themes will be based on them and will be connected to the Papal Encyclical "Laudato Si" which Pope Francis proclaimed on Pentecost Sunday, on May 24 this year, with the poor in mind.

In our liturgy in this Season of Creation, we have to be reminded that we cannot escape from responsibility towards creation which is fast deteriorating. We cannot separate spirituality from care for creation. It would be unjust and insensitive on our part if we ignore the ecological crisis that we are now.

In his Encyclical, the Pope does not specify his addressees. Since Pope Francis calls the earth as our common home, we should immediately sense that he is addressing not just the Christians or Catholics, believers or non-believers, but everybody, all the inhabitants of this planet earth.

The Encyclical is first of its kind. It is the first time that a Pope has written an Encyclical on Ecology. The Pope has exhausted all the possible ideas connected with Ecology for us to ponder upon so that we can respond properly with more enlightened spirit, heart and mind.

The title comes from the first two words of St. Francis of Assisi in his Canticle of Brother Sun. The Italian "Laudato Si'" means "Praised be to you." Things will become more interesting when we continue his song or poem that depicts his spirituality and reveals his deep relationship with God.

Isaiah 35, 4-7

James 2,1-5

Responsorial Ps 146:7, 8-9, 9-10

Mark 7,31-37

Homily:

"He has done all things well. He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak." This is the expression of the people as a result of witnessing Jesus heal a deaf person, who also has a speech impediment, simply called a deaf-mute. After touching the man's ears and tongue, and after saying a prayer to his Father in heaven, and upon saying aloud to the man, "Ephphata!" which means "be opened," immediately the man's ears and mouth are opened and now he can clearly hear and respond properly to the people and things around him. The people cannot but rejoice when they see something extraordinary happening in their lives. Jesus shows his power to them, not only to the man who was healed. Their hearts and minds, too, are opened leading them to give praise to Jesus. "He has done all things well...." Wow! We can translate this expression in this Season of Creation, as "Laudato Si"... Praised be my Lord for this wonderful experience.

In this Season of Creation, we also ask the Lord to open not only our ears, but also our eyes and our other senses, so that we too can truly exclaim, "He has done all things well.... Laudato si."

When Pope Francis adopted the name of St. Francis of Assisi when he became Pope, he did it with a purpose. Now he is making waves in promoting the approach of St. Francis to life, to nature and to God. True to the spirituality of St. Francis, Pope Francis made use of the first two words of the Canticle of the Universe (or Canticle of Brother Sun), composed by St. Francis himself, when he praised God for Brother Sun and Sister Moon. In Italian, he said, "Laudato Si".

St. Francis got close to God by communing with nature as he found it without manipulating or appropriating it. So he did not desire wealth and property out of it. Living simply was enough for him. He did not have props or enhancers to have joy in his heart. He totally put his trust on God's providence. He called God, "Our Father", no longer his earthly father, Pietro Bernardone, the provider of his material needs.

Many of us do not praise God anymore because we see no more any connection between God and nature. We cannot hear God speaking to us through the chirping of the birds and the sweet sound of the gentle breeze because our ears have been impaired by the loud and deafening music and noise that divert our attention to what is essential in our lives. We have been more attuned to the allurements of advertisers, who sell their products, even if they are toxic, and we buy them if even we do not really have any need for them.

Now we also find more enjoyment with our latest gadgets. We go frantic taking photos of the scenery around us, forgetting to give more time to enjoy it personally.

In our relationships, we do not spend quality time with one another anymore, always on the go, moving from one place to another, pretending that we have other important matters to attend to. In the process, we do not enjoy anything anymore. We are like crazy. We have become incapable of appreciating the beautiful works of God.

We think we make everybody happy when we show off in the social media our sophisticated and wasteful lifestyle without regard nor sensitivity to the needs of the poor.

The Second Reading teaches that we should not discriminate against the poor to give way to the rich, who wear fine clothes in gatherings. Why should we? Because the rich are the ones who oppress us. Today we identify them as the ones who exploit the natural resources. They gain access to the mountains and hills by bribing the corrupt government officials. They finance illegal mining and logging or drugs for selfish profit. Feeding on their greed, like bottomless pit, they relentlessly amass wealth and property, depriving the poor and indigenous peoples of their rights, making more poor and new poor in the land.

In this Eucharist, let us ask the Lord to rescue us from the present evil. Let us pray that God may restore our senses, including our sanity, as suggested in the First Reading. We pray that we may recover our ability to enjoy again our true human nature and the world around us without destroying them and consuming a lot of energy. We pray that like St. Francis of Assisi, who lived simply, we may appreciate God's wonderful works and be able to sing, Laudato Si. We pray that like Jesus, we may also hear other people say to us, "We have done all things well... Laudato Si.

September 13
24th Sunday in Ordinary Time B

Isaiah 50,5-9
Responsorial Ps 116:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9
James 2,14-18
Mark 8,27-35

Homily:

"Get behind me, Satan, you are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." Jesus reprimands Peter for thinking that Jesus, the Messiah, should not suffer and die. Jesus calls him "Satan." Shocks! Just prior to this incident, Jesus affirmed Peter for his right knowledge about him when he asked, "Who do you say that I am?" and he answered correctly, "You are the Messiah." *Korek ka diyan*, Peter. But his understanding of Jesus' mission as Messiah is infirm and corrupted. Peter goes with the popular belief that the Messiah should be victorious against their enemies, not a loser. To be completely right, Peter must accept God's thinking about the fate of his son, Jesus.

In this Season of Creation, let us discern God's thoughts about his Creation and accept it. In his Encyclical *Laudato Si*, paragraphs 65-67, to have a right attitude towards creation, Pope Francis affirms the teachings of the Holy Scriptures, especially, in Genesis, about Creation. Creation is something good. It is beautiful. It is something to appreciate and enjoy. Humans are also good. Being made in the likeness and image of God, they are intelligent and capable of closely intertwined relationships with God, neighbor and the earth itself.

Biblical scholars help us understand the story of creation. It has two versions. They are found in the first three chapters of Genesis. We will soon notice as we continue reading the story that God's handiwork is little by little demolished by humans because they listen more to themselves, to Satan (represented by the snake and their own desires) and not to God. It begins in the symbolic act of eating the forbidden fruit. Immediately, relationships foul up. Humans, represented by Adam and Eve, realize their vulnerability. The blaming game begins. The woman blames the snake, the man blames his wife. The Creator God becomes an investigator and punisher. Later, Cain kills his brother Abel (LS 70). Lamech recklessly kills two people. As the people increase in number, immorality and violence also multiply. It reaches its tipping point in chapter 6 when God can no longer take it (LS 71). So he sends the Great Flood. God should prevail, not humans and their evil schemes. God wants to put all things into order. God is God. Humans are humans, not gods. They are just his images. They are number 2, not number 1.

The story of creation and its un-creation is still alive in our history today. People think they are higher than God. They are highly secularized. God has no longer a place in their hearts and minds, in their agenda and conversations, in their families and in their governments. They do not anymore listen to God's representatives: the prophets, the ordained ministers and the official teachings of the Church when it comes to faith and morals. Their conscience is not developed. All because they choose to listen to their false selves, full of pride and greed. They busy themselves scheming how to get more wealth and property at any cost. So, they do whatever they want with the land to extract minerals. They have no qualms if they violate human rights, if they pollute the air, the land and the sea, if they throw away so much garbage and toxic wastes in the streets, in the lakes and the sea, as long as bucks continue increasing in their pockets.

Satan is at work with our lawmakers, who think only of their own interest, not the common good. Satan is at work with the corporations and business people and establishments that have no concern about the health of the environment and the people especially the poor. All they are after for is money, money, and more money.

With 'Laudato Si', Jesus also tells us, church people, both clerics and lay, who are not concerned about the preservation of this planet, "Get behind me, Satan!"

St. Francis of Assisi and his true disciples have long struggled to recover the Lost Eden, by saying No to the enticements of the world of glitter, glamour and gold. They refuse to own property. They deny themselves of their wants and caprices. They mortify themselves. They don't accumulate things. Whatever they have, they put at the disposal of others. They believe they are just stewards and that everyone is entitled to enjoy it. No walls, no demarcation lines, no barb wires, for the whole earth is our common home.

St. Francis believed in the goodness of God. When he said God is good, he meant God is a responsible God. He does not withhold anything from us. The whole earth is at our disposal. There is enough for everyone. In contrast, the world and Satan teach the opposite. There is not enough for everyone. So they set aside resources more than enough for themselves. They steal. They rob. They hoard.

People who does not possess God's thoughts compete with one another to get the lion's share. They project their unbridled greed in the form of oppressive laws, dynasties, patronage, economic and political systems. They do not care about the environment. They don't care about the poor. They are the ones referred to in the Second Reading who say to the poor, "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well," but they do not lift a finger or do anything to alleviate their plight.



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Can we go back to God? Can we appropriate the word of the prophet in the First Reading, "The Lord opens my ear that I may hear, and I have not rebelled, have not turned back." It refers to the Suffering Servant in the Old Testament and to Jesus in the New Testament. It can also refer to us. Can we take the necessary sacrifices to save this planet earth, which has been rapidly in danger? Can we suffer a little to prolong the life of this earth, can we produce less, can we consume less?

We can avert our destruction if we change our lifestyle, our producing and consuming habits, and, if we listen to God NOW NA!

We, Catholics, are taught that it is Christ who can really satisfy our hunger deep within and give us joy. We makes himself available to us in this celebration through his Word and Sacrament.

September 20
25th Sunday in Ordinary Time B

Wisdom 2,12.17-20
Responsorial Ps. 54:3-4, 5, 6 and 8
James 3,16—4,3
Mark 9,30-37

Homily:

“Who is the greatest?” The world empires consider themselves as the greatest on this earth. They have strong economy and military capability. They can project their power and influence to all corners of the world. They can dictate international policies.

The Pope observes in ‘Laudato Si’ that the world’s vision of “might is right” has engendered immense inequality, injustice and acts of violence against the majority of humanity, since resources end up in the hands of the first comer or the most powerful: the winner takes all. Jesus does not buy this idea. Instead he teaches harmony, justice, fraternity and peace (LS 82).

For Jesus, the greatest is the servant of all. The servant laboriously caters to the needs of all, not just of some people but all without exemption. That servant does not serve himself/herself, is inclusive, does not discriminate against, has no favoritism, is not selective.

Considering the needs of the group journeying with Jesus up to Jerusalem, the disciple who wants to be considered the greatest must exhibit diligence and sensitivity to the needs of the group. He must be helpful. He must offer assistance whenever necessary. He is not a lazy guy, on a free ride, and does not contribute anything. He does not ask others to do his job for him. Hindi señorito! Hindi ‘pabebe’.

In this Season of Creation, all Christians should desire to be the greatest, according to the definition of Jesus. We are all on a journey. Even now we are journeying towards the sabbath of eternity, the new Jerusalem, towards our common home in heaven (LS 243). The roads, the times and seasons, are not all smooth. In fact, today, they have become worse because of global warming.

Pope Francis notes that scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides and others) released mainly as a result of human activity (LS 23).

Summits on ecology have tried to limit the culprit, which is the greenhouse concentration, in order to reverse the trend of global warming (LS 167). The Pope also demands measures to eliminate poverty through healthier environment and improved weather conditions. Heavy rains, supertyphoons and draughts - these extreme weather conditions - eliminate the little gains of the poor. They make them poorer.

As enlightened disciples of Christ, we can be the greatest if we take initiatives to educate the rich, and others, on the harmful effects of their wasteful lifestyle. We can serve best the earth and the poor when we are able to influence lawmakers to ban coal plants, and the like, and look for alternative sources of energy. We can help businessmen compute how much carbon dioxide they are producing, when they are in the process of earning millions and millions of pesos, and they should be feel responsible when Mother Nature gets back at us. As courageous servants of God, we must make them feel responsible. Without knowing it, powerful people who produce, earn, and spend much, have contributed much to the degradation of the earth. As a result, they have made the life of the poor more difficult. We must remind them of their social responsibility.

Powerful people must not condemn the innocent with a shameful death, according to the First Reading. They must not test their faith and resilience, for these ordinary and simple people will suffer more.

The Second Reading tells us what makes other people suffer. Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passion that make war within your members? Wars and armed conflicts are the by-products of men's passion to control and to dominate. Lenin once said, "Had there been 10 Francis of Assisi in Russia, there could have been no Bolshevik Revolution."

St. Francis of Assisi did not have passion to acquire wealth and power. He was contented and happy being a Poverello, the little poor man of Assisi, detached from things. Instead of fighting for entitlements, he busied himself serving the poor and the lepers. He saw God in them. He was able to develop fraternal life among his followers. His fraternity included the sun, the moon and the stars. His group was not a threat to anyone nor did they need an army to protect their interests, for they had none. His group was at peace with everyone.

Reflecting on this, the Pope in his Encyclical 'Laudato Si' urges us to ecological conversion. He says, "In calling to mind the figure of Saint Francis of Assisi, we come to realize that a healthy relationship with creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion, which entails the recognition of our errors, sins, faults and failures, and leads to heartfelt repentance and the desire to change. The Australian bishops spoke of the importance of such conversion for achieving reconciliation with creation: "To achieve such reconciliation, we must examine our



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lives and acknowledge the ways in which we have harmed God's creation through our actions and our failure to act. We need to experience a conversion, or change of heart" (LS 218).

To be the greatest in God's kingdom, we as servants must, first of all, experience true conversion. We must be reconciled with ourselves, with others, with God, and nature. We must not be bent on manipulating one another for our personal gains. We must respect the rights of each one, especially the poor. We must teach others by giving a good example on how to humbly and joyfully make ourselves available to them.

In this Eucharist, we once more celebrate the greatest servant of all, Jesus Christ. As a servant of God, he totally gives himself to us, his body and blood, to make us live into eternity. May our struggles and our concern for this planet earth never take away the joy of our hope (LS 244).

September 27
26th Sunday in Ordinary Time B

Numbers 11:25-29
Resp. Psalm 19:8, 10, 12-13, 14
James 5:1-6
Mk 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

Homily:

“No one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me.” Jesus assures his disciples that even unknown people who do impressive deeds in his name are acceptable to the Lord. The apostles should not feel threatened if they meet such people. They belong to God.

The First Reading has a similar story. Not all the prophets called to serve as leaders in the desert journey of the Israelites were in the meeting, but the spirit came to rest upon them as well. God has the prerogative to appoint whom he wishes to advance his plan. We cannot impose our criteria on God.

In this Season of Creation, in his latest Encyclical ‘Laudato Si’, Pope Francis encourages us to be open minded, to be more welcoming to one another. We cannot do much to save the Earth, our common home, without each one’s cooperation and expertise. Many individuals, advocacies and ecology groups have shown great concern to our environment and the issue of global warming, but they are at a loss how to proceed globally. So Pope Francis calls us all to unite, to talk together and plan: scientists, philosophers, theologians and civic groups, as well as, other Christian churches and communities (LS 7). It is a big challenge for us to converge together and to act as one big organized body to prevent worldwide ecological crisis.

In ‘Laudato Si’, Pope Francis says, “I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation, which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all. The worldwide ecological movement has already made considerable progress and led to the establishment of numerous organizations committed to raising awareness of these challenges” (LS 14). We do not have to be a scientist, nor to have a high IQ, in order to be conversant about the causes of ecological crisis. It is observable that we, humans, are the ones causing it. The way we are treating the earth and its elements is scandalous.

The Gospel for today also talks about giving scandal to the little ones who believe in him. Though he is merciful, Jesus has strong warning against those who are giving scandals. Better

for them if a heavy millstone is hang around their necks and thrown into the sea than to lead the innocent little ones to commit the same sin.

We adults, especially the rich, who have erred so much in the past and, in the present, must not lead the next generation to do the same mistakes. We should generate a new breed of people through our example of ecological conversion. With repentant hearts, we help form the hearts and minds of the young to be ecologically sensitive and friendly. We send them to schools that value and teach environmental justice. We should not enroll them at highly technical schools with no soul, and just teach them how to exploit the natural resources and only to make money.

We should not destroy the innocence of our children and, our youth, making them a new generation of greedy people who come rampaging and raping the forests, the plains, the valleys and the seas and “consuming in the scandalous level of consumption” (LS 172).

St. Francis of Assisi was able to start a new breed of Christians, whose mission was to preach the good news of salvation through their simple and joyful lifestyle, devoid of greed and detached from material things. They did not conform to their times in which people discover the power of money obtained through merchantilism, rather than by tilling the land promoted by feudalism.

Each community ... has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations (LS 67).

The Second Reading teaches us, especially the rich, the futility of amassing wealth for themselves. Those things will be rotten and lost and will go out of their control. For all the injustices they have done to their workers, they will be held accountable. There will be no escaping. The Reading gives a stern warning to the sick minds, who only think of their personal benefit and not of the common good.

This Sunday, in which we celebrate the Eucharist, is meant to be a day which heals our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world... it is another way of working, which forms part of our very essence. It protects human action from becoming empty activism; it also prevents that unfettered greed and sense of isolation, which make us seek personal gain to the detriment of all else (LS 273). We are all God’s creatures. Let us give one another a break and sing Laudato Si.

October 4
27th Sunday in Ordinary Time B

Genesis 2:18-24
Resp. Ps 128:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6
Hebrews 2:9-11
Mk 10:2-16

Homily:

Today, we celebrate the Feastday of St. Francis of Assisi. He was declared by Saint Pope John Paul II as the patron of ecology in 1979. He was cited for being “an example of genuine and had deep respect for the integrity of creation.”

St. Francis of Assisi considered all creation as his brothers and sisters. In his *Cantico di Frate Sole*, St. Francis invited the plants and animals including Brother Sun and Sister Moon to praise the Lord. He was life-friendly and nature-friendly.

St. Francis is the favorite saint of so many people in the world, including non-Catholics, because of his attitude towards nature. Artists depict him surrounded with animals and the beauty of nature. In his Biography, he is reported to be talking to birds and taming the Wolf of Gubbio.

St. Francis is also an inspiration to many peace movements because of his non-violence stance. He wants that all creatures live in peace and harmony. He does not want violence inflicted on anyone. He would pick up a worm along the street so that no one would step on it. The familiar peace prayer, “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,” composed in the last century, has been attributed to him because it sits well with him.

Now, lest we remain in the romantic level, let us reflect on his impact on our Church and the world and discern how he would also make a big impact on us personally today. St. Francis has a big impact on the Pope.

Archbishop Jorge Bergoglio of Argentina, once he was elected pope, adopted the name of St. Francis of Assisi. At first, there was a little confusion as to which of the two St. Francis he was referring to. Immediately some believed that it was St. Francis Xavier, for he was a Jesuit like him. But as he explained why he adopted the name Francis, it became clear that he referred to St. Francis of Assisi for his love for the poor and his being poor. A Brazilian Cardinal, his friend, Claudio Hummes, OFM, whispered to him minutes after his election,

“Don’t forget the poor.” That influenced the choice of his name. The Pope has been pro-poor since the beginning of his ministry as a Jesuit priest in Argentina.

As he governs the Church, Pope Francis prefers simple and not pompous ways to dispense his duties as the Supreme Pontiff. He foregoes some protocols not to incur much expense. He lives an austere life at the Vatican. He drinks coffee with the workers in their canteen.

Since the start of his papacy, he has challenged the clergy and religious to simplify their lifestyle, not to buy expensive cars, and go out to meet and smell like (sheep) the poor, and build the Church of the Poor. He has been doing this even before becoming a pope. Voluntary poverty or, evangelical poverty, is antidote to expensive and wasteful lifestyle, which has impacted our weather conditions. In a way, we may interpret Pope Francis as the modern St. Francis of Assisi. For he vehemently reminds us, in his words and deeds, of the Saint’s pristine values of simplicity, justice, peace, joy, fraternity, love for the poor, and harmony among all creatures. The religious priests and nuns, even if their number worldwide is dwindling, must give witness to Christ by radically living the evangelical counsels. The Pope reminded them to bring joy to the world in this Year of Consecrated Life.

Out of his love for Francis, Pope Francis wrote an Encyclical on Ecology. In his Encyclical, he made use of the two opening words in each stanza in Francis’ Cantic. Thus we have “Laudato Si” as its title.

In other words, St. Francis of Assisi has made a great impact on our Holy Father. The Pope has found inspiration in his gigantic task to shake the people from their complacency and carefree life in abandon, in spite of the warnings raised by scientists of the terrible consequences. It is dishonest of us if we close our eyes to this reality.

How about us, beginning with us, who are attending this Feast of St. Francis? Many of us begin and stop at liturgical celebrations only with the blessings of our cats and dogs and other pets. St. Francis must make a big impact on us, like Pope Francis when he made a big impact on us when he came to the Philippines last January. He has seen the correlation between global warming and the Super typhoon Yolanda. As he consoles the victims, he is also challenging us to help avert similar future disasters.

For the sake of our poor brethren who are affected most, the Pope says we must simplify our lifestyle. We change our modes of production, which emit so much smoke and carbon dioxide. We limit our consumption. We change our cooking and eating habits. In our churches, we should not exaggerate altar decorations, for any reason, so that we will not dump a lot of garbage outside the church after.

Our craving for pleasure and material things will be lessened or stopped, if we heal our sick minds that have been programmed to be happy by the commercials and promoters of materialism. Let us be careful with them. They convince us to buy or taste this or that, or, acquire that or this property in order to be happy.

Ecological conversion starts with, in digital lingo, reformatting our brains to remove malwares of sin and viruses and install a new platform, a program that respects faith and morals, a program wherein we can launch our helpful activities for the earth. The platform is none other than the gospel life as interpreted by St. Francis of Assisi. We must believe that it is Christ who gives us joy and meaning to our lives. Material things are not substitutes for Christ.

Ecological conversion is like making a good confession. First, we must examine ourselves how toxic and wasteful has been our lifestyle, how harmful and violent have we been to the earth and atmosphere with our spending and consuming habits. Second, we ask for forgiveness. Third, we confess clearly and honestly. Fourth, we do penance, not just reciting three Our Fathers, but restoring what we have damaged or destroyed or returning what we might have stolen or putting a stop to our destructive tendencies.

St. Francis of Assisi got it all right. He was a man of penance. He admitted his sins. He received the sacrament of penance as a good catholic. In his conversion, he would not pursue anymore his ambition to be rich, powerful and famous, but promote fraternity and love for others especially the poor who need attention. He went viral when he gave up everything and followed Christ. You too can go viral in this way. Subukan ninyo. Good luck and Happy Fiesta!!!