

Honor the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi

“My sheep hear my voice ... and they follow me.”

Hello. My name is Strad Engler. I am a member of the St. Ignatius Green Team. Fr. Jim has invited several parishioners to provide reflections on today's readings in the context of the Season of Creation.

The theme this year is taken from the book of Amos: Let Justice and Peace Flow. The readings for the first four Sundays provided a growing story of conversion. In today's reading from Ezekiel, the Lord says, “You say, ‘The Lord's way is not fair.’” This passage is part of a longer story about the freedom God gives each of us to choose our path through life. It was common in ancient times to assume that the sins of the parents would pass down to the children. The Lord's way, which rankles the House of Israel, is that we are not to be judged by the sins of our parents. We start with a clean slate. We are free to choose wickedness or what is right and just.

But with freedom comes consequences. Based on what we choose, we will either live or die. However, just as we are not condemned for the sins of our parents, we have the opportunity to change our ways. The passage says,

“...if he turns from the wickedness he has committed, and does what is right and just, he shall preserve his life ...”

Paul warns us of what we should turn away from. When we become arrogant and think of ourselves as being most important, we look on the people and things around us as objects to be used. We act “out of selfishness and vainglory.” We forget what God had in mind in creating the world and all its wonders. St. Ignatius teaches that everything is a gift: God created the world for our pleasure, showing the wonder of God's love in all we see. The people and things that are part of our lives are good and can lead us to be closer to God.

This coming Wednesday we will celebrate the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. St. Francis is famous for the joy he found in praising the Lord for all of Creation: Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Sister Water and Brother Fire. “Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Earth, our Mother, who nourishes us and sustains us, bringing forth fruits and vegetables of many kinds and flowers of many colors.” *Laudato Si', Mi Signore.*

St. Ignatius also teaches that these same things can be a distraction. “People, possessions, titles, occupations are good in themselves. However, when what is supposed to be a means becomes an end, these gifts no longer bring us closer to God. The selfishness and vainglory that Paul mentions is manifest today in the unsustainable lifestyle that we collectively are leading. The signs of the times tell us something is going wrong. What we’re doing seems to be making things worse, but we don’t know what to do. Like the first son in the Gospel, we promise to do better, but don’t really change anything.

Pope Francis describes this situation in his encyclical, *Laudato Si’*:

Once we lose our humility, and become enthralled with the possibility of limitless mastery over everything, we inevitably end up harming society and the environment. It is not easy to promote this kind of healthy humility or happy sobriety when we consider ourselves autonomous, when we exclude God from our lives or replace him with our own ego, and think that our subjective feelings can define what is right and what is wrong. (LS 224)

Earlier in the Season of Creation, we were invited to use the Ecological Examen. One question asked for the grace to look closely to see how our life choices affect creation, the poor and vulnerable:

- Am I meeting my needs with sustainable practices?
- Does my lifestyle ensure a healthy and prosperous future for the coming generations?

The answers to these questions can be challenging. We may see a lot things we need to change. Looking at society at large, we see others who don’t seem to care. This can be discouraging. We might even say, “This isn’t fair.” Where do we turn for help?

Paul suggests that we’re thinking about this the wrong way. We need to think in a new way, God’s way. Instead of being distracted by things in our lives, we must give up our arrogance, accept them as gifts from God, be grateful, and then give them away!

“... humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his [or her] own interests, but also for those of others.”

Matthew’s recounting of Jesus’ parable of the two brothers provides two versions of how we can respond to this challenge. We can think of the father as God. He is calling his sons to be virtuous, to be good stewards of the vineyard: Creation and all the wonderful things and people in it. The first son knows what is good, and agrees to do it. “Yes, father, whatever you say.” But he isn’t serious about his

commitment. As soon as no one's looking, he goes back to his idle ways, caring only for himself. The second son also knows what is good, but can't be bothered. He at least is honest. "I just want to take care of myself." But this time, after the father leaves, he has a change of heart. The call of the psalm we heard a few weeks ago takes hold. "If today, you hear God's voice, harden not your heart."

Paul also offers Jesus as the model of humility. Jesus Christ became human, not seeking to exult himself. He submitted to death on the cross. Christ gave away everything he had so that we might be saved. Seeing the humility of Jesus and his generosity, we can seek to grow in gratitude. We can gather the courage to willingly share what we have.

This change in thinking is a two-part process. First, we must put the things in our lives back into their rightful place as goods to be appreciated with sobriety. Second, we must use these gifts to deepen our relationship with God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

On October 4 the first edition of the *St. Ignatius Parish Laudato Si' Action Plan* will be released. It includes the story of Pope Francis' call to action and the response by St. Ignatius Parish. It contains a variety of suggestions for ways we can examine and reflect on the current state of world affairs in the light of the Church's teaching on social justice. It also offers suggestions on things we can do to help reach the goal of becoming a community living sustainably and, as Paul said, "humbly regard[ing] others as more important than [ourselves]."

When you receive your copy, I invite you to see what the action plan has to offer you. This change in thinking is hard. The journey of an ecological conversion is long. The good news is that the Lord wants to help us. All we have to do is ask for God's compassion and forgiveness. The Psalm says:

"Good and upright is the LORD; thus, he shows sinners the way. He guides the humble to justice, and teaches the humble his way."

Working together on behalf of all Creation, we become part of the mighty river of peace and justice.

**“UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot,
nothing is going to get better. It’s not.”**

My name is Dot and I am the Middle and High School Faith Formation Coordinator here at St. Ignatius. I was asked by the Green Team to share a reflection on the readings today in light of the Season of Creation.

To start I want to talk about a story. Who has read Dr. Seuss’s book (or seen the movie) *The Lorax*?

Can anyone tell me what the Lorax is about?

In the Lorax, the character of the Onceler discovers the Truffula Tree which is a large fuzzy tree that provides the perfect material for the Thneed, a very versatile piece of clothing. The Onceler makes a fortune selling the Thneeds, which results in him building a large factory to continue his operation. The Lorax, a creature that speaks for the trees, appears and warns the Onceler that he is harming the forest and the animals with his production of Thneeds. The Onceler ignores the Lorax until he chops down every last Truffula tree. Only when it’s just the Onceler and the Lorax left in the forest does the Onceler finally realize the harm that he did to the environment.

Jesus also shares a story today. Jesus tells us about two sons who are asked to go out in the field and work for their father. The first son, originally tells his father no, but changes his mind later and does go out and do the work. The second tells his father that he will do the work but he never does. Jesus tells us that even though the first son originally said no he is the one who did the work in the end and the one who did do what the father wanted. From what we heard in the first reading, the first son doing the work is the one who will be saved, while the second son who does not do the work he says he will, will be punished.

Like the first son who initially refused to go out and work, sometimes it can be hard for us to do the right thing when we are asked to do it. We might be asked to eat vegetables we don’t like, to spend time with our family instead of hanging out with a friend, or to do our homework when we want to watch a movie. But doing what is right over not doing, or even lying about doing something and then not doing it, is what Jesus calls us to do.

How does this relate to the story of the Lorax? The Lorax ends with the Onceler coming to his own conversion after he realizes what he did to the forest and finds a way to do what the Lorax asked and save the trees:

“But now, says the Once-ler, Now that you’re here, the word of the Lorax seems perfectly clear. UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not. SO...

Catch! Calls the Once-ler. He lets something fall. It’s a Truffula Seed. It’s the last one of all! You’re in charge of the last of the Truffula Seeds. And Truffula Trees are what everyone needs. Plant a new Truffula. Treat it with care. Give it clean water. And feed it fresh air. Grow a forest. Protect it from axes that hack. Then the Lorax and all of his friends may come back.”

Like the son in Jesus’s parable who ended up having his own change of heart, so does the Onceler. The Onceler, once uncaring of the forest becomes a protector, holding on to the last Truffula seed to give to someone who cares about rebuilding the forest. For the Onceler, it wasn’t too late for him to have his change of heart, and we end his story with the hope that one day the forest and the Lorax will return as the trees regrow.

In the same way, the Lorax called on the Onceler to take care of the environment God calls us to care for all of creation. However, it can be hard in today’s world to practice this call towards ecological stewardship. In the same way that the production of Thneeds harmed the Truffula trees, our own culture of consumerism is harmful to the environment. This culture of consumerism results in a want to constantly buy new things while our old things fill up landfills, and the harmful chemicals and materials that are needed to make these new things end up in rivers, oceans, and wild areas.

Pope Francis’s *Laudato Si* also calls us to care for the environment. He talks about the great harm that is currently befalling the environment. And calls us to action to make changes to be better stewards of the environment and show our love of creation.

Today, I challenge you to think about ways that you can come to your own conversion, like the Onceler or the son in our Gospel reading for today, in relation to climate change. To help all parishioners of St. Ignatius Parish, a new *Laudato Si Action Plan* will be released on October 4, the feast day of St. Francis. *The Laudato Si Action Plan* will give us many suggestions for ways that we can care for the environment.

As the *Laudato Si Action Plan* will show us, there are many ways that we can build habits that will demonstrate our care for the environment every day. Whether this is making sure you turn off all the lights when you aren't using a room, practicing good recycling habits, or finding your own *Truffula* seeds to rebuild a forest. **Like the Onceler said, "UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."**

“Praise be to you, my Lord.”

Good morning.

I'm Harold Berberick, a member of the St. Ignatius Green Team. As you may know, we are in the Season of Creation, which began on September 1 and extends to October 4 with the Feast of St. Francis. The Season of Creation is not only observed by Catholics, but also by Protestants, Jews and Muslims. We all share a common concern for our planet.

Our Pastor, Fr. Jim, has committed us to becoming a *Laudato Si'* parish and to adopting a *Laudato Si'* Action Plan. If you're like me, you may not know much about Pope Francis' Encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, and what an Action Plan is. I didn't know until I joined the Green Team.

First of all, *Laudato Si'* means “praise to you,” or “Praise be to you, my Lord.” The Encyclical consists of six chapters. Each chapter addresses a specific method, but throughout the entire Encyclical some principal topic is taken up and stressed, such as the relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet, the conviction that everything in the world is connected, the need to find other ways of understanding the economy and progress, the human meaning of ecology, the throwaway culture and the need for new lifestyles.

I think there are two main themes in the Encyclical:

1. The Encyclical speaks in detail about climate change, because of the moral imperative to address it and since the climate crisis has grown even more severe since the Encyclical was published in 2015. *Laudato Si'* affirms the compelling scientific knowledge that climate change is occurring, as well as evidence that human activity is responsible and that many of our efforts to reduce climate change are inadequate.
2. The second theme is that efforts to reduce climate change and to help people in poverty should not be pitted against each other, but instead pursued as a unified project. Low-income countries are expected to experience the worst effects of climate change, and there is a need for rich countries to take the lead in providing funds to developing countries seeking to combat climate change. The phrase “cry of the poor” is used throughout the Encyclical.

This is a brief summary of the Encyclical, but you can learn much more by googling *Laudato Si'* Encyclical.

There are practical suggestions on what we can do in our daily lives:

1. Use more public transportation if possible, and walk or cycle for local errands.
2. Compost food.
3. Reduce meat consumption in your diet by substituting plant-based foods that are high in protein.
4. Contact Mass Save. They will do an energy audit of your home and supply energy efficient LED light bulbs for free.
5. Help out with neighborhood cleanup efforts.

The *St. Ignatius Laudato Si' Action Plan* is going to be posted on the parish website. We welcome your comments, ideas, and suggestions. The Green Team welcomes new members who are interested in supporting our efforts. You can contact the Parish Office, which will put you in contact with Strad Engler, who is our coordinator.

I will end with a short prayer:

Oh God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned of this earth, so precious in your eyes.
Bring healing to our lives and our planet, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, not pollute it, not destroy it. Amen.

“If he ... does what is right and just, he shall preserve his life.”

My name is Alan Stern, I am a 1988 graduate of Boston College and a member of the St. Ignatius Parish Green Team. During this Season of Creation members of the Green Team have been offered the opportunity to share a few reflections on Scripture and this liturgical season.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis says that we are in an ecological crisis. We as humans have abused the gift that God has given us. We have destroyed natural habitats, polluted the water and the air and through the ravages of war have displaced people, causing pain, suffering and further stress on the earth. . We, as humans are committing grave sin by destroying the world that God so loves. That is the bad news. The good news is that we have an all forgiving and loving God. For God so loved that world that he gave us his only begotten son, Jesus Christ. This love has no limits. Jesus, the Son of God was born, lived and suffered death on the cross so that human-kind's sins could be forgiven.

In today's first reading from the Prophet Ezekiel, we learn that if we change our ways we will be saved.

“If he turns from the wickedness he has committed, and does what is right and just, he shall preserve his life; since he has turned away from all the sins that he has committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die.”

God is giving humans the chance to change our behaviors, to turn away from acts that are harming the earth. This theme that God has given us the ability to change and reconcile ourselves is also evident in our Psalm for today “teach me your paths ... the sins of my youth ... remember not.” Conversion has two steps, abandon our old ways of ravaging the earth and we are forgiven, once on the path, we are expected to follow Christ's example.

This theme is further driven home in the second reading. In Philippians St. Paul teaches us that Jesus humbled himself for our sake, taking the form a human being. He was humiliated and oppressed in order to be the sacrifice for our sins. We must take the opportunity to emulate Christ, to become selfless and realize how we are harming the earth that God entrusted to us.

We are called to live our lives and make our choices in line with the values for which he lived and died. These include looking beyond our own self-interest to the needs of others. Our willingness to shoulder our ecological and social responsibilities will benefit many: our children and grandchildren, our communities, and the poor and vulnerable who suffer most from pollution and climate change.

St. Matthew drives home the point of conversion in the Gospel reading. In the story of the two sons, Matthew teaches us that Conversion from not being caring to taking just action is better than saying good things and not actually doing it - greenwashing; not examining alternatives to understand the unintended consequences of our inactions. The Gospel also teaches us that it is never too late for change. Change is necessary for ecological conversion.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis echoes this theme, holding out the hope that humanity will accept and fulfill its responsibility to care of our common home. We are challenged to remember that we are truly members of one family, called to share concern and care for one another. And this includes caring for the environment, God's creation, that sustains all life. St. Ignatius Parish has committed to becoming a *Laudato Si'* Parish. Parishioners have expressed their values and hopes which are captured in a Reflection document published on the St. Ignatius website. They've also offered suggestions for actions we can take as individuals and collectively as a parish. The parish *Laudato Si' Action Plan* will be released this coming Wednesday, Oct. 4, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

A key part of this Action Plan is the work of ecological conversion. There are three dimensions to our conversion:

One is environmental: What are we doing to reduce the pollution of air, water and land that have resulted from our ways of living in creation? What are we doing to address the violence of indifference and domination, war and militarization that are destroying our common home?

Two is the economic dimensions of an integral ecological conversion: What changes are we undertaking in the economic dimensions of our lives? How are we resisting the idolatry of wealth and possessions so common around the world? What are we doing to help ourselves and others better understand the systems of economy and development, of production and distribution and consumption which have abused and overused the resources of the planet, are threatening its resilience, and are destroying its regenerative capacities.

Three is the social dimensions of an integral ecological conversion: How can we work together to overcome the many expressions of violence in our societies? Poverty and marginalization? Racism, discrimination in our communities, our institutions, our countries? How can we work to overcome divisions that lead to violent conflict, war, and destruction of creation? How can we develop a more socially conscious spirituality, one that is attentive to the injustice in our institutions and culture, one that works to transform conflict nonviolently, one that works to raise up the New Creation?

It is never too late in life to respond to God's call to conversion. God is compassionate; however, it can become too late to respond to the cry of Earth. We must work to prevent the devastating destruction that unjust, violent, and sinful lifestyles abusing Earth and continuing planetary warming will bring about.

We must do more than talk about taking action. Having the right intentions will not suffice, we must act to reverse the harm we have caused to our one and only home. We as Catholics have the obligation to go forth into the world and spread God's Good News. When we receive communion, as we receive Christ's body and blood, we are nourished spiritually and brought closer to God. We must utilize this spiritual nourishment to affect positive change to preserve the gifts that God has bestowed upon us.

Moreover, this is why, every Sunday, we process in with the Book and the Book stays on the altar at the end of Mass: the words in the book leave with us, God's people. If we take the lessons learned from scripture and spiritual nourishment from Communion, we will go forth into the world and help Justice and Peace Flow Like a Mighty River.