World Day of Prayer for Care of Creation Homily August 31- September 1, 2019

As a grandfather of five, I am blessed to be able to share these reflections with this community as we enter the **Season of Creation**: September 1 through October 4, the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi. This weekend celebrates the September 1st **World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation** in union with the Orthodox faith tradition. The Catholic Church joined this ecumenical day of prayer flowing from Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical **Laudato Si’, On Care For Our Common Home.**  In the encyclical, Pope Francis poses the question: **“What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?”**(#160) That is the question we must ask ourselves in our individual and communal actions and in our public policies—the laws--we live by locally, nationally and globally.

Pope Francis’ teaching is not new; it continues and expands upon a major theme of Catholic Social Teaching, the Care for Creation, found in the encyclicals and writings of Popes John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI, referred to as the “Green Pope.”

Laudato Si’ addresses the urgent and significant global impacts of climate change: first, on poor people and nations suffering disproportionately its effects; second, on children and future generations; and third, on the increasing loss of animal and plant species.

Climate change manifests itself in the frequency and ferocity of hurricanes, tornadoes, cyclones, flooding, drought, wildfires, melting glaciers, rising oceans, and weather disruptions. Climate change causes and results in the refugee movement of people fleeing conditions which have made their former homes uninhabitable, agricultural conditions unproductive, and life unsustainable, thereby forcing them to seek refuge in new lands to call home.

Pope Francis teaches us of an **integral ecology**—that we are united, connected, and bond with nature as part of our humanity on earth; and of **intergenerational solidarity**—that we have a responsibility to those who follow us to pass on to the next generation a livable and healthy Mother Earth. On June 14, addressing energy executives, investors and experts, Pope Francis declared we are in a climate emergency: “Dear friends, time is running out! Deliberations must go beyond mere exploration of what can be done, and concentrate on what needs to be done, starting today. We do not have the luxury of waiting for others to step forward, or of prioritizing short-term economic benefits. The climate crisis requires ‘our decisive action here and now’ (Laudato Si’, 161) and the Church is fully committed to playing her part.”

What can we do? Where are there signs of hope in this time of crisis and emergency? We can pray together, act individually, ecumenically and communally, advocate before our governmental bodies, and particularly, invite and involve young people in these activities. Let me share some examples of hope and action in our community and world: on Friday, September 20, starting at 10:00 a.m. at Grant Park there will be a prayer service, march, and rally, the Chicago Youth Climate Strike, in downtown Chicago organized through offices of the Archdiocese of Chicago in preparation for the United Nations session on climate change. Everyone is invited. People in India, a nation of about 1 billion people, planted 220 million tree saplings in one day to counteract carbon emissions in the atmosphere.

There are two organizations providing leadership: universally through the Global Catholic Climate Movement and nationally through the Catholic Climate Covenant. A neighboring local parish is considering a “tree festival” to encourage the planting of tree saplings in the spring. Do you want to hold a “tree festival” in this parish next spring? Do you want to join efforts ecumenically, pray together and undertake local joint efforts in this community? How do young people want to get involved and participate in reducing and reversing carbon dioxide in the atmosphere?

The challenge in these critical times is ours. How do we want to respond? In the words of Laudato Si’: **“What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?”**(#160). We are called to think, pray and act. The responsibility is ours acting together. May God inspire us and bless our joint efforts.