



# A Samaritan Celebration

By Sister Mary C. Sullivan

## of Laudato Sí



**On May 24, 2020**, we celebrate the fifth anniversary of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. As we re-read this urgent call to conversion of our minds, hearts and behavior on behalf of Earth and all her created life, we can easily feel like the paralyzed man brought to Jesus: overwhelmed by all that this crucial encyclical specifically asks of us now, not later.

But if we turn to the story of the Samaritan on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, we will not only feel the magnitude and urgency of the mercifulness that Francis asks of us, but we also will feel less overwhelmed and will find a clear focus for the ecological conversion to which he now calls all of us in the Mercy family.

Our robbed and wounded Earth and all her created life lie on the road right in front of us, and we must now lay aside some of what we had thought was our “most important” work—selling our wares—and quickly bend down to embrace Creation's wounds and try to heal them. Our half-dead suffering Earth and all her wounded created life lie right before our eyes if only we will open them wide enough and look far enough to feel their pain, and then do something to heal their injuries and avert further suffering.

So let us not celebrate the anniversary of *Laudato Si'* with rituals that ask nothing of us as passersby, like the blind priest and Levite scurrying to the temple in Jerusalem. Let us not celebrate the proclamation of Francis's demanding *Laudato Si'* simply by prayer services that fail to elicit any tangible commitments or actions on our part. Rather, let us humbly pray for the Spirit's help to see and feel the suffering of our Sister Earth, and then to cross the ecological road and bend down to bandage her wounds, pouring into this merciful work all the energetic “wine and oil” we possess.

And let us not fail to address the “robbers,” even though they are currently out of sight. Let us speak firmly and persistently to the multinational corporations that make money cutting down other people's old-growth forests, the lungs of the Earth; who mine for oil, natural gas, gold and other minerals in lands that are the homes and sacred places of indigenous peoples; who destroy huge areas of soil with herbicides and single-crop agriculture, not admitting publicly how finally unsustainable such industrial farming actually is. Let us, with our own small voices—and collectively with our louder voices—dare to be prophetic, with the apostolic boldness (parrhesia) that Pope Francis urges. Let us condemn (graciously, but firmly) the harmful robbery committed against Earth, all humanity and all created life by single-minded pursuit of short-term economic “profit” and ignorant claims of “progress.”

The current climate crisis is not a sign of historical progress, but the reverse. It is a severe and crippling emergency, the most widespread human-created and human-afflicting global emergency since the dawn of human life. Our egocentrism

and anthropomorphism (solely human-focused thinking) have now afflicted all created life, including the bees who quietly pollinate one-quarter of the food we need and the humble, but receding, glaciers that for thousands of years have patiently covered the permafrost that safely stores some of the Earth-heating carbon emissions of times past.

So, we ask ourselves: What can I do? What can we do? What can the whole Mercy family in the Americas—all our sisters, associates, companions and co-workers—do now to authentically celebrate the anniversary of the urgent call Francis expresses in *Laudato Si'*?

We can do what the alert and tender Samaritan did.

We can do the small and large, helpful things he did. We can pour out our wine and oil, foregoing some of our own comfort and convenience and some of our own so-called “needs.” We can lift the wounded Earth onto our own donkey and carry her to the inn. We can petition the world's innkeepers on Earth's behalf. And we can pay for her care with our own resources and ecological behavior.

#### **At the personal level:**

- ✓ We can educate ourselves, and then others, by carefully re-reading *Laudato Si'* and studying every report on the climate crisis that we can get our hands on.
- ✓ We can stop our consumption of unneeded novelties and thereby reduce the production of these resource-consuming things. Do we really need another or a newer whatever? Isn't enough enough?
- ✓ We can stop wasting food and paper. Leftover or slightly damaged food still tastes good, and using only cloth napkins is easy. (Every old convent has napkin rings hidden somewhere, and an enterprising Mercy huckster could develop a cottage industry of peddling rings and cloth napkins.)
- ✓ We can find a way to compost our vegetable and fruit garbage (or find a friend or business that will compost for us), thereby cutting down on what we send to methane-emitting landfills. Methane is 30 times more toxic to the environment than carbon dioxide.



On a daily basis, we can try to see, hear and feel, in our prayer and human hearts, the cries of our carbon-storing tropical and temperate forests as they are wantonly destroyed; the pleas of our shrinking aquifers, rivers, and lakes, and of our rising, now acidic seas; and the urgent laments of the widespread, crippling loss of the biodiversity and ecosystems on which all created life depends.

Let us also daily see and consciously embrace our sisters and brothers in Myanmar, where 150,000 people perished in a 2008 cyclone; in Ethiopia, where thousands of poor people and their farm animals face starvation due to relentless droughts, desertification and crop failures; the thousands in south and southwest Australia whose homes and livelihoods have been destroyed by ruthless fires; and the Gwich'in peoples in the Arctic region whose traditional homes and fishing and Caribou hunting needs are now threatened by logging trucks, bulldozers and drilling equipment.

These Burmese, Ethiopians, Australians and Alaskan tribes, as well as countless other ecologically vulnerable people, are not far away from us. They lie right before us on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. They are our neighbors whom we are called to love now, and we are their neighbors, called to serve them now, not sometime later, when we get around to it.

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So, let us get a move on—acting even more promptly and vigorously than we have acted in the past. Let us, in selfless solidarity with these suffering neighbors, examine and convert our own personal lifestyles, and collaborate with like-minded others in public witness and petitions. Let us boldly invite large institutions to join us as we get down on our knees and do the tangible, scientifically recommended acts of healing our wounded Earth, respecting the reality of her natural resources and created life, and honoring the human rights of her suffering peoples. This is the integral, cultural, economic and personal ecological conversion that Francis pleads for in *Laudato Si*.



Protestors took to the streets of cities around the world, including Washington, D.C., for the 2019 Global Climate Strike.



Sisters protest in Burrillville, Rhode Island, in December 2015 over a fracked gas power plant. (From left) Sisters Pat Otilio (now deceased) Lois Harten, Barbara Riley and Kathleen Turley are photographed by Sister Mary Pendergast, who was arrested for planting tulip bulbs on the property that day.



Sister Catherine Kuper (center) joins Sister Margaret Stratman, OSM, (foreground) and others in Omaha, Nebraska, to protest the Dakota Access Pipeline.





### At the public level:

- ✓ We can connect our efforts with a few large environmental advocacy organizations, joining our voices with theirs to petition legislatures, governmental agencies and private corporations to do what is needed to amend our destructive ways and to avert further climate catastrophe. If we join the Sierra Club, the Environmental Defense Fund, the League of Conservation Voters, the Friends of the Earth or any well-informed environmental advocacy group, we can sign their wise and needed group petitions on behalf of Earth, her created resources and all her suffering peoples.
- ✓ We can wake up our parishes and dioceses, and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, asking them to preach occasionally on behalf of our wounded Earth and her suffering created life (certainly this is a God-given “holy scripture” for our times). And we can urge them to set up local climate crisis committees, and to adopt environment-friendly practices and building renovation plans.
- ✓ We cannot support national or multinational corporations in their robbery of Earth’s natural resources (think Nestle and bottled water) or in their theft of the lands, resources and livelihoods of vulnerable peoples in Peru or Brazil. But we can support the skill and know-how of our Mercy Investment Services as it repeatedly confronts such corporations through shareholder resolutions asking them to reform their harmful, misguided and ultimately selfish ways.
- ✓ And we can start now, in our own Mercy planning and budgeting, to transition our congregational buildings, and the ministerial buildings we own, to fully renewable energy and fossil-fuel independence. This will initially cost real money—saved money, raised money, redirected money not spent on less immediately needed or not-really-needed things. Becoming carbon neutral and fossil free will be a big financial expense at first, but we must start that transition now, quietly putting our money where our mouths are, as it were, and encouraging our leaders to begin to take this urgent ecological step. Probably most of us would rather spend our money on a couple of solar panels for the chapel roof over our heads on the day our bodies are wheeled in than lie below in a more expensive casket.

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So, we must not let ourselves be overwhelmed by all that *Laudato Si* asks of us. Rather, we must pray daily for the Spirit’s energy and guidance, and then keep our eyes, ears and hearts focused on our robbed, wounded, half-dead Sister Earth, hearing her cries and the cries of all her created life and suffering people. Then we will assist the recovery of God’s beautiful and generous Creation by whatever personal and public actions and sacrifices such ecological love requires.

To celebrate the anniversary of Pope Francis’s *Laudato Si* in an honest and truly befitting way asks all of us in the Mercy family to become new people ecologically: to become Samaritan women and men, Samaritan communities and a Samaritan religious congregation who bend down to succor our robbed and wounded Sister Earth lying on today’s road from Jerusalem to Jericho, and then lift her up to healing.

All we need for this spiritual and corporal work of mercy is the oil and wine of our God-given union and charity and the good old steady, hardworking donkey of our unhesitating hope and confidence in God’s ever attentive Providence and Mercy.



Sister Mary Sullivan is an author and lecturer on Catherine McAuley, a core member of Mercy Focus on Haiti and a professor emerita of language and literature, and dean emerita of the College of Liberal Arts at the Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York. She is committed to speaking and writing about climate change. She can be reached at [msullivan@mercynypaw.org](mailto:msullivan@mercynypaw.org).