

CARING FOR GOD'S CREATION: Living Laudato Si

Helping to bring Pope Francis's encyclical to life in our community

From the Diocese of Syracuse "Care for Our Common Home" Task Force

Lenten Sacrifice, Simplicity, and God's Creation

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Lent...is a wake-up call for the soul...We need to free ourselves from the clutches of consumerism and the snares of selfishness, from always wanting more, from never being satisfied, and from a heart closed to the needs of the poor.

-Pope Francis, Ash Wednesday Homily, 2019

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free, 'Tis the gift to come down where I ought to be...

-Traditional Shaker Song

"How to Want Less: The Secret to Satisfaction Has Nothing to Do with Achievement, Money, and Stuff," an article by former S.U. professor and Holy Cross parishioner Arthur Brooks, makes the case that material possessions and worldly pleasures do not bring lasting satisfaction, which instead comes mainly from intrinsic things like faith, family, friendships, and work that serves the needs and happiness of others.

These insights are timely for us as Catholic Christians during the season of Lent, traditionally a time for spiritual "spring cleaning" as we abstain from some creature comforts and focus on prayer and repentance. But as Brooks and Pope Francis agree, simply limiting our wants, as valuable as that can be, is far more meaningful if done in a way that helps to serve God and others. Here are some potential ways that we can use this Lent to live the message of Laudato Si' to simplify our lives, limit our own wants, serve the needs of others, and better care for God's creation:

-Donate time and money saved from Lenten sacrifice to CRS Rice Bowl or other such operations to help meet the needs of the poor and vulnerable, so we can have the satisfaction of heeding Christ's call to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, and care for those who are sick, imprisoned, or oppressed – for Jesus said that in serving them we are truly serving Him.

-Turn down our thermostats to the point where our home feels chilly (65°?), so we can better relate to the refugees, the homeless, and to those who lack warm clothes or sufficient heating, and better care for God's creation by using less of the fossil fuels that produce greenhouse gas emissions.

-Cut back on gasoline consumption by walking, biking, consolidating trips, carpooling and/or using public transport, so we can feel some solidarity with those who cannot afford a vehicle, and better care for our earth by reducing our fossil fuel usage.

-Abstain from meat, not just on Lenten Fridays but on other days as well, so we can get a sense of what life is like for those who have to do without, and reduce the methane gases emitted by cattle, which contribute to climate change.

-Take shorter and/or fewer showers and wash and dry clothes less often, so we can better relate to those who are displaced by war and/or lack hot water and sufficient clothing, while using less water and energy to help preserve precious resources.

-Cut back on TV and social media, and spend more time with family and friends, in prayer, and in outreach to the hurting, to improve our relationships with God and others while also saving energy.

-Pray the "Renew the Earth" Stations of the Cross (<https://www.jrsusa.org/resource/stations-of-the-cross-renew-the-earth/>) and/or the CRS Rice Bowl Reflections for the 40 Days of Lent (<https://www.csricebowl.org/>) to help connect our Lenten sacrifice with the passion of Christ and the sufferings of those impacted by climate change and environmental degradation.

These are just a few things that we can do this Lent to better serve God and our neighbor and to help us prepare for the life-giving joys of Easter and beyond.