

Jubilee of Mercy – A New Work of Mercy

Now that we're familiar with the traditional works of mercy, Pope Francis has proposed a new one – showing mercy not to individual persons, but to planet Earth itself, home to all of us. Reflecting his appeal for an “integral ecology” – developed in his encyclical *Laudato Si'* last year – the Holy Father recently called for the addition of **care for our common home** as a complement to both the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

On September 1st, in a message for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, Pope Francis noted, “We usually think of the works of mercy individually and in relation to a specific initiative: hospitals for the sick, soup kitchens for the hungry, shelters for the homeless, schools for those to be educated, the confessional and spiritual direction for those needing counsel and forgiveness. But if we look at the works of mercy as a whole, we see that the object of mercy is human life itself and everything it embraces. Obviously ‘human life itself and everything it embraces’ includes care for our common home.”

Explaining how this is a twofold work of mercy, Pope Francis continued, quoting in part from *Laudato Si'*, “As a spiritual work of mercy, care for our common home calls for a ‘grateful contemplation of God’s world’ (LS, 214) which ‘allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us’ (LS, 85). As a corporal work of mercy, care for our common home requires ‘simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness’ and ‘makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world’ (LS, 230-31).”

Earlier in his message, Pope Francis recalled that the abuse and misuse of nature is a sin that has consequences for humanity, affecting especially the poor, as well as for the earth itself. He called on all peoples to repent of the harm we are doing to our common home by “a distorted culture of prosperity and a disordered desire to consume more than what is really necessary,” by a “mentality of profit at any price, with no concern for social exclusion or the destruction of nature.” Repentance of these abuses should lead us to resolve to preserve creation from all harm.

September 1st, the Orthodox commemoration of God’s creation, also marks the beginning of a 5-week “Time for Creation,” ending on October 4th, the commemoration of St. Francis of Assisi. This initiative, proposed by the Third European Ecumenical Assembly in 2007 and supported by the World Council of Churches, has inspired activities worldwide promoting environmental justice by people from diverse religious backgrounds. “Christians or not, as people of faith and goodwill, we should be united in showing mercy to the earth as our common home and cherishing the world in which we live as a place for sharing and communion,” Pope Francis stated.