



# SEASON OF CREATION 2020

September 1 – October 4



## LAUDATO SI' SESSION - TOWARDS A NEW LIFESTYLE

Recognising that life as we know it has changed significantly in the last months due to the COVID-19 Lockdown, we still join the world in commemorating the 5th Anniversary of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. The encyclical, on ecology and climate change, is an open appeal for dialogue and conversation about the future of our common home — a home we all share, regardless of faith or ideology. This reflection is an invitation for you to see and experience God in new ways while being attentive to your own context and live experiences. Indeed, in giving Pope Francis' letter our attention during this global pandemic, we gain new perspective to how the consumerist attitude of the world is damaging ecology.

### TOWARDS A NEW LIFESTYLE

Let us ponder how we might contribute to a more sustainable culture. Pope Francis has sharp words with which to motivate us. In effect, he accuses much of contemporary society as having adopted what he calls a “techno-economic paradigm” that brings about “compulsive consumerism”, a “whirlwind of needless buying and spending”. “This paradigm,” Francis writes, “leads people to believe that they are free as long as they have the supposed freedom to consume” (para. 203).

He goes on to say that, most of us probably don't possess the self-awareness it will take to shape a new lifestyle in the world today. It is as if we have been so programmed to connect our sense of freedom, in general, with our freedom to consume, in particular, that many of us don't know what else to do with our freedom than binge at will.

### World Facts

In 1998, the inequality in consumption was wide, but the United Nations also provided some eye-opening statistics worth noting here:

Today's consumption is undermining the environmental resource base. It is worsening the inequalities. And the dynamics of the consumption-poverty-inequality-environment nexus are accelerating. If the trends continue without change — not redistributing from high-income to low-income consumers, not shifting from polluting to cleaner goods and production technologies, not promoting goods that empower poor producers, not shifting priority from

consumption for conspicuous display to meeting basic needs — today's problems of consumption and human development will worsen.

... The real issue is not consumption itself but its patterns and effects.

... Inequalities in consumption are stark. Globally, 20% of the world's people in the highest-income countries account for 86% of total private consumption expenditures — the poorest 20% a minuscule 1.3%.

More specifically, the richest fifth:

Consume 45% of all meat and fish, the poorest fifth 5%

Consume 58% of total energy, the poorest fifth less than 4%

Have 74% of all telephone lines, the poorest fifth 1.5%

Consume 84% of all paper, the poorest fifth 1.1%

Own 87% of the world's vehicle fleet, the poorest fifth less than 1%

Runaway growth in consumption in the past 50 years is putting strains on the environment never before seen.

The above is the Human Development Report 1998 Overview, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

If available today, it would likely be that the breakdowns shown for the 1998 figures will not be as wide today in 2020 as development of countries continue. However, they are likely to still show wide inequalities in consumption.

If emerging nations follow the same path as rich countries, their consumption patterns will also be damaging to the environment.

In the midst of the debate for care for creation and the misuse of nature's resources, everything has come to a stop. The COVID-19 pandemic with all its threat and potency has made us rethink about a new way of life. Not able to move around freely or socialise, even the fact that work from home has become a viable option for many, has reduced consumption drastically. The pandemic has also taught us to prioritise and buy only what we need as against the endless wants we have. It has given a pause to human excesses allowing Mother Nature to heal and recover.

## Questions

Do you think Pope Francis is too sharp, or is he right: is our sense of freedom so bound up with the freedom to consume that they are difficult to separate?

It may help to consider these questions in the light of the coronavirus pandemic.

As markets halted and our patterns of consumption shifted, have we proven to be the kind of people who respond in new ways?

Have new ways of sustaining an integral ecology opened up to us, or have we all just been anxious to get back to business as usual? Pause to think this through in terms of your own experience.

## Prayer

Creator, you give us life.  
Help us as a world community  
to honour you  
as we care for your precious creation.

Redeemer, you give us hope.  
Help us especially the decision makers  
see new ways of living  
as we turn from the path of destruction.

Holy Spirit, you give us unity.  
Help us especially those who speak up  
to find strength in the love between us  
as we seek healing for the Earth.

Amen.

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