Liturgical Suggestions for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation

Pope Francis instituted the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation in 2015 as a practical step following the publication of his encyclical *Laudato Si*. September 1 was chosen for the yearly observance, as it is the same date chosen by the Orthodox Church in 1989. The day of prayer gives Catholics the opportunity to give thanks to God for the creation of the world and of humanity, and to recall and strengthen the responsibility of men and women to care for that creation.

For the first time since its designation in the Catholic Church, the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation will fall on a Sunday, namely September 1, 2019, the Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time. In view of liturgical planning for pastoral needs, pastors and diocesan worship offices may wish to propose or make appropriate accommodations to observe the day of prayer, consistent with the norms of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) concerning Masses for Various Needs and Occasions: “If any case of a graver need or of pastoral advantage should arise, at the direction of the Diocesan Bishop or with his permission, an appropriate Mass may be celebrated on any day except Solemnities, the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and Easter, days within the Octave of Easter, the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls’ Day), Ash Wednesday, and the days of Holy Week” (no. 374).

As mentioned in the August-September 2015 Newsletter, the *Roman Missal* offers no specific formulary focusing on the environment and the care of creation. The Secretariat of Divine Worship observes, however, that the Mass “For the Sanctification of Human Labor” from the Masses and Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions (no. 26; see especially the second Collect of formulary A) may be a fitting option. This formulary requires the use of Preface V of the Sundays in Ordinary Time, entitled simply “Creation.” The preface speaks eloquently of God’s creation of the world, and the need of humanity to praise God by caring for that creation. Connections between human labor and the care of creation can be drawn out by the formulary itself, and in the homily and Universal Prayer. (This task is made easier by the coincidence that the day of prayer this year occurs on the day before Labor Day in the United States.)

Since it is a Sunday in Ordinary Time, the green vestments of that season should be used for the Mass, and the existing readings for the Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time should be proclaimed, since they are already printed in commonly used participation aids. Nevertheless, some or all of the readings could be replaced by others from the appropriate selection in volume IV of the *Lectionary for Mass* (see Mass “For the Blessing of Human Labor,” nos. 907-911). Considering the day of prayer and humanity’s role in caring for God’s creation, the use of Genesis 2:4b-9, 15 and Psalm 90:2, 3-5a, 12-13, 14 and 16 (see nos. 907-2 and 909-1, respectively) could be noteworthy substitutions for the First Reading and Responsorial Psalm, while retaining the other readings of the Sunday.

Even if no special Mass formulary or readings are selected for the occasion, it would still be appropriate to mention the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation and its significance in the homily, petitions, and/or concluding announcements. Also to be kept in mind are any diocesan days of prayer already instituted, especially those relating to the earth: “Masses for Various Needs and Occasions are used in certain situations either as occasion arises or at fixed times. Days or periods of prayer for the fruits of the earth, prayer for human rights and equality, prayer for world justice and peace, and penitential observances outside Lent are to be observed in the Dioceses of the United States of America at times to be designated by the Diocesan Bishop” (GIRM, no. 373, emphasis added).

“Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord, praise and exalt him above all forever” (Dn 3:57). Through the liturgy and private prayer, the Church continually praises God for the works of his creation. As the Holy Father exhorts in *Laudato Si*, may her members work more fervently for a more integral ecology among all men and women of good will, and between the human race and its common home, the Earth.