



Catholic Climate Covenant
Together for our Common Home

Answering the Call to Conversion in 2025

An analysis of Pope Francis'
most important encyclicals

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A Global Call

Ten years ago, Pope Francis wrote *Laudato Si'* as an invitation to Catholics around the globe to read the “signs of the times” (Matthew 16:3) and reckon with the disruption and threats to life caused by the climate crisis. The pope writes to remind all Catholics, lay and clergy, that our reverence for our Creator is measured by how we treat all creation, since God’s covenant with Noah includes his descendants, “every living creature,” and the earth (Genesis 9:9-17).

Laudato Si' is often described as the first encyclical to call on Christians to embrace an “ecological conversion” (§220). When Pope Francis writes, “Now, faced as we are with global environmental deterioration, I wish to address every person living on this planet,” he is actually echoing Pope John Paul II’s call to ecological conversion from 2001. How long will it take for us to answer this call to *metanoia*?

Integral Ecology and Misusing Free Will

Just as Jesus calls his followers to conversion, Pope Francis laments that human beings are misusing the gift of free will, and the result is the degradation of the natural environment and immense suffering to the human family — especially women, children, the poor, and Indigenous communities, who are the most vulnerable to the worst effects of climate crisis (§§5-6, 49).

Laudato Si' does not just remind us of our moral responsibilities to the global common good, the “integral ecology” ordered to the collective flourishing of every member of creation (§156). It is an appeal to each and every person to recognize that our unsustainable rates of production and consumption (and corresponding systems of exploitation and waste) are a symptom of soul sickness. Echoing a 2005 homily from Pope Benedict XVI, Pope Francis observes, “The external deserts in the world are growing because the internal deserts have become so vast” (§217). Our deep spiritual hunger cannot be satiated by retail therapy; the creation God recognizes as “very good” (Genesis 1:31) will be rapidly depleted until we replace “consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing” and embrace “a way of loving, of moving gradually away from what I want to what God’s world needs. It is liberation from fear, greed and compulsion” (§9).

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Rejecting Defeatism

Given the scale and urgency of the climate crisis we face, it can be easy to feel anxious and overwhelmed or that any sacrifices we make are too insignificant to matter. Pope Francis rejects this kind of defeatism, arguing that care for creation is simply an act of love “overflowing with small gestures of mutual care [which] is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world” (§231).

Let us urge one another onward: “We must not think that these efforts are not going to change the world. They benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread. Furthermore, such actions can restore our sense of self-esteem; they can enable us to live more fully and to feel that life on earth is worthwhile” (§212). Care for creation is an affirmation of the dignity in and around us, filling us with the hope that there is good worth fighting for.

Fratelli Tutti

Five years ago, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic that revealed and caused widespread disruption and death, Pope Francis released *Fratelli Tutti* to address rising polarization and unjust inequalities that desecrate and dismember God’s family.

Fratelli Tutti builds on similar themes from *Laudato Si’* as it laments the spiritual problems that cause social distrust and division. It repeats the need to replace self-interest with a shared commitment to the global common good so we can properly care for one another as members of a “single-family dwelling in a common home” (§17). Both encyclicals call for collective moral action to integrate social, economic, and ecological justice (e.g., LS §§189-191 and FT §§122-125). *Fratelli Tutti* acknowledges that our individual efforts will fall short until we build a “community of belonging and solidarity” that leaves no one out or behind (§36). In this way, Pope Francis echoes Mother Teresa’s line, “If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.”

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Drawing on the example of the Good Samaritan — the despised outcast who is moved with compassion and courageously cares for the man beaten, robbed, and left for dead in Luke 10:25-37 — Pope Francis uses *Fratelli Tutti* to develop his vision of a “culture of encounter” that brings people together across differences and resists the “globalized indifference” that leaves people callous to suffering in our neighbors and in nonhuman creation (§30). While the Catholic Church has often focused on the sin of pride as a main obstacle to right-relationship with God, self, and others, *Fratelli Tutti* acknowledges that today, the problem may be more due to widespread insecurity and fear, shame, and social anxiety (§§146, 224).

These are not just psychological problems, but also spiritual problems, which is why Pope Francis returns again to the significance of love, the measure of the “spiritual stature of a person’s life.” In his view, God is not interested in ideological rigor, a “violent defense of the truth,” or “impressive demonstrations of strength.” Instead, he insists, “All of us, as believers, need to recognize that love takes first place: love must never be put at risk, and the greatest danger lies in failing to love” (§92). When we become consciously aware of God’s love for us and deepen our commitment to extend God’s love to others, then we can “dream together” of what more God can make possible through each one of us (§8).

Dilexit Nos

In our fast-paced lives, it can be difficult to break out of our typical ways of seeing, thinking, feeling, and acting. Our default setting can orient us toward what is most comfortable, convenient, or expedient. Some of us might wrestle with feeling unworthy, alone, or powerless. To combat these temptations, last year, Pope Francis released *Dilexit Nos*, an encyclical reflecting on the fully human and fully divine heart of Jesus.

The Sacred Heart of Jesus — often depicted aflame and crowned with thorns — is a visible reminder of God’s compassionate love for and solidarity with each and every person. God’s love does not prevent suffering or erase wounds but transfigures and transforms them into new life and new communion made possible through the Resurrection (§157). Pope Francis proposes that if we spend time in prayer reflecting

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on the Sacred Heart of Jesus, this devotion can fill us with awe and gratitude, empowering us to collaborate as God's partners in mission who radiate God's love for the world.

And if we question the difference we might make, Pope Francis insists that it's "not important whether you see immediate results" and instead, we should keep "experiencing the joy born of our efforts to share the love of Christ" (§216). Pope Francis reminds us that when we may think our value is contingent on our appearance, possessions, financial security, or achievements, in the end, it is love that sets us free so that we — and all creation — can flourish, just as God desires (John 10:10). In 2025, let us strive to be converted from all that gets in the way of being loved and being more loving.

About the Author

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