



# The Holy See

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POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCES** San Damaso courtyard

Wednesday, 16 September 2020 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

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## Catechesis “Healing the world”: 7. Care of the common home and contemplative dimension

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

To emerge from a pandemic, we need to look after and care for each other. And we must support those who care for the weakest, the sick and the elderly. There is the tendency to cast the elderly aside, to abandon them: this is bad. These people — well defined by the Spanish term *cuidadores* (caretakers), those who take care of the sick — play an essential role in today’s society, even if they often do not receive the recognition and recompense they deserve. Caring is a golden rule of our nature as human beings, and brings with it health and hope (cf. Encyclical *Laudato Si’* [LS], 70). Taking care of those who are sick, of those who are in need, of those who are cast aside: this is a human and also Christian wealth.

We must also extend this care to our common home: to the earth and to every creature. All forms of life are interconnected (cf. *ibid.*, 137-138), and our health depends on that of the ecosystems that God created and entrusted to us to care for (cf. *Gen* 2:15). Abusing them, on the other hand, is a grave sin that damages, harms and sickens (cf. *LS*, 8; 66). The best antidote against this misuse of our common home is contemplation (cf. *ibid.*, 85, 214). But why? Isn’t there a vaccine for this, for the care of our common home, so as not to set it aside? What is the antidote against the sickness of not taking care of our common home? It is contemplation. “If someone has not learned to stop and admire something beautiful, we should not be surprised if he or she treats everything as an object to be used and abused without scruple” (*ibid.*, 215). Also in terms of “disposable” objects. However, our common home, creation, is not a mere “resource”. Creatures have a value in themselves and each one “reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 339). This value and this ray of divine light must be discovered and, in order to discover it, we need to be silent; we need to listen; we need to contemplate. Contemplation also heals the soul.

Without contemplation, it is easy to fall prey to an unbalanced and arrogant anthropocentrism, the “I” at the centre of everything, which overinflates our role as human beings, positioning us as absolute rulers of all other creatures. A distorted interpretation of biblical texts on creation has contributed to this misinterpretation, which leads to the exploitation of the earth to the point of suffocating it. Exploiting creation: this is the sin. We believe we are at the centre, claiming to occupy God’s place and so we ruin the harmony of creation, the harmony of God’s plan. We become predators, forgetting our vocation as custodians of life. Of course, we can and must work the earth so as to live and to develop. But work is not synonymous with exploitation, and it is always accompanied by care: ploughing and protecting, working and caring... This is our mission (cf. *Gen 2:15*). We cannot expect to continue to grow on a material level, without taking care of the common home that welcomes us. Our poorest brothers and sisters and our mother earth groan for the damage and injustice we have caused, and demand we take another course. They demand of us a conversion, a change of path; taking care of the earth too, of creation.

Therefore, it is important to recover the contemplative dimension, that is, to look at the earth, creation, as a gift, not as something to exploit for profit. When we contemplate, we discover in others and in nature something much greater than their usefulness. Here is the heart of the issue: contemplating is going beyond the usefulness of something. Contemplating the beautiful does not mean exploiting it: contemplating is free. We discover the intrinsic value of things given to them by God. As many spiritual masters have taught, the heavens, the earth, the sea, and every creature possess this iconic capacity, this mystical capacity to bring us back to the Creator and to communion with creation. For example, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, at the end of his Spiritual Exercises, invites us to carry out “Contemplation to attain love”, that is, to consider how God looks at his creatures and to rejoice with them; to discover God’s presence in his creatures and, with freedom and grace, to love and care for them.

Contemplation, which leads us to an attitude of care, is not a question of looking at nature from the outside, as if we were not immersed in it. But we are inside nature, we are part of nature. Rather, it is done from within, recognizing ourselves as part of creation, making us protagonists and not mere spectators of an amorphous reality that is only to be exploited. Those who contemplate in this way experience wonder not only at what they see, but also because they feel they are an integral part of this beauty; and they also feel called to guard it and to protect it. And there is one thing we must not forget: those who cannot contemplate nature and creation cannot contemplate people in their true wealth. And those who live to exploit nature end up exploiting people and treating them like slaves. This is a universal law. If you cannot contemplate nature it will be very difficult for you to contemplate people, the beauty of people, your brother, your sister.

Those who know how to contemplate will more easily set to work to change what produces degradation and damage to health. They will strive to educate and promote new habits of production and consumption, to contribute to a new model of economic growth that guarantees respect for our common home and respect for people. The contemplative in action tends to

become a guardian of the environment: this is good! Each one of us should be a guardian of the environment, of the purity of the environment, seeking to combine ancestral knowledge of millennia-long cultures with new technical knowledge, so that our lifestyle may always be sustainable.

Lastly, *contemplating and caring*: these are two attitudes that show the way to correct and re-balance our relationship as human beings with creation. Oftentimes, our relationship with creation seems to be a relationship between enemies: destroying creation for our benefit. Exploiting creation for our profit. Let us not forget that this comes at a high price; let us not forget that Spanish saying: “God always forgives; we forgive sometimes; nature never forgives”. Today I was reading in the newspaper about those two great glaciers in Antarctica, near the Amundsen Sea: they are about to fall. It will be terrible, because the sea level will rise and this will bring many, many difficulties and so much harm. And why? Because of global warming, not caring for the environment, not caring for our common home. On the other hand, when we have this relationship — let me say the word — ‘fraternal’ in the figurative sense with creation, we will become guardians of our common home, guardians of life and guardians of hope; we will safeguard the patrimony that God has entrusted to us so that future generations may enjoy it. And some may say: “But, I can get by like this”. But the problem is not how you are going to manage today — this was said by a German theologian, a Protestant, a good man: Bonhoeffer — the problem is not how you manage today; the problem is: what will be the legacy, life for future generations? Let us think of our children, our grandchildren: what will we leave them if we exploit creation? Let us protect this path so we may become “guardians” of our common home, guardians of life and hope. Let us safeguard the heritage that God has entrusted to us so that future generations may enjoy it. I think especially of the indigenous peoples, to whom we all owe a debt of gratitude, also of penance, to repair the harm we have done to them. But I am also thinking of those movements, associations, popular groups, that are committed to protecting their territory with its natural and cultural values. These social realities are not always appreciated; and at times they are even obstructed, because they do not earn money. But in reality they contribute to a peaceful revolution: we might call it the “revolution of care”. Contemplating so as to care, contemplating to protect, to protect ourselves, creation, our children, our grandchildren, and to protect the future. Contemplating to care for and to protect, and to leave a legacy to the future generation.

However this must not be delegated to others: this is the task of every human being. Each one of us can and must be a “guardian of the common home”, capable of praising God for his creatures, and of contemplating creatures, and protecting them. Thank you.

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### Special greetings

I cordially greet the English-speaking faithful. In these days, my thoughts turn especially to the elderly and infirm, and those who generously care for them. Upon all of you and your families I

invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

Lastly my thought goes as usual to *the elderly*, to *young people*, to *the sick* and to *newlyweds*. We recently celebrated in the liturgy the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. May the Cross, a sign of faith in Christ, be comfort for all and the image of an unwavering hope.

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### **Summary of the Holy Father's words:**

Dear Brothers and Sisters, in our continuing reflections on the current pandemic in the light of the Church's social doctrine, we have seen the vital role played by the many people who generously care for others, especially the sick, elderly and most vulnerable. We have also recognized our responsibility to care for the natural world, whose beauty is all too often ignored and its resources squandered. In order to regain a proper sense of our place within God's creation, and of our call to respect and care for the earth and one another, we need to learn anew the art of *contemplation*. For when we enter into silence and contemplate our interconnected world, we come to appreciate the true meaning and value of all creatures, for each in its own way reflects something of God's infinite wisdom, goodness and beauty. Contemplation teaches us how integral we all are to the whole of creation, our calling to be faithful stewards of its riches, and our need to preserve it for future generations.

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