



Caring for All God's Creatures

All creation in its diversity opens us to an encounter with God, and with God's gift of creation. **Catherine Devitt**, a frequent contributor on Environment, reflects on the Pope's intention for September, focusing on Pope Francis's call to love all of creation.

Religion can change how we relate to the earth and all its creatures. The Catholic tradition has tended to see the rest of creation as existing simply for human use. For example, in Genesis 1, we read, 'let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth'. This narrative of dominion even appears as recently as 1994 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: 'God willed creation as

destruction of habitats, unsustainable agricultural and forestry practices, climate change, urban expansion and resource extraction. Irish nature is not immune; there is less wildlife around today than there was just a few decades ago. In my lifetime the sounds of a healthy countryside, enjoyed whilst growing up on a small farm, have become distant memories. Indeed, at times, one can feel that all our efforts seem like losing battles against an ever-increasing thirst for consumption.

Pope's Intention (universal): That politicians, scientists and economists work together to protect the world's seas and oceans.

One of the crucial questions arising at this time, is around the meaning and value of all the other species we share this planet with. Do we

value them only for their usefulness to human beings? In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis reminds us that they have meaning and value in themselves, yet 'because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us' (LS, 33).

gift addressed to man ... animals, like plants and inanimate beings, are by nature destined for the common good of past, present and future humanity.' We have to ask, is it this worldview that has got us into the environmental problems we are currently facing? Right now, we are experiencing the sixth largest extinction of life, attributed not to meteorites, but to human activity – activity which, according to the United Nations, includes the

We humans must not think of ourselves as relating to nature as if we were separate from it. Instead, Pope Francis invites us to see ourselves as



part of nature, and to see that all other creatures have value before God, and they give glory to God by just being: 'other living beings have a value of their own in God's eyes' (LS, 69), 'all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another' (LS, 42).

In this sense not only is our destruction of nature potentially disastrous, we are also denying the potential for encounters with God. We need to be moved by the flight of every sparrow, every frog, every threatened species, to feel for them and act on their behalf. Love and care for the natural world becomes an intrinsic part of our faith experience, and it is our faith that can allow us to see the mystery

of the world in new ways.

The late eco-theologian Thomas Berry talked about the Ecozoic Era, the end of a geological era marked by the disappearance of thousands of species, but also a time of hope when humans recover a creative orientation to the world. If we take on board the messages of *Laudato Si'*, we are invited to stop, look and appreciate the wonder of the fullness of flora and fauna around us: 'contemplation deepens the more we feel the working of God's grace within our hearts, and the better we learn to encounter God in creatures outside ourselves' (LS, 223). Faith communities often have access to space that can be used to protect and promote the place of nature in our localities. ❤️