

BREATHING IN, BREATHING OUT - What is Happening to Earth, Our Mother

Online Eco-poetic and eco-contemplative resource interweaving selected brief texts from Laudato Si'.

We are eco-warriors *and* eco-contemplatives!

Created by Judith Keller, Southport Australia

1. *Our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather become painfully aware, to dare to turn to what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it. LS: 19.*
2. *Respect must also be shown for the cultural riches of different peoples, their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality. If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out...LS: 63.*
3. *We tend to demean contemplative rest, as something unproductive and unnecessary, but this is to do away with the very thing which is most important about work: its meaning. We are called to include in our work a dimension of receptivity and gratuity, which is quite different from mere inactivity...rather it forms part of our very essence. It protects human action from becoming empty activism; it also prevents that unfettered sense of greed and sense of isolation which make us seek personal gain to the detriment of all else. LS: 237.*

Resources: Please have access to a copy of these materials, and your journal and pencils; It is recommended that you have access to a copy of *Laudato Si'*, by Pope Francis in relation to this resource. The full title of *Laudato Si'*, as originally published in 2015 is *Laudato Si' An Encyclical Letter on Ecology and Climate.*

Part One - approx 35 minutes

1. Acknowledgement of country.

We acknowledge that we walk upon the traditional lands of First Nations Peoples. We pay our respects to them and recognise the continuing gift of their cultures to the life and spirit of [Australia...and the countries in each each one of us dwell...]

I/We acknowledge that land is a living entity: the soil, water, the air from which all are formed and from which we too often separate ourselves...

I/We acknowledge that there has been violence - systemic, historical, on-going - to allow us to be here...

I/We acknowledge our ancestors, the elders whose blood we bear and all who support us in the opportunity to gather, making this time together a sacred space...

I/We acknowledge that we are all part of the web of life - and are responsible for healing Earth and each other...

Take a few moments for each one of us to acknowledge the First Nations Peoples on whose lands we are sitting today, and to ground our presence here...

[Source: Judith Keller, Southport, Australia, inspired and partly adapted from a land acknowledgement statement from Earth Sisters, USA].

[LS text: In this sense it is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners...for their land is not a commodity but a gift from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and value. LS: 146.]

2. Reflection/Song: 'Forgotten', Deirdre Ni Chinneide, from CD, Celtic Passage

Have you forgotten who you are?

Have you wandered so far?
 No trace of ancient story
 But the tragedy of stone that stands alone? [x 2]
 No wind to sound you
 No sea to wash you
 No earth to ground you
 Through the sacred and profane.
 Who are you
 On your island of experience
 Struggling to connect with mainlands
 Other islands,
 Floating by
 That dare to touch
 Yet drift away
 Frightened by the current reality
 Stay a little longer
 Mooring in the harbour of your heart
 Anchored there forever...
 With wind to sound you
 And sea to wash you
 With earth to ground you
 Through the sacred and profane.

[LS text: This sister [Mother Earth] now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her...We have come to see ourselves...as entitled to plunder her at will...The violence present in our hearts is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life...We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the Earth; our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters. LS: 1-2.]

3. What are some of the ecological crises facing Earth community today? Given your own Bioregion, what climate impacts are you noticing in your life, community, Bioregion? [LS includes an analysis of the crises that Earth community is facing, especially in Chapters 1 and 3 of the document, 'What is Happening to our Common Home', and 'The Human Roots of the Ecological crisis'. If you are working with this resource on your own you may want to stop to take the time to read these chapters].

4. Deep listening to 'Shadow Line' by Stephen Edgar. NOTE: we are not analysing the poem but being invited into a journey of discovery related to our feelings and apprehensions in listening deeply to the text.

Shadow Line Stephen Edgar
 And there it is at last,
 The last one gone, the final star,
 The term of its self fuelled fire surpassed
 And cancelled. Nothing but a background hum
 And darkness stretching through the nebular
 Detritus into spans of time to come
 More incommensurably vast,

Next to the reign of light,
 Than Earth's deep ages set beside
 A mayfly's one transparent day in flight.
 But hale those aeons back and see the face
 Of the dead planet swept and scarified
 By strobe-lit storm and red gales that chase
 The skyline as the days ignite.

Just a few feet below
 The stripped and lifeless regolith,
 A narrow, blackened band would put on show
 The fruits of our endeavour, a footnote
 To the grand tale we'd left to reckon with,
 A six inch sooty layer laid down to quote
 from that portentous folio:

Interred there and compressed,
 The residue of all we've made,
 Roads, sewers, factories, vehicles would attest,
 Plastics and pipes and wires and ticking meters
 The deathless works, the missiles on parade,
 The Sphinx, the floating Tai Mahal, St Peter's
 The half lives haunting our bequest.

And so one might presage
 That a mere grain, one molecule
 That some outrider from a distant age
 Sifted from all that indeterminate dross,
 Might be the wattle leaves whose shadows pool
 On a desk this afternoon, and brush across
 The hand that's poised above this page.

1st reading of the poem - settling and shimmering: a word or phrase that shimmers, disturbs, beckons, addresses you in some way...

Sharing

2nd reading of the poem - savouring and stirring: allow the word or phrase to unfold in your imagination and speak more deeply, savour your word, allow feelings and images and associations and symbols to arise; allow your senses to come into play...

Personal journalling.

Interweave texts from Laudato Si': As we sit here today, we are aware from our reading of LS that:

1. *Doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain. We may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation... LS: 161.*

2. *We seem to think that we can substitute an irreplaceable and irretrievable beauty with something which we have created ourselves...LS: 34.*

3. *All it takes is one good person to restore hope. Renewal entails recovering and respecting the rhythm inscribed in nature by the hand of the Creator. LS: 71.*

4. *Ours may yet be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to attain sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace and the joyful celebration of life. LS: 207.*

3rd reading of the poem - summoning - allow your deepest feelings to arise, attend to how your word or phrase or image connects with the context and situation of your life right now and to what is happening to Earth/Creation. How does it relate to your own feelings and perceptions... What surprises you...What excites you...What delights you...What touches you...What disturbs you...

Personal journalling

Part 2 - Approx 25 minutes

1. Laudato Si' some brief quotes.

1. *Each year hundreds of millions of tons of waste are generated, much of it nonbiodegradable, highly toxic and radioactive...Earth our home is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth. LS:21.*

2. *...sister Earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, cry out, pleading that we take another course. LS: 53.*

3. *The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. LS:13.*

4. *...from the very heart of things, something new can emerge. LS: 80.*

5. Inner peace is closely related to care for ecology and for the common good because lived out authentically, it is reflected in a balanced lifestyle, together with a capacity for wonder. LS: 225.

2. Breathing Through Compassion meditation

Adapted from Tara Brach Meditation - Breathing Through. Tara Brach is a Buddhist teacher and writer, and psychologist and on her website you will find a number of her audio meditations. She has a number of Awakening Compassion Through Tonglen meditations on her website and if you prefer to find one of these recordings on Tara's website, then you could sit and listen to an audio version.

Around 15 minutes

Drawn from a classic Tibetan Buddhist compassion practice, this guided meditation invites us to open to the sufferings of the world, and let it move through our hearts and out again. The blessing of this offering of presence is that our hearts become a transformer of sorrow.

You might begin by sensing your posture and making sure that you are sitting in a way that is relaxed, comfortable, and allows you to be awake.

If you'd like to close your eyes, please do so, or lower your gaze. We will begin together with a few long deep breaths, so

Inhaling smoothly and deeply, breathing in and filling the lungs, and the out breath slow and smooth, letting, letting go....

Again, breathing in smoothly and deeply, filling the chest and lungs...letting go, slow, smooth out breath, releasing, letting go, letting go...

Then allowing your breath to resume its natural rhythm, letting go of all controlling, and simply observing and feeling the breath as it is...

As you watch the breath, just noticing that it happens by itself without your will, without your deciding when to inhale or exhale.

Sense that you're being breathed, being breathed by life, just as all other beings on our planet human and non human animals, life forms, are being breathed, sustained, in a vast breathing web of life.

...

Now visualise your breath as a stream, or ribbon of air, that is passing through you. See it flow up through your nose and down through your windpipe and into your lungs.

And from your lungs now take it through your heart.

Picture it flowing through your heart and out through an opening there to reconnect with the larger web of life.

Let the breath stream as it passes through you, one loop within that vast web connecting it, connecting you with it.

So the breath is flowing like a stream or ribbon up through your nose, down through your windpipe and into your lungs, and from your lungs taking it through your heart out through an opening that reconnects with the larger web of life.

Breathing in, and through, and out.

Letting that breath stream as it passes through you, as one loop within the vast web, connecting you with it.

In through your heart, and out....

[pause]

Now widening your awareness, sense this suffering of our larger body this earth, sensing, how that suffering is present in the world.

Let your intention be to drop all your defences and open to your knowledge of that suffering...let it come as concretely as you can.

Still breathing, you might imagine concrete images of land stripped of trees or of trees burning, and wildfires, of droughts, parched land, devastating storms, of toxins entering the air or waters...vulnerable humans struggling to raise crops to find food, find drinkable water, to protect their homes from floods, from fires.

Or perhaps animals killed in oil spills, animals endangered by our warming climate...

The fear and trauma that arises with the dying of life systems.

Let your attention go to the suffering that you are most aware of. Let it be close in, real.

Now breathe in the pain like dark granules on the stream of air up through your nose, down through your trachea, your lungs, your heart and out again into the world.

You're asked to do nothing for now but let it pass through your heart.

Breathing in the pain, dark granules on the stream of air, up through your nose, down through your trachea, your lungs and your heart, and out again, into the world...be sure the stream flows through, and out again...not to hang on to the pain, but surrender to it, for now, into the healing resources of

If no images or feelings arise and there's only blankness, perhaps greyness, or numbness, breath through the numbness itself a very real part of our world...be sure the stream flows through, and out again...not to hang on to the pain, but surrender to it, for now, into the healing resources of life's vast web.

And if what surfaces for you is not the pain of other beings so much as your own personal sufferings, breathe that through too, your own anguish, your own hurt, is an integral part of the grief of our world and arises with it.

Breathing in whatever suffering is here...through the chest, through the heart and out again into the vast web.

Should you feel an ache in the chest, a pressure in the rib cage as if the heart would break, that's all right....Your heart is not an object that can break. But if it were they say that the heart that breaks open can hold the whole universe. Your heart is that large. Trust it.

Keep breathing. Know your belonging to infinite loving awareness.

Wherever the suffering is, breathing it in like dark granules through the nose, your lungs, the heart and out again. Doing this your heart can become a transformer of sorrows.

Become a field of tenderness as you take it in and then let it go into your larger belonging.

As you release the pain into space, feel the web of aliveness, of compassionate awareness that is its source...

You can rest in this loving awareness, offering your own presence to your fears and hurts, offering your presence to all beings everywhere.

The poet Rilke wrote:

I live my life in ever widening circles that reach out across the world.
I may never complete the last one, but I give myself to it...

For this last moment, sensing your heart as a transformer of sorrow. Breathing in. Breathing out. Releasing your belonging to that heartspace that's boundless, tender and awake.

Open your eyes become aware of the outside environment wherever you are and silently declare your intention to tread consciously and breathe in the sacredness of all that is.

3. Laudato Si' Action Platform - Spiritual Exercise: Caring for Our Common Home - Reflection sheet. The invitation is to sit with this spiritual exercise below as a form of meditation practice and let your own responsiveness arise as you sit with these questions. You may like to identify where your own ecospiritual activism is already engaged, and, where you would like to commit even further. The 7 questions correspond to the Laudato Si' action plan that is currently being implemented in Archdioceses around the world [2022, ongoing].

4. Closing Song: 'Dadirri' (Deep Listening), Luka Bloom, from CD, Refuge

[Song is inspired by <https://www.miriamrosefoundation.org.au/dadirri/>

My people are not threatened by silence. They are completely at home in it. They have lived for thousands of years with Nature's quietness. My people today, recognise and experience in this quietness, the Great Life-Giving Spirit...Our Aboriginal culture has taught us to be still and to wait. We do not try to hurry things up. We let them follow their natural course - like the seasons. We watch the moon in each of its phases. We wait for the rain to fill our rivers and water the thirsty earth...When twilight comes, we prepare for night. At dawn we rise with the sun.

I sat by the mountain at the master's feet

struggling with silence away from the streets.

There was a call, wake from urban sleep

Calling me deep within

Deep listening, deep Dadirri.

Birth is in a raindrop, death is in a leaf

Wisdom is the oak you sit beneath.

Shut down everything, find the riverside

Feel the force of your life

Deep listening, deep Dadirri

Dadirri, Dadirri, Dadirri

We've tried everything, except what it is

To be still.

I sit by the mountain, at the master's feet

Under the open sky, deep listening

Deep Dadirri

Dadirri, Dadirri, Dadirri.

5. A Covenant Prayer With the Land (Source: Kinship with Earth, CEO, Sandhurst, VIC.

Elizabeth 'Betty' Pike, *The Power of Story Spirit of Dreaming*, Elizabeth 'Betty' Pike, John Garrett Publishing, 2011, p.185)

Today let us make a covenant with this land. As new fruit
can be grafted

onto the branch of a mature tree,

may we wish to be grafted

onto the ancient heritage of this land of our first peoples,

so that its life may flow through us.

We commit ourselves to this land we live in and all who belong to it.

We will care for it with gentleness, patience, strength and compassion, rather than merely something to be bought and sold.

We will look to the land as a gift for which we are truly

thankful and undertake the privilege duty, of respecting and looking after it.

We thank the Great Creator Spirit,

for all Earth provides, water, food, all the riches above and below the ground and undertake to use them wisely, daringly, while ensuring that any development brings danger to no one.

As we enter more deeply into the Spirit of the land we will see it as Sacrament and Icon of our Mothering Creator Spirit.

Let us be still now - listen to the breath of the Spirit which has blown through this land for ages past - Today - and Always - for this is...

The Spirit of the Dreaming.

Spiritual Exercise

Caring for Our Common Home



LAUDATO SI'
Action Platform



Laudato Si' Goals

1. Am I hearing and responding to the cry of Earth?

- Reducing reliance on fossil fuels (coal, oil, gas).
- Using power from renewable non-polluting sources (solar, wind).
- Minimizing fossil fuel-based road and air travel. Reducing plastics and packaging, trying to buy in bulk.

2. Am I hearing and responding to the cry of the Poor?

- Making lifestyle changes which will care for the world's poorest.
- Purchasing goods and using energy which support sustainable, ethical and fair production.

3. Am I considering and acting on Ecological Economics?

- Moving finances and investments from banks, superannuation and shares that fund fossil fuels or other activity harmful to the planet.

4. How am I faring with adopting a simpler lifestyle?

- Adopting the 5 Rs. Refuse what you don't need, Reduce what you do need, Recycle, Re-use and Rot (compost)
- Eating less meat, poultry and fish and more plant-based foods.
- Buying locally grown foods and locally made products.
- Growing more trees and plants and my own food.
- Walking cycling, using public transport more often.

5. Am I educating myself and others towards integral ecology to further my awareness and action?

- Learning more about climate change, biodiversity loss and the threat of extinction and teaching others.
- Getting reputable information from independent sources (not those influenced by fossil fuel interests or other vested interests).

6. How am I faring in developing Ecological Spirituality?

- Focusing on the wonders of the natural world.
- Praising and thanking God for creation.
- Respecting culture and ecological spirituality of indigenous peoples.

7. Am I engaging in and participating in community action for care of creation?

- Supporting public action on climate change and environment.
- Calling on political and industry leaders for stronger action on carbon emissions and environmental protections.



A PROGRAM OF **Caritas AUSTRALIA**

Adapted from Mary Mother of the Church Parish, Ivanhoe, Victoria, from Laudato Si' Week and ARRCO - Living the Change and LSAP websites.