



CARING for the
ENVIR**NMENT**

Faith Theme

All life is a sacred gift from God, and as God's people we have a special responsibility to care for the environment.

Natural Teachable Moments

- When your family recycles household materials
- When the media covers a story about damage to the environment
- When your child is with you in a grocery store where you are buying "green" products
- On Earth Day or during school events that show care for the environment

In 1995 Pope John Paul II issued the encyclical *The Gospel of Life*. This document seeks to address the positive contribution of Catholic teaching regarding life in all its forms. Pope John Paul II noted that we have a specific responsibility toward the environment in which we live and toward the whole of creation that God has given to us. Our dominion of the earth is not an absolute power but must be based on God's dominion. This requires that we discern ways to serve the needs of this world rather than seek ways to exploit it for our own gain. Decisions that we make today not only will influence us but also will affect our children in the decades to come. What choices are we making today that demonstrate our care for the world and its creatures? In what ways are we being dismissive or irresponsible stewards of the world's resources and the life it supports?

Starting the Conversation

Ask your child what he or she would do to take responsibility and show care for the environment. Share one thing you did when you were his or her age or something that you'd like to do now. Try to pick one thing together that the two of you or your whole family could do for the environment sometime this month.

To Help You Ask Questions

Perhaps you can think together about the area that is within a mile radius of your home. Tell your child to imagine your home at the center of a circle a mile wide, and name places and things found within that area. Then ask if there is anything that can be done to help or improve this area. Are there any parks, streams, or alleys that need to be cleaned? Is there an unused piece of land that could be used as a community garden or planted with grass or native plants? Could you begin recycling something in your home that you currently are not? Can you walk or bike somewhere that you currently drive to? Try to find something that captures your child's imagination; avoid forcing her or him into an activity she or he might resent.

To Support You

Suggested Bible Reading

God gives creation to humans, and creation rejoices:
Genesis 1:28–31 and Psalm 96:11–13

Suggested Children's Books

Green Street Park

Drop by Drop

Both available at www.loyolapress.com

What the Church Says about This Topic

A Catholic theology of the environment includes these principles:

God created everything that exists, and everything that God created is good. There is no such thing as a bad creation, and everything that exists must be respected as God given.

The world and all of its elements are “sacramental”—signs to us of God's power and wisdom and we use them to express our worship of God. This gives them added meaning as well as additional basis for respect.

Human beings are a part of, not apart from, the rest of creation. Our fate on earth is intimately linked to the well-being of the environment. We cannot take the position of outsiders looking in on the environment; rather, we must consider whatever happens to the environment as happening to us.

Human beings differ from the rest of God's creation because they are created with intellect and free will, which means that we are responsible for protecting the well-being of the environment. This responsibility exists on the personal level, obliging each one of us to be caring and protective in our use of natural resources. It also exists on the social level, obliging us as a society to make political and economic decisions that will not harm but enhance the environment.

Human beings have basic rights, but so do animals, plants, and the natural elements: land, water, and air. We cannot do as we please with the environment.

Quotes from *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis's encyclical "On Care for Our Common Home"

In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the word "creation" has a broader meaning than "nature," for it has to do with God's loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance. Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled, whereas creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion. (76)

The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things. Saint Bonaventure teaches us that "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." (233)

A Prayer Moment with Your Child

God has given us so many beautiful places and creatures to care for. Let's give him our thanks for this gift:

Creator God, thank you for the marvelous world you've made.

Show me how to care for it with love and wisdom,

now and for the future.

Amen.

This material was excerpted from *52 Simple Ways to Talk with Your Kids about Faith* by Jim Campbell. Learn more about this book at www.loyolapress.com/campbell.