

**Reflection for the 25th Sunday of Ordinary Time –
September 18-19, 2021**

This week, we have to say good-bye to summer - at least according to the calendar - and welcome fall. For some people, it is the start of their favourite season, where the temperature is cooler but still warm, the days are still fairly long and nature is at its most colourful in this part of the world. Oh, and it might also have something to do with the kids going back to school.

For other folks, bidding good-bye to summer is bitter sweet; the seemingly endless days of summer give a feeling of freedom, relaxation and limitless possibilities that we don't want to part with.

Whichever way you lean, having distinct seasons and the changes they bring is a gift that God blessed us with in this part of his Creation. Here in Ottawa, Mother Nature prepares us for fall by giving us little clues that things are starting to change – like my hydrangea and sedum plants showing that first blush of pink – before the more obvious and sometimes noisy signs - I'm thinking of the flocks of geese that have been flying overhead – that fall is almost upon us. These cyclical changes are not only **seasonal** reminders but perhaps little taps on the shoulder from God not to forget the diversity and wonder of this beautiful planet he has provided for us.

Not only are we entering fall but, as Fr. Jim and Eleanor Rabnett told us in their reflections over the last two weeks, we are also in the Season of **Creation**, the annual five-week Christian celebration of **prayer and action** on behalf of the Earth, our common home. Together, the ecumenical family around the world unites to pray, protect, and advocate for God's creation.

Prayer and action. Richard Rohr, the founder of the Centre for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico, said that early on in the Center's existence, they had discussed which word in their title was the most important element of their mandate. It turned out that it wasn't "action" or "contemplation" at all, but that little word AND.

So, it is with the Season of Creation – prayer AND action. Last week's 2nd reading made that clear when it said that "faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

With so many global challenges on our collective plates these days, and not only with the environment – true reconciliation with indigenous peoples, working in synodality within the church, poverty, the pandemic – figuring out where to take action and where to act first can be overwhelming. There is a risk of not even getting started or getting stuck and just spinning our wheels.

So what guidance can today's readings offer us if we look at them through the lens of caring for our common home, God's gift not only to we humans but to all the creatures of the Earth?

The Responsorial Psalm encourages us by telling us that the Lord upholds our lives and that God is our helper who sustains our lives even when we encounter those who are against us. Certainly reassuring words to hold on to when we face the inevitable obstacles, setbacks and even criticisms.

The 2nd Reading provides some guidance on how to discern whether our actions spring from the source of wisdom or from our own desires and ambitions. The fruits of righteousness are sown in

peace for those who cultivate peace. If we are not at peace and are acting out of panic, might it be time to take a deep breath and reflect some more before acting rashly.

In the Gospel, the Apostles shamefacedly had to admit that they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest. We humans decided that we were the greatest of God's creatures and prioritized not only our needs but our wants over that of other creatures. Now we have biodiversity collapse on top of a climate emergency, both subjects of crucial United Nations Conference of the Parties meetings this fall.

Children and young people are leading the way in the fight against climate change. Is the Gospel telling us that when we welcome these children, we are welcoming Jesus and his Father who sent him? Might this be God's way of telling us that their wisdom can direct us towards a better, sustainable future? Dominant society has not listened to wisdom voices and in fact has often disparaged them – indigenous peoples, women, young people, marginalized people, the poor. Jesus directs us to the children telling us that that is where God resides. If we really want to hear his voice, we should intentionally listen to theirs rather than just give them the usual lip service by calling them our future yet again.

And of course, we have Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, to guide us. At the closure of the year marking the 5th anniversary of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis invited everyone to embark on a seven-year journey with him towards environmental sustainability in dioceses, parishes, schools and other religious institutions.

Pope Francis asked: 'What world do we want to leave to our children and our young? ... Let us take care of our mother Earth; let us overcome the temptation of selfishness that makes us predators of resources; let us cultivate respect for the gifts of the Earth and creation; let us inaugurate a lifestyle and a society that is finally eco-sustainable: we have the opportunity to prepare a better tomorrow for all.'

On October 4, the feast of St. Francis of Assisi and the end of this year's Season of Creation, the Vatican will release a 7-year *Laudato Si'* action plan for Catholics and their parishes, schools and institutions. Its ultimate objective is a fundamental transformation of the spirit of Catholics individually and organizationally to become environmentally sustainable.

The diocese of Ottawa-Cornwall has a Care for Creation team which has recently formed a network of interested parishes and St. Joe's is one of them. We can look forward to journeying not only with Pope Francis but with our fellow parishes as we act and grow on this 7-year journey towards transformation.

As Pope Francis said, "From God's hands we have received a garden, we cannot leave a desert to our children."

Don't forget to vote on Monday and consider casting it with Pope Francis' message in mind.