News
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Celestina Fernandes da Silva, a Catholic activist, waters flowers in front of her home in the Wapishana indigenous village of Tabalascada, Brazil, April 3, 2019. (CNS/Paul Jeffrey)

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When you think of God's creation, what image comes to your mind?

Is it the sun at dawn peeking over a peaceful meadow filled with wildflowers? Or maybe a woman drawing water from a well in a parched landscape during a drought? Might you think of a vast forest charred to shades of gray and black by devastating wildfires?

Creation can mean many things to many people. Often, it depends upon the environment around you, as well as where you've been.

In his 2015 encyclical "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home," Pope Francis said that "contemplation of creation allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us." He went on to say, "An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals."

"If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs," Francis wrote.

Throughout his career, photographer and journalist Paul Jeffrey certainly has experienced the awe and wonder of our world. He's also witnessed the destruction that human activity can bring to ecosystems and those who call them home. With camera in hand, he has documented all these dimensions of creation, first as a missionary in Central America and then during years of globetrotting on assignment.

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The contemplation of creation the pope describes is the jumping-off point for EarthBeat's new spiritual reflection series, Lens on Creation. The series is timed to mark the ecumenical Season of Creation, which begins Sept. 1 and runs until Oct. 4.

In Lens on Creation, Jeffrey will lead readers on a visual expedition into some of the images of creation from his many travels. He tells the stories behind the images, introducing you to the people and environments they feature, along with the threats they face and their work to safeguard the natural worlds they call home.

"There is no way to separate caring for the planet from caring for the health and dignity of individual persons and families," he writes in today's opening reflection.

In Lens on Creation, Jeffrey will take readers to a post-typhoon Philippines, a city dump in India, the top of Washington's Mt. Tahoma, and even his own backyard in Oregon.

Building on this year's Season of Creation theme, "Jubilee for the Earth," Jeffrey offers reflections on the consequences of human decisions on many of the corners of our world featured in the photos. He explores through people's stories how climate change has made weather-related disasters more destructive, limited access to clean water, ruined coffee crops in Guatemala and led to conflict in Africa. At the same time, he poses examples of how strategic decisions can also renew life and flourishing for all.

He also brings those places close to home with suggestions for further study, reflection and action. Pope Francis also reminds us that we are all connected, with one another and with the world's ecosystems. Our decision about purchases can affect people in distant places. And their struggles for environmental justice sometimes mirror those of people in our own neighborhoods — perhaps in places where we've never noticed them.

"We have a terrifying ability to mess up God's creation," Jeffrey writes. "But we also have the ability to confess our environmental sin and work to restore the integrity of the planet which we share with an amazing variety of animals and plants."

You can sign up here to receive Jeffrey's reflections in Lens on Creation in your inbox every Monday, Wednesday and Friday from Aug. 31 through Oct. 4.

Related: What is the Season of Creation?
This story appears in the **Lens on Creation — Enfocando la Creación** feature series. View the full series.