

The entrance to the papal villa and farm at Castel Gandolfo, Italy, is seen July 1, 2025. The villa is open to the public and is home to the Borgo Laudato Si' ecology project and the Laudato Si' Center for Higher Education. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

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Vatican City — July 2, 2025
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Ravaging the earth and creating environmental injustices are not what God had in mind when he entrusted creation to humanity, Pope Leo XIV said.

In fact, following Pope Francis' teachings on integral ecology must be accepted as "the right path to follow," the pope said in his message for the 2025 World Day of Prayer for Creation.

"Nature itself is reduced at times to a bargaining chip, a commodity to be bartered for economic or political gain. As a result, God's creation turns into a battleground for the control of vital resources," Leo wrote.

"Agricultural areas and forests peppered with landmines, 'scorched earth' policies, conflicts over water sources, and the unequal distribution of raw materials, which penalizes the poorer nations and undermines social stability itself," are among the many wounds inflicted against creation and "are the effect of sin," he wrote.

"This is surely not what God had in mind when he entrusted the earth to the men and women whom he created in his image," he wrote in his message, which was released by the Vatican July 2.

The World Day of Prayer for Creation, which will be celebrated Sept. 1, marks the start of the ecumenical Season of Creation. The season concludes Oct. 4, the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi, patron saint of ecology.

The theme for 2025, "Seeds of Peace and Hope," had been chosen by Francis to be in harmony with the Holy Year dedicated to "Pilgrims of Hope." The 2025 message also coincides with the late pope's 2015 encyclical, "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home," from which Leo's message cited extensively.

"In Christ, we too are seeds, and indeed, 'seeds of peace and hope,'" Leo wrote.

Just as the Holy Spirit "can make an arid and parched desert into a garden, a place of rest and serenity," he wrote, "prayer, determination and concrete actions are

necessary if this 'caress of God' is to become visible to our world."

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In different parts of the world, "our earth is being ravaged," Leo wrote. "On all sides, injustice, violations of international law and the rights of peoples, grave inequalities and the greed that fuels them are spawning deforestation, pollution and the loss of biodiversity."

"Extreme natural phenomena caused by climate changes provoked by human activity are growing in intensity and frequency, to say nothing of the medium and long-term effects of the human and ecological devastation being wrought by armed conflicts," he wrote.

The destruction of nature does not affect everyone in the same way, he wrote. "When justice and peace are trampled underfoot, those who are most hurt are the poor, the marginalized and the excluded. The suffering of Indigenous communities is emblematic in this regard."

"The Bible provides no justification for us to exercise 'tyranny over creation,'" the pope wrote. On the contrary, the biblical texts imply "a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature."

Environmental justice, he wrote, "can no longer be regarded as an abstract concept or a distant goal" and it involves "much more than simply protecting the environment."

"It is a matter of justice — social, economic and human," he wrote. "For believers, it is also a duty born of faith, since the universe reflects the face of Jesus Christ, in whom all things were created and redeemed."

"In a world where the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters are the first to suffer the devastating effects of climate change, deforestation and pollution, care for creation becomes an expression of our faith and humanity," Leo wrote.

"Now is the time to follow words with deeds," he wrote.

Francis' encyclical,"Laudato Si', has now guided the Catholic Church and many people of goodwill for ten years. May it continue to inspire us and may integral

ecology be increasingly accepted as the right path to follow," he wrote.