

Today's second reading draws attention to our relationship to the natural world. St Paul tells us that the whole of creation has been subjected to futility because of Adam's sin and it now waits in hope for its redemption that will only come when humanity is redeemed.

Paul's vision is in keeping with Scripture as a whole. One writer puts it this way: "If we consider created things, this earth, these heavens, the Bible from end to end affirms their close connection and unity of destiny with humanity. For the Bible never considers the natural world apart from humanity – any more than it separates humans from their place and activity within creation."

Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si* (2015) drew attention to this vision of ourselves and nature. The encyclical's title, taken from the opening line of St Francis of Assisi's Canticle of the Sun, points to the solidarity of humans and the natural world since the poor man of Assisi throughout his poem chose words that belong to the sphere of family – mother, brother, sister - when speaking of the non-human world.

"May you be praised, O Lord, in all your creatures, especially brother sun, by whom you give us light for the day . . . May you be praised, my Lord, for sister earth, our mother".

This solidarity is grounded in many things: God the Creator, for as created, we and the natural world and are all members of God's family. God is our Father. Then there is solidarity because humans together with the non-human material creation manifest God's glory: In Pope Francis's words: "Together, in solidarity, humans and the non-human world manifest God's glory."

Solidarity relates also to the 'stewardship' of Genesis. In our Pope's words: Humans "can take from the bounty of the earth whatever they need for subsistence, but they also have the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations."

The final dimension of solidarity is solidarity in worship. Our Holy Father comments: "Our hearts are moved to praise the Lord for all his creatures and to worship him *in union with them*." First we praise God for the sun, moon, water, wind and earth and then, as well, and because we are part of the material world, in union with the material world, we praise God.

A text from Vatican II expresses this traditional Christian thought: "Through their bodily composition humans gather to themselves the elements of the material world; thus they reach their crown through the human person, and through the human person raise their voice in free praise of the Creator."

The depth of our solidarity with the natural world reminds us of our calling to revere God for his gift of non-human creation, to respect its God-given goodness and beauty, and to use it appropriately with both self-control and with justice. May St Paul enlighten us as to the meaning of our solidarity with creation and the responsibilities we have to it.

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