

THE SEASON OF CREATION



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In the letter of Paul the apostle to the Romans, the biblical image pictures the Earth as a Mother, groaning as in childbirth (Rom 8:22). Francis of Assisi understood this when he referred to the Earth as our sister and our mother in his Cantic of Creatures. The times we live in show that we are not relating to the Earth as a gift from our Creator, but rather as a resource to be used.

And yet, there is hope and the expectation for a better future. To hope in a biblical context does not mean to stand still and quiet, but rather groaning, crying, and actively striving for new life amidst the struggles. Just as in childbirth, we go through a period of intense pain, but new life springs forth. The symbol for 2024 is **'The firstfruits of hope'**.

Hope is an instrument enabling us to overcome the natural law of decay. Hope is given to us by God as a protection and guard against futility. Only through hope we may realize the gift of freedom in fullness. Freedom to act not only to achieve enjoyment and prosperity, but to reach the stage in which we are free and responsible. Freedom and responsibility enable us to make the world a better place. Only when we work together with Creation can the firstfruits of hope emerge.

To delve deeper into the theological reflection that guides the 2024 theme and symbol, find more information – <https://seasonofcreation.org/>



SEASON OF CREATION

Season of Creation 2024

Theme and Symbol Presentation

The theme: To hope and act with Creation

The symbol: The firstfruits of hope

Biblical text: Rom 8:19-25

Theological Introduction

Creation is groaning in the pains of childbirth (Romans 8:22)

This biblical image pictures the Earth as a Mother, groaning as in childbirth. The times we live in show that we are not relating to the Earth as a gift from our Creator, but rather as a resource to be used. Saint Francis of Assisi understood this when he referred to the Earth as our sister and our mother in his Canticle of Creatures. How can Mother Earth look after us if we do not look after her? Creation is groaning because of our selfishness and the unsustainable actions that harm her.

Along with our Sister, Mother Earth, creatures of all kinds, including humans, cry out because of the consequences of our destructive actions causing climate crisis, loss of biodiversity, and human suffering as well as Creation's suffering.

And yet, there is hope and the expectation for a better future. To hope in biblical context does not mean to stand still and quiet, but rather groaning, crying, and actively

striving for new life amidst the struggles. Just as in childbirth, we go through a period of intense pain, but new life is coming forth.

Creation is standing on tiptoe waiting for the children of God to be revealed (Romans 8:19)

Creation and all of us are called to worship the Creator, working together for a future of active hope and action. Only when we work together with Creation can *the firstfruits of hope* be born. Pauline theology reminds us that both Creation and humanity are conceived from the beginning in Christ and, therefore, are entrusted to each other.

Creation is standing on tiptoe waiting for the manifestation of the children of God! The children of God are those who stretch up their hands towards the Creator, recognizing themselves as humble creatures, to praise and respect God, and at the same time to love, respect, care, and learn from God's gift of Creation. Creation is not given to humanity to use and abuse, rather, humanity is created to be part of Creation. More than a common home, Creation is also a cosmic family that calls us to act responsibly. This is how the children of God have an intrinsic vocation and important role to play in the manifestation of the kingdom of justice (cf. Rom 8:19).

Firstfruits of hope (Rom 8:23-25)

Hope is an instrument enabling us to overcome the natural law of decay. Hope is given to us by God as a protection and guard against futility. Only through hope we may realize the gift of freedom in fullness. Freedom to act not only to achieve enjoyment and prosperity but to reach the stage in which we are free and responsible. Freedom and responsibility enable us to make the world a better place.

We act for a better future because we know Christ has overcome the death caused by our sins. There is a lot of pain on Earth because of our shortcomings. Our structural and ecological

sins inflict pain on Earth and all creatures, including ourselves. We know that we have caused a lot of damage to Creation, and to the world we are living in because of our negligence, because of ignorance, but as well, in many cases, because of our unrelenting wish to satisfy unrealistic selfish dreams (cf. Rom 8:22).

There's a phrase commonly attributed to Saint Augustine that says: "Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are, and Courage to see that they do not remain as they are." As we witness the cries and sufferings of Earth and all creatures, let holy anger move us toward the courage to be hopeful and active for justice. We believe that the incarnation of God's Son offers guidance enabling us to face the troubling world. God is with us in efforts to respond to the challenges of the world we are living in (cf. Rom 8:23).

There are different forms of hope. However, hope is not merely optimism. It is not a utopian illusion. It is not waiting for a magical miracle. Hope is trust that our action makes sense, even if the results of this action are not immediately seen (cf. Rom 8:24). Hope doesn't act alone. Earlier in his letter to the Romans, Paul the apostle explains the close relationship of hope as a growth process: '*endurance produces character, and character produces hope*' (Rom 5:4). Patience and endurance are close associates of hope. These are qualities that lead to hope.

We know how much bold action to restrain the climate and ecological crises is urgent, and we also know that ecological conversion is a slow process as humans are stubborn to change their minds, their hearts, and their ways of living. Sometimes we don't know what our actions should look like. As we journey in life, every day we get new ideas and inspirations to find a better balance between the urgency and the slow rhythms of long-lasting change. We might not fully comprehend all that is happening, we might not understand the ways of God, but we are

called to trust and follow with concrete and sustained actions, following the example of Christ, the redeemer of the whole Cosmos (cf. Rom 8:25).

In some languages, the translation of the Pauline passage expresses that hope is not a passive waiting but rather an active hope (cf. Rom 8:20-21). There is much we can learn from other cultures and countries on how to hope and act together with Creation. The Portuguese verb “*esperançar*”, as well as the Spanish “*esperanzar*”, express well that hope must be understood as an active verb to avoid falling into the trap of superficial positivity. In French, there are also two different ways to speak about this notion: “*espoir*”, which evokes the attitude of waiting, and “*espérance*” which expresses the active hope in the light of God. The same nuance appears in the Arabic language which distinguishes between “*amal* (أمل)” and “*raja'* (رجاء)”, showing how there is much more to reflect about what we mean when we speak about “hope”.

Talking points to reflect on this year's theme and symbol

The different dimensions of hope

- *Christian hope is not superficial—it's concrete. Our hope is rooted in God's character, promises, and actions.*
- *Needs for metanoia, ecological conversion, and reconciliation with the Earth. The Spirit is the one guiding our conversion, leading us deeper into the comprehension of being a cosmic family.*
- *Repairs the broken relationship between humans and Earth, human creatures and other creatures, humans and God. Repair and repentance.*
- *To change the system, we must change our mindsets.*
- *Important for us is to listen to the voices that cry out and groan, communities who are losing land and*

livelihoods due to climate change, species and ecosystems being lost, victims of extraction and fossil fuel industries.

- *Active hope in our Christian communities can be seen in the care of creation, hearing the voice of the poor, hearing the cries of the Earth.*
- *Hope inspires us to act; because we are hopeful we can act and so see what we hope for. Because we are hopeful we are willing to act.*
- *Collective action creates grounding hope for those suffering from climate anxiety, being overwhelmed that time is running out. Christian hope fuels transformative action.*
- *Transformation takes time, we have to be patient. Hope is also a process, requires patience.*
- *Hope is faith in the things we do not see, hope is knowing that tomorrow will be better because Christ is resurrected, He defeated all evil, life overcomes all things.*
- *Active hope is a non-monetary value that has the power to change the world.*

Action as a sign of the firstfruits of hope

- *You don't see hope, hope is like a seed you have to be patient and nurture it with water to make it grow. If you don't include hope, the seed might not grow. We know sometimes the seed might die, but hope reminds us to keep planting other seeds.*
- *The firstfruits of hope are born when we work collectively, regenerating peace and harmony in all Creation and with Creation, nurturing peaceful coexistence, fidelity, honesty, and transparency among the whole cosmos.*

- *The Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty (FFNPT) is a global initiative that strives for an international regime that complements the Paris Agreement in addressing the still-growing supply of fossil fuels. It is a concrete action that can serve as a compass for a hopeful future.*
- *The FFNPT is a call for a transformation, not just adjusting our GHG outputs, but which points to a change of life that goes to phasing down and out of fossil fuel production.*
- *Action as the firstfruits of hope can look like many different things: advocacy campaigns, sustainability initiatives, and educational formations to help upskill Christian communities in their awareness of how care for Creation is central to our faith.*
- *The firstfruits of hope can be seen when we think and work collectively, when we recognize how we depend on Creation, when we listen to the cries of the Earth and the cries of the poor, when we listen to the voices of our global neighbors impacted by climate change, when we listen to the prophetic voices of indigenous sisters and brothers, when we listen to the different creatures that are going extinct and the ones still striving to live, when we listen to the voices of young people and children, when we learn from the slow and powerful cycles of life of different species, ecosystems, and biomes, when we work together with Creation and all creatures for a better future.*

How we are called to hope and act together with Creation

- *To hope and act together with Creation we must truly listen to how and why Creation is groaning. We need to push for more action, we're more aware than ever of the problems.*

- *Creation is groaning. Creation is part of God's revelation, we must learn from and with Creation to know how to hope and act for a better future.*
- *Although the testimony of indigenous Christians and their spiritualities are respected, they are not listened to. Usually, Christian churches find resistance to speaking about Earth or Creation as a being, while for indigenous and original peoples this is an intrinsic part of their cosmic worldview and way of living.*
- *Creation groans as fossil fuel industries create greenwashing campaigns for clean energy. They are expanding their energy businesses instead of actually phasing out of fossil fuels. They talk about energy transition, but they are only doing an energy expansion to keep their profits high.*
- *We must acknowledge the damages caused by selfish and foolish decisions that disregard the cries of the most marginalized, including refugees, or those displaced by climate change, mining, and ecological devastation. The presence of big oil companies at COP28 we saw last year is a clear example of this.*
- *As resources diminish and access to them diminishes, there's more war. The inevitable result of the climate crisis will be more violence. You can't have peace without an equitable sharing of resources.*
- *The African wisdom of Ubuntu teaches us that the sense of self is shaped by relationships with others. It takes a village to raise a child. It takes a cosmic collective family to care for Creation. I am because we are, the same goes with Creation. We are nature, nature is us, we are God's hands for global and cosmic justice.*