

PILGRIMAGE PAUSE #3:

Prairie Yield | Flowers and Soil

(Laudato Si' sections 32–42))

Pope Francis opens *Laudato Si'* with the verse: "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs." This emphasizes the Earth's role as a nurturing "sister and mother" and highlights the beauty and diversity of the natural world, including the "colored flowers and herbs" characteristic of prairies.

Prairie ecosystems support biodiversity and a diverse range of native plants and wildlife, including numerous insect species, birds, and mammals. Many of these species are rare or endangered and rely on prairies for food, shelter, and breeding grounds. Prairies also support soil health and water quality: Prairie vegetation, with its deep and intricate root systems, helps prevent erosion, filters pollutants, and improves soil structure. The extensive root systems of prairie plants deposit carbon deep into the soil layers, contributing to carbon sequestration and mitigating the effects of climate change. The Encyclical's call for addressing both environmental degradation and social injustice provides a strong framework for understanding and engaging in efforts to protect and restore creation.

Reflection: *Just as the elements of a prairie are connected above and below ground, we are connected with creation and with each other in many ways. Take a moment to ponder how you benefit from – and benefit – people and natural systems around the world. What does that tell you about how God cares for us?*