

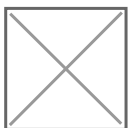
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Late evening sun illuminates rock formations at the Garden of the Gods in Colorado Springs, Colo., July 23, 2020. (OSV News/Bob Roller)

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I was standing in line at a pizza shop, ordering a few slices for a quick dinner at home. Someone tapped me on the shoulder.

"You're my hero," she said. I was her hero? I wasn't even wearing a cape.

Then she pointed to the reusable container I had brought with me, so I could save the waste of a big disposable box.

"I always mean to do that but I forget," she said. I laughed and explained that I usually forget as well. I am nobody's hero.

But we are in the heart of the Season of Creation, which spans five weeks between the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, which was Sept. 1, and the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi Oct. 4. And our U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has called for us to observe this in the spirit of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' encyclical on care for our common home.

If you visit the U.S. bishops' [website](#), you'll find a bulletin insert your parish can use. They also list the parishes and dioceses who have *Laudato Si'* action plans. It's an impressive list, but not nearly long enough.

None of us individually is going to save the world. But each of us can do something. We can bring our own carryout carton to the restaurant for leftovers, avoiding those plastic containers so many venues still use. We can take our reusable cup to most coffee shops. We can have a compost pile in the backyard for produce waste and coffee grounds, or, like my family, we can contract with a local firm that picks up compostables and turns them into rich topsoil, saving them from the landfill.

But here's something most of us don't pay as much attention to, yet it's one of the world's largest sources of microplastic pollution and energy waste. I'm talking about clothes.

"Fast fashion" has become relatively cheap since the days when Grandma bought one good winter coat that she wore forever. Today, inexpensive clothing lures us into buying the latest trend on a whim, and sometimes discarding it after a few wears.

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[EarthDay.org](https://www.earthday.org) reveals startling [statistics](#) on clothing waste. Clothing production has doubled globally since 2000. The average person today buys 60% more items of clothing than they did 15 years ago, and wears them fewer times.

The apparel industry is responsible for 4% of greenhouse gas emissions — the same as Germany, France and the United Kingdom combined.

And the materials used? The ubiquitous polyester is a nonrenewable crude oil derivative. Every time you wash it, and other synthetics, you send microplastics into our water system. Synthetic fabrics are the largest source of microplastic pollution in the world's oceans.

Think cotton's a good alternative? Non-organic cotton is one of the world's most pesticide-intensive crops. The pesticide runoff from cotton fields pollutes water. And, speaking of water, one little cotton T-shirt takes gallons of water to produce.

And all those clothes we give away? Most of those clothes are eventually headed for the landfill, where some will take centuries to disintegrate, or to the incinerator, or to a Third World country, often adding to their [pollution woes](#).

A prayerful nature walk, reflecting on the gift of our environment, is a great way to honor the Season of Creation.

Then, a quick look at my clothes closet reveals I have plenty right now. A "no buy" pledge will do me good, combined with an occasional trip to a nice thrift store. Who knows? Maybe I'll find my superhero cape there.

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