

Climate in the Pulpits



Homily Helps

Readings for the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sunday, November 17th, 2019

by Catherine Goggins for IPL-DMV

Find more Climate in the Pulpits resources, including a link to obtain Catholic Climate Covenant's 2019 St. Francis program, "We Are All Connected: Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor?" at vaip.org/ClimatePulpitResources

Where in Scripture do we hear a call to care for Creation?

From Catholic Relief Services

In the very beginning of time, God created all that is, and proclaimed it good (Genesis 1:1–31). He instructs us to "cultivate and care" for creation (Genesis 2:15). God also tells Moses to make sure the Israelites let their land lie fallow every 6 years, giving the land itself a Sabbath, or time to rest (Leviticus 25:4–5). The Scriptures brim with reminders that creation belongs to God and reveals his goodness (Romans 1:19–20, 1 Corinthians 10:26), which invites us to respect our Creator by caring for nature.

Why does the Church care about the environment?

From Catholic Relief Services

The Church has a long tradition of caring for creation. St. Francis of Assisi, considered a patron saint of ecology praised God for revealing his greatness through "Brother Sun" and "Sister Water." By being good stewards of creation, we recognize and honor our Creator. We also care for creation because we believe that people deserve to live in conditions that uphold their God-given dignity. When the environment suffers, human beings suffer too.

Why should Catholics take action on climate change?

From Catholic Climate Covenant

The Holy Father and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops recognize climate change as a moral issue that threatens Creation, places added burdens on poor people, and compromises the common good of all.

How can our parishes take action on climate change?

Our tradition teaches the sacred worth of every person, and affirms our interdependence with each other and with our natural world. But too often, only some have been able to enjoy nature's abundance, while others have been forced to bear more than their share of our pollution and waste. This is not right.

Our pollution is impacting communities across Virginia: our air and water are poisoned by coal mining and burning; our land is seized for pipelines; our low-lying neighborhoods are flooded by rising sea levels and our land is targeted for landfills and other toxic facilities. Pollution disproportionately burdens marginalized communities. Yet residents of these communities persist in advocating for their health and environmental quality, demonstrating resilience and power. We must stand with them.

The climate crisis makes our sacred responsibility to address environmental injustice even more urgent: burning fossil fuels is pouring heat-trapping climate pollution into our atmosphere, and those least responsible for damaging our climate, here and around the world, are among the first to be suffering the consequences.

This week, our congregation is raising up environmental justice alongside fellow faith communities. As we work together to repair our damaged climate, we affirm that every person has an equal right to the Tree of Life.

We must make sure that everyone most impacted—including low-income people, people of color, the vulnerable, and those on the frontlines—are part of every solution.

Today, our church is joining with faith leaders and congregations across the Commonwealth who are calling on our elected leaders at all levels of government to create fair and just climate policies. Please fill out the post card on your bulletin insert so that you can share it as an offering when the collection plate is passed.

The post card calls on our elected leaders to act on climate change with a focus on the concerns of those most vulnerable and most impacted by the climate crisis. Specifically, it calls on our legislators to create a permanent Council on Environmental Justice and fund it appropriately, to require new projects to be analyzed for their impact on environmental justice, and to require state and local agencies to regularly conduct environmental justice reviews.

Lectionary Readings for November 17th, 2019: 159

Reading 1 (Mal 3:19-20A), Responsorial Psalm (Psalms 98:5-6, 7-8, 9), Reading 2 (2 Thesolonians 3:7-12), Alleluia (Luke 21:28), Gospel (Luke 21:5-19)

In today's readings, the psalmist speaks of creation joyfully, "Let the sea and what fills it resound, the world and those who dwell in it; let the rivers clap their hands, the mountains shout with them for joy." It is a beautiful reminder of the ways that all of creation is made to glorify our creator. In reminding us that the "Lord comes to rule the earth with justice," the psalmist also offers a glimpse of the world we pray for and commit to working towards when we pray the words our Saviors taught us: "thy kingdom come."

In many ways, the image of an earthly king, concerned with wealth and power, willing to exploit other people, the earth, and the resources we share, is the exact opposite of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. We hear today, for instance, that God comes to rule with justice and equity. Father Gregory Boyle, who writes about his ministry with individuals formerly involved with gangs, uses the language of "kindom" to help us envision this. In doing so, he reminds us that we are one another's keepers. And to keep and care for one another, we must care for what Pope Francis calls "our common home."

Being good kin requires listening, mutual support, affection, and celebrating and lifting up one another. In this time, it also requires working to maintain a livable planet as sea-level rise and increasingly frequent and severe storms and droughts threaten homes, crops, traditional ways of life, animal species, and human lives. As we reflect on the vision of the "kindom" to come, Paul's letter informs us of the kind of work required to usher it in. His letter reminds us that the work will be challenging, toilsome at times, and often done without praise.

To imagine this "kindom" we're called to work to bring about, I'd like to invite each of you to use what Saint Ignatius referred to as "our prayerful imagination." When we imagine the "kindom" of God, how do we envision the perfect love we will have for one another as siblings in Christ? How do we envision a decision-making process governed by justice and equity? What might it look like to dwell in harmony with creation and all created beings? What would it look like to have, as Fr. Boyle describes it, a widening circle of compassion, with no one standing outside of it?

Let us give thanks for those already engaged in this hard work for the common good, especially indigenous peoples and communities on the front lines of climate change and environmental contamination. The work that they do (and the work that we are called to do as stewards of creation) is not easy, but in today's Gospel, Jesus encourages the twelve and reminds us that we are never alone in it. Jesus tells us even when we have much to fear, we ought to be ready to speak out for the "kindom" and that he will provide "wisdom in speaking" such that all "adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute."

In the early 1980s, it was a study by the United Church of Christ that coined the term "environmental racism," recognizing that toxic waste, like other environmental hazards, is concentrated in communities of predominately people of color. In the years since, this unjust reality persists, here in Virginia and around the world. The current reality is a far cry from true kinship. Frontline communities are left out of the decision-making process. The well-being of future generations is often an afterthought. Pipeline infrastructure is sited through low-income and predominantly African American communities. The global poor, who bear the least responsibility for heat-trapping emissions, suffer the most because of the climate crisis' hurricane, droughts, and rising seas.

Catholic Social Teaching encourages us to practice subsidiarity. That is to say that those closest to the issue ought to have a role in determining the way forward. Communities on the frontlines of environmental injustice are already speaking out and, as Catholics, we ought to listen and then respond. The time has come for each of us to speak out. Fortunately, Jesus himself has promised to be with us in the pursuit of justice.

On following page: Suggested hymns, prayers of the faithful

Suggested Hymns

Tend the Ground (from the album *Our Common Home* at OCP.org)

Litany for the Earth (from the album *Our Common Home* at OCP.org)

Sacred Creation (from the album *Our Common Home* at OCP.org)

Every Creature is Sister and Brother (from the album *Our Common Home* at OCP.org)

All Creatures of Our God and King

For the Beauty of the Earth

How Great Thou Art

Prayers of the Faithful (to choose from)

That God may give us wisdom to listen and courage to act on our call to care for our common home and all those with whom we share it, we pray to the Lord.

R: *LORD, hear our prayer.*

For communities that have long borne a disproportionate environmental burden, whether due to extraction, pollution, droughts, or climate-fueled storms, we pray to the Lord.

R: *LORD, hear our prayer.*

That God would inspire policy makers, elected officials, advocates, business leaders, and communities to seek the common good by caring for our common home, we pray to the Lord.

R: *LORD, hear our prayer.*

That God may enlighten our hearts to learn from and stand with all those suffering, especially communities of color and those living in poverty, who are too often excluded from the decision-making process, we pray to the Lord.

R: *LORD, hear our prayer.*

That God liberate us from the sins of ingratitude, environmental racism, short-sightedness, exclusion, greed, and environmental destruction and allow us to help usher in the “kingdom,” we pray to the Lord.

R: *LORD, hear our prayer.*

*Climate in the Pulpits Virginia is a program of Interfaith Power & Light (DC.MD.NoVA),
Virginia Interfaith Power & Light, and Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions.*

This and all 2019 Climate in the Pulpits resources can be downloaded online at vaipl.org/ClimatePulpitResources