



Climate in the Pulpits

VOTE: Committing Ourselves to Climate Justice and Beloved Community 2020

Homily Helps

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings for the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi
Sunday, October 4th, 2020

Find more 2020 Climate in the Pulpits resources, including a link to obtain Catholic Climate Covenant's 2020 St. Francis program, *"The Healing Power of Love in Action: Creation Care in a Time of Pandemic and Partisanship"* at IPLdmv.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?

We come into mass seeking the blessings of community and prayer, and go forth again into the world with a charge to love and to serve. But too often, the way we travel from place to place, by car or by airplane, still burns fossil fuels.

We understand that burning fossil fuels is not only dirtying our air but also pouring heat-trapping climate pollution into our atmosphere, hurting our neighbors here and around the world. We are called to work together to move our transportation system and our entire economy off of fossil fuels, and to repair our damaged climate.

In his encyclical letter on “Care for Our Common Home,” Pope Francis makes it clear that failing to be a good and loving steward of Creation is a sin, a sin that offends God and harms ourselves and our neighbors. The way that our actions impact others – those living near the landfills where our trash is taken, communities dealing with sea-level rise, and farmers facing unpredictable weather to grow their crops – are not always clear to us, yet we know these people are our neighbors. The bishops tell us that “loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world.” We know that future generations too will be impacted by our actions and inaction when it comes to the ways we care or fail to care for “our common home.” These ecological sins offend not just our global neighbors, but our Creator who has so generously blessed us and entrusted us as stewards of Creation.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis quotes the Australian bishops referencing the importance of true reconciliation: “To achieve such reconciliation, we must examine our lives and acknowledge the ways in which we have harmed God’s Creation through our actions and our failure to act. We need to experience a conversion, or **change of heart**” (218). The words “change of heart” are powerful. When we apologize to a friend, spouse, or co-worker for speaking harshly or arriving late, we are also committing to actually making a change! Today we have heard a great deal about God’s mercy and we praise God for God’s perpetual willingness to forgive. We are reminded that mercy is worthy of response – having been forgiven ourselves, we must be merciful to those who “trespass against us” and work to avoid sin moving forward.

Lectionary Readings for October 4th, 2020: 139

Reading 1 (Isaiah 5:1-7), Responsorial Psalm (Psalms 80:9, 12, 13-14, 15-16, 19-20), Reading 2 (Philippians 4:6-9), Alleluia (John 15:16), Gospel (Matthew 21:33-43), Pss III

Throughout today’s readings, we have imagery that shows us God’s connection to God’s Creation. In Exodus, God comes to the people with thunder and lightning, and a smoking mountain. In Psalm 19, we hear poetically that “the heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork ... In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy.”

And in Matthew, we have the image of God as the keeper of a vineyard, with tenants who are charged with the responsibility to ensure a good harvest.

Of course, none of these passages are particularly *about* caring for Creation. The reading from Exodus is about the delivery of the 10 Commandments, and the parable in Matthew speaks to the people's rejection of the prophets and foretells Jesus's crucifixion. If you weren't looking for a word on the natural world, you might miss it entirely.

And that is so often how we have failed to care for or even notice the blessings of our natural world. Our use and abuse of natural resources, and particularly our wasteful and harmful use of fossil fuels, has brought us a crisis that too often feels like it's lurking in the background.

Burning fossil fuels creates pollution that traps heat. Over time, this heat-trapping climate pollution warms the planet and sets off a chain reaction. Going back to Psalm 19, we've turned the sun's rays—something the psalmist tells us we should greet joyfully—into something insufferable, like a ski jacket on a warm day. The damage caused by our pollution is far-reaching: severe weather, heat waves, sea-level rise, crop failure, and mass extinctions. Because of climate pollution, the psalmist's line that "nothing is hid from [the sun's] heat" begins to feel like more of a threat.

But with so much going on right now, it's easy to feel sometimes like the climate crisis is at the bottom of the list. Between Covid-19, lost jobs, and work for racial equity, congregations have been extra busy caring for the immediate needs of our communities.

If we look closer, however, we can see that the climate crisis is not separate from any of our other problems; our damaged climate is impacting so many neighbors right now, and making all of these other crises worse.

Covid-19 becomes deadlier when it infects communities who have long been forced to breathe the air pollution caused by toxic facilities that burn fossil fuels. And although that pollution affects everyone, it's been especially harmful to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color who have been forced to breathe far more than their fair share of pollution for decades. That pollution is one of the reasons that communities of color have been disproportionately affected by Covid-19.

And as much as this virus has hurt our economy and cost our communities jobs, we know that climate change will be even more damaging. Just in monetary terms, it's estimated that by 2050, climate change could cost us a total of 8 trillion dollars.

When our leaders can see the damage that fossil fuels are doing to our neighbors and to God's Creation, yet continue to invest in their false promises, that is a form of the idolatry that the Ten Commandments forbid.

The sin of idolatry is sharply exposed in today's Gospel reading. In the reading from Matthew, a parable depicts the people rejecting the prophets, and ultimately, Jesus. But the backdrop of this parable portrays the world as God's vineyard, and humanity as its tenants.

We, the tenants, are judged based upon our care for the neighbors God has sent us and our care for the vineyard God has given us. Think about that—Jesus did not tell us that we have “dominion over” the natural world, or that we should use God’s resources however we choose. Jesus showed us an image of humanity as tenants charged with the good upkeep of God’s Creation.

The charge to care for the vineyard isn’t just a suggestion; it’s a commandment, with consequences. After expelling the unworthy tenants, Jesus says the owner will “lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.”

So we are called to work together to care for the vineyard, to clean our air and repair our damaged climate. We’ve seen congregations across our region do just that through actions like installing solar panels, planting trees, and speaking out to our elected leaders. But this fall, one of the most important actions we can take to care for Creation is to vote our values!

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called voting a “moral responsibility,” and I believe it’s a moral responsibility for every one of us, too. Voting is a powerful way that we can choose leaders who will reject the idolatry of fossil fuels. Voting is a powerful way that we can show our care for our neighbors, and value everyone’s voices. I think, voting our values is part of what is required of us as good tenants of God’s vineyard.

So I hope you’ll join so many caring people across our region who are requesting a mail ballot (Maryland and Virginia voters; DC registered voters will be mailed a ballot and do not need to request one), voting safely, and helping to choose leaders who share our commitment to repairing our damaged climate.

I’d actually like to take a couple of minutes right now to give everyone time to make sure you’re registered to vote and to request a mail ballot.

Even when we’re gathered online, we can take action together, and in community! So in a moment, we’re going to play a few minutes of music, during which I invite everyone to click on the link we’re putting [in the chat/in the comments] right now, <https://ipldmv.org/vote>. Click on that link to open a form that will walk you step-by-step through making sure you’re registered to vote and have a chance to request a vote-by-mail ballot.

To paste in the chat/comments:

Take action with us
now: <http://ipldmv.org/vote>

Or text MDLCV to 52886

If you’re not somewhere where you can use a keyboard right now, then our friends at the League of Conservation Voters can help. Whether or not you live in Maryland, you can text MDLCV – for “Maryland League of Conservation Voters” – to 52886, again: text MDLCV to 52886. We’ll also place those instructions in the chat below the form.

Thank you for taking the time for this moral responsibility. Today we can commit to voting our values and to choosing leaders who care for God's vineyard and for our climate. And every day, we have an opportunity to make choices, in our homes and beyond, for the climate, for God's creatures, for our neighbors, and for future generations.

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

For your Creation, LORD; the common home you provide for us and all living creatures, that those who work to protect and defend it may be strengthened in their testimony, trusting always in your wisdom. We pray to the LORD.

R: *LORD, hear our prayer.*

For a generous outpouring of love and support to our sisters and brothers who are victims of wars, insurrections, and natural disasters, all of which are made worse by the impacts of climate change. We pray to the LORD.

R: *LORD, hear our prayer.*

With a shared sense of responsibility to care for God's beautiful, life-giving Creation, we pray that the goals of energy transition, a live-able climate, and protection of life for all are attained. We pray to the LORD.

R: *LORD, hear our prayer.*

That, inspired by the example of St. Francis of Assisi - the Patron Saint of ecology - each of us may become instruments of God's healing for our imperiled planet and its inhabitants. We pray to the Lord.

R: *LORD, hear our prayer.*

For the faith-based groups and grassroots movements for social change that are championing

both equity and climate justice. We pray to the Lord.

R: *LORD, hear our prayer.*

Additional resources

Online course: Laudato Si' and Integral Ecology

This course is offered for everyone who wants to gain insights into the major themes of Pope Francis' groundbreaking encyclical and who desires to become a part of the global Franciscan movement towards ecological conversion and systemic change. Begins September 7th:

laudatosi-school-77aa.thinkific.com/courses/laudato-si-and-integral-ecology

Catholic Climate Covenant's 2020 Feast of St. Francis program:

"The Healing Power of Love in Action: Creation Care in a Time of Pandemic and Partisanship"

The Covenant's 90-minute program enables U.S. Catholics to host in-person or virtual sessions to grow in their understanding and call to care for Creation as integral to the Catholic faith through prayer, education and action. It is part of the Season of Creation being marked worldwide with hundreds of events, prayers and activities. The program includes prayers, readings, a short video, discussion questions, and suggested activities. This year, in addition to an in-person group version, we also provide a version for individual/virtual group use.

The 2020 Feast of St. Francis program is framed around St. Francis' famous prayer, the Canticle of Creatures, to illuminate our current journey from the pandemic, from indifference to climate change, from political partisanship, to a place of healing through God, with each other and with Creation. The program ends by offering ways to act, including courageous conversations with friends and family, learning more about our civic duties as Catholics, pledging to vote, and ways to embrace the call to protect life, our vulnerable communities and neighbors, and God's Creation which sustains life.

Sign up here to download the program: catholicclimatecovenant.org/program/feast-st-francis

Climate in the Pulpits / on the Bimah / in the Minbar is a collaboration between Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions, Interfaith Power & Light (DC.MD.NoVA), and Virginia Interfaith Power & Light.

Find more resources at IPLdmv.org/ClimatePulpitResources.