

# CARING FOR GOD'S CREATION

RESOURCES FOR LITURGY, PREACHING, AND TAKING ACTION



BASED ON *LAUDATO SI'*

## Introduction:

As Catholics, we have a rich heritage of faith, tradition, and social teaching to draw upon as we seek to live the Gospel faithfully in our own time and situation. As a community of faith, we seek to protect the life and dignity of every person, to care for those who are vulnerable, and to preserve our common home for our children and for future generations. In parishes, dioceses and other Catholic organizations, we encourage efforts to bring about discussion on issues affecting the environment (climate change, consumption, pollution, stewardship of the land) that is civil and constructive, that invokes the virtue of prudence in seeking solutions, and that is more responsive to the needs of the poor, both here in the United States and abroad. As Catholics, we have a unique opportunity and responsibility to make a difference in addressing the impacts these issues present, particularly on those least able to endure the burdens.

## Table of Contents:

[What You Can Do Today](#)

[Liturgical Aids: Scripture, Prayer and Song for the Parish and Home](#)

[Preaching Environmental Justice](#)

[Environmental Quotes](#)

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## What You Can Do Today

### LEARN OUR CATHOLIC TRADITION

Here are some helpful learning resources on the call to care for our common home:

- Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'* [*On Care for Our Common Home*] and this accompanying [discussion guide](#) and [handout](#).
- Pope Francis' post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Querida Amazonia* [*Beloved Amazonia*] and accompanying [study guide](#).
- The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) statement, *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good* is a particularly useful document for discussion groups.
- The USCCB's Environmental Justice Program Web site: [www.usccb.org/environment](http://www.usccb.org/environment)

### TAKING ACTION

Questions for consideration:

(Taken from [Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching](#), 1991)

For Catholics

- How are we called to care for God's creation?
- How may we apply our social teaching with its emphasis on the life and dignity of the human person, to the challenge of protecting the earth, our common home?
- What can we in the Catholic community offer to the environmental movement, and what can we learn from it?
- How can we encourage a serious dialogue in the Catholic community—in our parishes, schools, colleges, universities and other settings—on the significant ethical dimensions of the environmental crisis?

For People of Good Will across the Country:

- How do we proceed to frame a common and workable environmental ethic?
- What steps can we take to devise a sustainable and just economy?
- What can we do to more firmly link in the public mind the commitment to justice and duties to the environment?
- How can we recognize and confront the possible conflicts between environmental care and the economy, and work for the common good to find solutions that value both people and the earth?
- How do we secure protection for all God's creatures, including those who live in poverty and the unborn?

- How can the United States, as a nation, act responsibly about this ever more global problem?
- In working for a sustainable global economy, how do we fulfill our obligations in justice to those who are poor in developing nations?

## TAKING ACTION IN MY STATE

1. Encourage lawmakers to improve and update public transportation options. When effective and far-reaching public transportation systems are in place, fewer cars clog the roads to emit greenhouse gases and air-polluting contaminants.
2. Join local efforts of groups working with elected officials and community leaders to explore ways your local community can do business and reduce harmful emissions.
3. Organize or participate in local and state Earth Day celebrations, and in [Laudato Si' Week](#) (May 16-24) to raise awareness of the challenges of climate change.
4. Pay attention to legislation going before the state legislature that concern climate, emissions, or energy policies. Urge legislators to remember that people who live in poverty in your state may suffer the most from climate change and that legislative measures should include provisions that address disproportionate economic impacts, e.g., in heating and transportation costs.

## TAKING ACTION NATIONALLY

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is urging that any legislative action on climate change include provisions that (a) ease the burden on low-income communities and those who live in poverty; (b) offer relief for workers who may be displaced because of climate change policies; and (c) promote the development and use of alternate renewable and clean-energy resources, including the transfer of such technologies and also technical assistance that may be appropriate and helpful to developing countries in meeting the challenges of climate change. Write to your senators and representatives in Congress. Let them know that you care about climate change and support action on a national level that includes the three key priorities above. For background information on the issue, go to [www.usccb.org/environment](http://www.usccb.org/environment) and the Catholic Climate Covenant website at <http://catholicclimatecovenant.org>.

All across our country, Catholics are taking the St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor and joining the Catholic Climate Covenant. The St. Francis Pledge is a promise and a commitment by Catholic individuals, families, parishes, organizations and institutions to live our faith by protecting God's Creation and advocating on behalf of people in

poverty who face the harshest impacts of global climate change. To join the Covenant, you commit to act on each of the five elements of the St. Francis Pledge.

## THE SAINT FRANCIS PLEDGE

I/We Pledge to:

- PRAY and reflect on the duty to care for God’s Creation and protect the poor and vulnerable.
- LEARN about and educate others on the causes and moral dimensions of climate change.
- ASSESS how we-as individuals and in our families, parishes and other affiliations- contribute to climate change by our own energy use, consumption, waste, etc.
- ACT to change our choices and behaviors to reduce the ways we contribute to climate change.
- ADVOCATE for Catholic principles and priorities in climate change discussions and decisions, especially as they impact those who are poor and vulnerable.

# Liturgical Aids: Scripture, Prayer and Song for the Parish and Home

## PRAYERS OF PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING FROM SCRIPTURE

Gn 1:1-28	Creation Story
Gn 9:8-17	God's Covenant with Noah and All Creation
Ps 8	The Majesty of God
Ps 65	Thanksgiving for God's Blessings
Ps 104	Praise of God the Creator
Ps 146	Trust in God Alone
Ps 147	Zion's Grateful Praise to Her Bountiful Lord
Ps 148	Hymn of All Creation to the Almighty Creator
Dn 3:52-90	Praise of God; Praise of God's Creation
Jn 1: 1-5	In the Beginning Was the Word
Rev 21:14	New Heavens and New Earth

## SPECIAL OCCASIONS FOR PRAYER

Rogation Days: Traditionally the three days before the Solemnity of the Ascension

Season of Creation: September 1 to October 4

Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi: October 4

World Food Day: Week of October 16

Fast for World Harvest: Thursday before Thanksgiving

World Day of Peace: January 1

Earth Day: April 22

*Laudato Si'* Week: May 16-24, 2020

World Environment Day: Early June

Arbor Day: Varies by state

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

### *Old Testament*

Gn 1; 2:4-7	God's Wonderful Creation Is Good
Gn 2:15	God Instructed Us to Tend Creation
Gn 9:8-17	God's Covenant with Noah and All Creation
Lv 25:23-24	The Land Is God's
Ps 8	The Majesty of God
Ps 65	Thanksgiving for God's Blessings
Ps 104	Praise of God the Creator
Ps 146	Trust in God Alone

Ps 147        Zion's Grateful Praise to Her Bountiful Lord  
Ps 148        Hymn of All Creation to the Almighty Creator

*New Testament*

Mt 6:25-34    Learning to Trust in God as Does Nature  
Jn 1:1-5        Through Him All Things Came into Being  
Rom 8:18-25   From the Beginning until Now, the Entire Creation Has Been Groaning in  
                  One Great Act of Waiting for Redemption  
Col 1:15-23    In Christ All Things Have Their Being  
Rev 21:1-5     Promise of the New Creation

APPROPRIATE MASSES FOR VARIOUS NEEDS AND OCCASIONS IN THE ROMAN MISSAL

- 25. At the Beginning of the Civil Year
- 26. For the Sanctification of Human Labor
- 27. At Seedtime
- 28. After the Harvest
- 30. For the Preservation of Peace and Justice
- 33. In Time of Famine or for Those Suffering Hunger
- 36. For Fine Weather
- 49. For Giving Thanks to God

Consult the *Lectionary for Mass* for the various Scripture readings assigned to these Masses.

PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

That we may receive the grace to respect and care for God's creation, let us pray to the Lord.

*Lord, hear our prayer.*

That all creatures may be blessed as a sign of God's wondrous love, let us pray to the Lord.

*Lord, hear our prayer.*

That we may work to end the suffering of those in poverty and bring healing to all of God's creation, let us pray to the Lord.

*Lord, hear our prayer.*

That we may use our technological inventiveness to undo the damage we have done to God's creation and to sustain God's gift of nature, let us pray to the Lord.

*Lord, hear our prayer.*

## ST. FRANCIS'S CANTICLE OF THE SUN

O most High, almighty, good Lord God,  
to you belong praise, glory, honor, and all blessing!

Praised be my Lord God with all creatures;  
and especially our brother the sun,  
which brings us the day, and the light;  
fair is he, and shining with a very great splendor:  
O Lord, he signifies you to us!

Praised be my Lord for our sister the moon,  
and for the stars,  
which God has set clear and lovely in heaven.

Praised be my Lord for our brother the wind,  
and for air and cloud, calms and all weather,  
by which you uphold in life all creatures.

Praised be my Lord for our sister water,  
which is very serviceable to us,  
and humble, and precious, and clean.

Praised be my Lord for brother fire,  
through which you give us light in the darkness:  
and he is bright, and pleasant, and very mighty,  
and strong.

Praised be my Lord for our mother the Earth,  
which sustains us and keeps us,  
and yields diverse fruits,  
and flowers of many colors, and grass.

Praised be my Lord for all those who pardon  
one another for God's love's sake,



and who endure weakness and tribulation;  
blessed are they who peaceably shall endure,  
for you, O most High, shall give them a crown!

Praised be my Lord for our sister,  
the death of the body,  
from which no one escapes.  
Woe to him who dies in mortal sin!

Blessed are they who are found walking  
by your most holy will,  
for the second death shall have no  
power to do them harm.

Praise you, and bless you the Lord,  
and give thanks to God, and serve God  
with great humility.

(St. Francis of Assisi, 1182-1226)

## BLESSINGS FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS FROM THE *BOOK OF BLESSINGS*

Order for the Blessing of Animals  
Order for the Blessing of Fields and Flocks  
Order for the Blessing of Seeds at Planting Time  
Order for the Blessing on the Occasion of Thanksgiving for the Harvest

## HYMNS

*All Creatures of Our God and King  
All Things Bright and Beautiful  
Come Rejoice Before Your Maker  
Earth and All Stars  
For the Beauty of the Earth  
For the Fruits of This Creation  
For the Healing of the Nations  
God We Praise You  
God Whose Firm Is All Creation  
God Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens  
Great God Our Source and Lord of Space  
His Voice Is the Thunder and the Storm  
How Marvelous God's Greatness*

*Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee  
Let All the Earth Their Voices Raise  
Let All Things Now Living  
Let the Heavens Be Glad  
Let the Whole Creation Cry  
Many and Great, O God, Are Your Works  
Morning Has Broken  
O God Beyond All Praising  
Over the Chaos of the Empty Waters  
Praise the Lord, Ye Heavens  
Sing to the Lord of Harvest  
Sing Out, Earth and Skies  
The Works of the Lord Are Created in Wisdom  
This Is My Father's World  
We Plow the Fields and Scatter*

## Preaching Environmental Justice: Suggestions for Homilists

Right will dwell in the desert and justice abide in the orchard. (Is 32:16)

Homilists should not have to strain to preach environmental justice. It demands no great leap to move from the Scriptures to today's environmental concerns. The Lectionary already offers great variety for the homilist to address contemporary environmental issues out of our Catholic tradition.

### DRAW FROM THE LECTIONARY AND LITURGICAL CYCLE

Our sacred texts are frequently quite attuned to themes of God's creation. Scripture speaks directly to us about creation. Rivers clap their hands, deserts bloom, and God clothes the fields of flowers. New Testament stories of stewardship, vineyard cultivation, and shepherding, not to mention parables taken from nature such as the mustard seed or the wheat that grows during the night, are easy lead-ins to preaching environmental justice.

The liturgical cycle likewise offers a variety of motifs from the darkness-to-light themes of Advent to the death-and-rebirth themes of Easter, which can open up reflections on the natural world and its place in the economy of redemption. The calendar of the saints and several of the "Masses for Various Needs and Occasions" found in the Roman Missal also offer occasions to deepen a congregation's sense of humanity's ties to the natural world in God's one creation.

The Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi (the Church's patron of ecology), for example, offers a unique opportunity to reflect on how his widened heart grew from love for those who are poor to embrace all God's people. Among the Scripture selections for the Mass for the Preservation of Peace and Justice, Isaiah 32:15-18 points to the bond between justice and the earth's flourishing.

### START WITH WHAT YOU KNOW (OR CAN EASILY LEARN)

First, a homilist has to set aside the unfounded fear that preaching about environmental justice strains Scripture or is out of keeping with liturgical themes. There may still be an unspoken fear that one must become an expert on many technical problems. To be sure, an educated person's knowledge of environmental issues is helpful; but there is much one can usefully say without pretending to be an ecologist or an expert in environmental policy.

A homilist can simply draw a congregation's attention to the immediate world around them: beautiful sunrises and sunsets, the life-giving nature of water, the beauty of clouds

and mountains, but also the smog in the valley, toxic dumps in low-income neighborhoods, strip mining in the local hills, or the sheer volume of a city's garbage. Without reaching beyond their own ministerial training, homilists can make links for the congregation with what the wider Church has been saying about environment as a moral issue. A good place to start might be our own United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' pastoral statement, *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*.

The 1991 pastoral statement sketches several distinct themes that may be of use to Catholic homilists. These include the following: (1) a sacramental view of the universe, (2) respect for human life, (3) the global common good, (4) an ethics of solidarity, (5) the universal purpose of created things, (6) an option for those who are poor, and (7) an ideal of authentic development of the human person. Homilists can also draw from *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*, the U.S. Catholic bishops' 2001 pastoral statement, as well as chapter ten of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, on safeguarding the environment (see below) and Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'* [*On Care for Our Common Home*] and post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Querida Amazonia* [*Beloved Amazon*]. The major themes of *Laudato Si'* are summarized on [this handout](#).

Homilists can also do a service to the universal Church by acquainting parishioners with the environmental concerns of the local Church in other parts of the world. Bishops' conferences from around the world have made wonderful statements about environmental justice and climate change, and many of these statements are lifted up in *Laudato Si'*

Still another aspect of preaching in this area is the introduction of broader themes of spirituality. Today's congregations are hungry for spirituality, and many people find spiritual solace in nature. Leading people from their native delight in nature to "the Love that moves the stars" can begin to heal hearts that feel divided between care for creation and love for the Creator. Reflection on the humility of Christ or of St. Francis, to take another example, can be an occasion to insert a forgotten but much-needed Christian virtue into the making of a Christian ecological consciousness.

## MAKE IT MAINLINE

In today's busy world, people are grateful for a message that helps them to integrate their otherwise fragmented lives. Indeed, for many that is the immediate religious appeal of care for creation. Environmental justice cannot be just another "to do" item to be added to a long list of unfulfilled wishes. Environmental justice will enter the hearts and minds of people only when it helps them integrate their lives.

The more that environmental justice is linked to our reading of the Scriptures, to our worship, to our spirituality, the more it is integrated into the whole of our life as a believing community – then the more it can be a source of renewal for ourselves and for all creation.

Care for creation is a constant theme in the Scriptures, in both the Old and New Testament. Environmental justice is thoroughly embedded in the Church's social teaching, and it has been a repeated theme of Church teaching. See the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*<sup>1</sup>, particularly chapters four and ten (excerpts below are from these chapters).

The demands of the common good are dependent on the social conditions of each historical period and are strictly connected to respect for and the integral promotion of the person and his fundamental rights. *These demands concern above all the commitment to peace, the organization of the State's powers, a sound juridical system, the protection of the environment, and the provision of essential services to all, some of which are at the same time human rights. ... Nor must one forget the contribution that every nation is required in duty to make towards a true worldwide cooperation for the common good of the whole of humanity and for future generations also.* (no. 166)

Care for the environment represents a challenge for all of humanity. It is a matter of a common and universal duty, that of respecting a common good, *destined for all, by preventing anyone from using "with impunity the different categories of beings, whether living or inanimate animals, plants, the natural elements—simply as one wishes, according to one's own economic needs."* *It is a responsibility that must mature on the basis of the global dimension of the present ecological crisis and the consequent necessity to meet it on a worldwide level, since all beings are interdependent in the universal order established by the Creator: "One must take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system, which is precisely the 'cosmos.'"* (no. 466, citing *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 34)

Responsibility for the environment, the common heritage of mankind, extends not only to present needs but also to those of the future. *"We have inherited from past generations, and we have benefited from the work of our contemporaries: for this reason we have obligations towards all, and we cannot refuse to interest ourselves in those who will come after us, to enlarge the human family."* This is a responsibility that present generations have towards the future, *a responsibility that also concerns*

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<sup>1</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2004).

*individual States and the international community.* (no. 467, citing *Populorum Progressio*, no. 17)

Large, varied congregations, like many of our Catholic parishes in the United States, are best served by integrating preaching on creation into the ordinary worship life of the parish and the living tradition of the Church. This includes Catholic social teaching. Preaching is a place for basic information and application to the life of the faithful. The community will respond positively to a simple homily that shows prayerful appreciation for the goodness of creation or the responsibilities of stewardship of the earth.

## HOMILY NOTES FOR SELECTED SPECIAL OCCASIONS

### Rogation Days

Background: Rogation Days were customarily held during the three days preceding the Feast of the Ascension, in which prayers, fasting and abstinence were observed in preparation for the celebration of the Ascension of the Lord. Farmers would often have their fields blessed for a bountiful harvest. While the observance of these days are generally no longer required, they are still marked in some places. When the Liturgical Calendar permits it, this period could be a good time for a special celebration on the theme of environmental justice, drawing from the Masses or other sources mentioned in the previous section. The Rogation Days involved prayers for the harvest, expressions of contrition and Eucharistic processions with Benediction in the fields, and this penance-petition structure is easily adapted to contemporary prayer services focused on environmental justice.

Homily Suggestions: Many of the readings assigned for these Masses speak of the goodness of God in creation. A central theme here might be the solidarity of the human family by virtue of creation and the duty of solidarity with those in need. (See Pope John Paul II's *On Social Concern* and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' statement *Renewing the Earth* on solidarity.) God's generosity in creation ought to serve as a model and warrant for our generosity toward the poor in their struggles for a good life in a healthy environment.

### Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi (October 4)

Background: This Memorial concludes the [Season of Creation](#), celebrated each year on September 1 to October 4. By both official designation of Pope John Paul II and popular usage, St. Francis of Assisi is patron of care for God's creation. While Francis tamed wolves, preached to birds, and wrote the Canticle of the Sun, he was above all a friend of the poor. Indeed, ecology-minded Franciscans argue that it was his struggle to love persons in

poverty perfectly that gave rise to the humility in which he became a brother to all creation. For that reason, the Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi is an especially good time to address questions of environmental justice, particularly environmental racism and environmental injury to the poor.

Homily Suggestions: St. Francis was so devoted to the literal imitation of Christ that he received the stigmata, the wounds of Christ in his own flesh. In Francis's case, however, this special grace was the fruit of a life given to the imitation of Christ in humility and poverty and to the service of those who are poor and marginalized in society. The Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi, therefore, is an appropriate time to make the case that an option for those who are poor stands at the heart of Christian environmentalism.

Among the choices for Gospel readings in the Lectionary's Common of Holy Men and Women is the beginning of Matthew 5: the Beatitudes, a thumbnail version of the Gospel as addressed to those who are poor and dispossessed. Each of the sayings is addressed to an audience that Francis, like Jesus, might have encouraged. Especially worth noting is "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land." This text offers opportunity to reflect on the dispossession of those who are poor from their land in many parts of the world, a phenomenon that contributes to environmental degradation and swelling refugee flows. It also suggests an opportunity to explain the Church's teaching on "the common purpose of created things" – a cornerstone of Church teaching on economic life, and a doctrine that demands equitable sharing of the earth's resources by all people.

## OTHER HOMILY IDEAS

*Special occasions like Laudato Si' Week, the Rogation Days, the Season of Creation, or the Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi are potential times to preach about environmental justice. However, it is also helpful to integrate environmental themes throughout the liturgical year as Scripture and the Lectionary suggest. Caring for God's creation is an ongoing mission, not just another subject for special observance.*

### Creating an Environment with Our God

Good homilists identify with their audience and become a "we" through their delivery and message. They are instrumental in creating an awareness of the sacredness of the moment, of the "here" and "now" – a time to encounter God. Homilies differ in winter and summer, morning and evening, rural and urban settings. To be aware of people, place, and time is the most elementary form of environmental consciousness. Some suggestions may help deepen this experience:

- *Community Enterprise*

The homilist does not have to be an expert on ecology. The homilist shares with all the vocation of healing a wounded earth. Preaching pulls in the experience of the community, and the homilist should reflect or mirror that experience.

- *Respect for All Creatures*

Whenever speaking of human beings, the crown of creation, and plants, animals, and all of nature, do so with the deepest respect. We are all creatures of God and must learn to live in harmony and peace. This sense of respect expresses the dynamic interrelationship that all creatures share with each other.

- *Handling Controversies*

Certain environmental concerns can divide a congregation. It is best for the homilist to address a problem through a series of questions rather than suggesting a resolution. For example, connecting our faith tradition (Scripture and teaching) to an issue by asking how the tradition might impact or inform an issue is one way to begin. Good preaching allows parishioners to share their thoughts in light of our faith and Catholic teachings.

- *Gratitude*

The homily should express thankfulness for the rich gifts of God's creation. Our awareness of the mystery and beauty of the web of life must be expressed in a variety of ways. Homilist and people together become more aware of God's gifts of creation and together ask for forgiveness for the acts of environmental destructiveness and misuse of resources.

## MAKING HOLY PLACE AND TIME WITH CHRIST, OUR REDEEMER

Try frequently to begin your homilies with examples from the world of nature. These examples serve as a setting or composition of time and place, a special flavor for the religious theme to follow. Our liturgical prayer life is already rich with direct references to God's creation, and the liturgical calendar reflects the seasons.

This practice of environmental awareness by the homilist highlights not only nature's gifts, but also the propensity of human beings to misuse God's gift of creation in our everyday lives. Select vivid examples of God's goodness and human misdeeds or healing based on the parish's location/climate and the homilist's creative imagination. Suggestions for some times and places follow.

- *January*

Creeks, rivers, and other forms of moving water, including ice, manifest the flow of life itself. A gurgling stream or rushing river, even in midwinter's rest, is the sign that new life is



coming forth, even when it is not yet perceptible in a snow-covered landscape. Our life in Christ begins through the saving water of Baptism; since this is so, we have an obligation to protect and save the water. Water pollution is widespread, denying safe drinking water to millions of people.

- *February*

Soil under our feet goes unnoticed, though this first foot of soil is where most living organisms dwell. The health of the fragile skin of our earth is of utmost importance. Humility comes from the Latin word for soil, "humus." From and unto dust is the humbling message to each of us touched by the dust of Ash Wednesday. Soil is rich and fertile but also prone to erosion and pollution.

- *March*

The winds of March point to the power of God's Spirit working in us. We need to listen and respond to the gentle breezes of the Spirit; but will we, or will we be too distracted? The rebirth of spring reminds us of the energy of nature so that we ask ourselves whether we waste or wisely use energy – electricity, oil, gas, etc. Can we and should we continue to use nonrenewable fossil fuels, often with accompanying air pollution, at the rate we do? Or will the environmental ills we cause today call us in the future as a society to use wind and solar energy?

- *April*

Lush and blooming vistas beckon us to take to the road and to explore. As we itch to go out and travel more in springtime, let us reflect on the mixed blessings. Interconnected communities and beautiful scenery are often coupled with air pollution, consumption of scarce petroleum, congestion, excessive mobility, and noise.

- *May*

Flowers in Mary's month tie us closely to the reawakening earth. The time of Resurrection and expectant Pentecost is one of buds, blossoms, wildflowers, and greening of meadows and lawns. Days lengthen and we welcome the warmth of the sun after the long winter. Jesus is risen and is present in our midst, and so we rise and ascend with him.

- *June*

Wildlife fills our life with joy and refreshment. Songbirds and birds of prey, squirrels and rabbits, butterflies and lightning bugs all carry a message worth discovering in early summer. Do we see and hear them, or do we overlook them, even despise them? Are they simply an annoyance, or do we come to know, love, and even serve these fellow creatures by providing protection and habitat?

- *July*

We may be more aware of community relations in this month of Independence Day, visits, festivals, communal celebrations, and family reunions. Do our community and home exude hospitality and welcome? Are we able to welcome strangers into our community and open our social circles wider? Do we see connections between hospitality to people and to other creatures? Is there a connection between community relations and environmental concerns?

- *August*

We may come to appreciate more deeply the various landforms (mountains, deserts, rock formations, valleys, and plains) during vacation time. They give us bearing, direction, and the geological history of our lives. This is the beginning of awareness of the "here" in our lives. The Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord shows us the "hereness" of the risen Lord, and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary speaks of God's power to the blessed. While we can choose to extend the Savior's redeeming power to our wounded earth, we also can choose to withdraw from this awesome challenge.

- *September*

Our buildings need to be winterized. Now is the time to think of energy conservation measures, adding caulking and painting, completing needed repairs, composting yard wastes, and protecting garden plants for late fall and winter. Do we regard our abodes as God's dwelling space, a sacred trust and healthy place? Do we cherish the abundance of space and use it properly as good stewards?

- *October*

Trees declare their own sermon in brief autumn's painted landscape. We note their size and type and variety and beauty. Trees serve as symbols of the gift-giving aspects of our lives. Trees provide fruit, wood, climatic modification, wind and sun protection, prevention of soil erosion, and a host of other benefits. This is the time to plant trees and to prepare them for winter. Should we not give more attention to how our lives can bear fruit in Christ and in the protection of our forests?

- *November*

The Thanksgiving meal is a ritual. Whether we are from rural or urban backgrounds, we know the harvest time passes and the year draws to an end. Giving thanks to God is Eucharist, a heavenly banquet and the foretaste of things to come. We are not worthy receivers of this sacrament without the haunting knowledge of the poor nutrition for many in our country and famine in other countries. How can we respond to homelessness and hunger here in our own land and share our bounty with those who are poor in other countries (lands)?

- *December*

We turn our attention indoors with Advent prayers and preparations for the birth of Christ. For most of us, the indoors makes up the part of our environment in which we spend the most time. It is also the most unregulated and can be the most polluted part of the total environment – due to new home cleaning products and tighter ventilation. Consider a simpler home environment, where houseplants purify the air, where fresh air is plentiful, and where chemical products are limited and controlled.

The yearly cycle of twelve months can make us more aware of our human environment and should help us as individuals and as a community to conduct a monthly examination of conscience. The series of homilies – not just a single one – makes us always more aware that Christ, our Redeemer, shed his blood on this earth to redeem all of us and to bring creation to fulfillment.

## RENEWING THE EARTH: REFLECTIONS FOR THE LITURGICAL SEASON

Ecological concerns are not only attitudinal, but practical. You can integrate these practical applications into the introductory remarks, the Prayer of the Faithful, or liturgical music. Each liturgical season offers an occasion for practical application.

- *Advent*

Advent is the season of anticipation, expectation, watchfulness, and waiting. Find ways to settle into the peace of the season. Light the candles on your advent wreath. Read the readings of the day.

- *Christmas*

Christmas is the season that many associate with joy, warmth, family togetherness, and love. Do we enclose ourselves into our own narrow cocoon and forget the broader neighborhood? Re-read the story of Jesus' birth and reflect, are we aware that local problems extend to the wider environment as well? Make time for prayer and quiet, realizing that all (youth and adults) need periods of reflection and their own private space.

- *Lent*

Lent is the season of fasting, a time for restraint, sacrifice, giving up for others, recognition of wrong-doing, repentance, and confession. Is our community wasteful? Is it wrong to send waste to communities that are low-income or poor for disposal, or to refuse to accept waste from other communities? Are we wasteful personally-in eating too much, giving in to excessive fashion, overheating our homes, overusing electricity, needlessly

traveling and driving our cars, not recycling, or using products that create unnecessary chemical and toxic waste?

- *Easter*

Easter is the celebration of Christ's victory over death and the time of hope, rekindled faith, and new energy. *Laudato Si' Week* (May 16-24, 2020) is celebrated during the Easter season and can be an opportunity for parish reflection and action. The parish community should reflect whether it can conserve more or simplify the parish's lifestyle. One way to do this is to conduct a resource assessment of the parish facilities, including not just the physical plant but also the grounds. Invite the community over time to develop a long-term parish resource conservation plan.

- *Pentecost*

Pentecost is the season of growth and spiritual development. During this time, we extend our vision to the broader community. Begin to consider ways of resisting the destruction of our families and communities, the broader human family, and all of God's creation. In a particular way, we extend our love to our brothers and sisters who are poor and marginalized. Justice for those who are poor and care for creation go hand-in-hand.

- *Ordinary Time*

There is nothing "ordinary" about this time in the Church's Liturgical Calendar. This is a time of respite, a time of growth and production. The color for the vestments during this cycle is green – new life and new birth are all around us during these days. This is also the longest Liturgical Season. We should spend time reading Scripture and integrating how we are caring for the earth with how Christ is calling us as disciples.

NOTE

1 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2004).

## Environmental Quotes

### QUOTATIONS FROM THE VATICAN

Respect for life and for the dignity of the human person extends also to the rest of creation, which is called to join man in praising God. (Pope John Paul II, *1990 World Day of Peace Message*, no. 16)

Christians, in particular, realize that their responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith. (Pope John Paul II *1990 World Day of Peace Message*, no. 15)

We cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention to both the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well-being of future generations. (Pope John Paul II, *1990 World Day of Peace Message*, no. 6)

The most profound and serious indication of the moral implications underlying the ecological problem is the lack of *respect for life* evident in many of the patterns of environmental pollution. (Pope John Paul II, *1990 World Day of Peace Message*, no. 7)

It is manifestly unjust that a privileged few should continue to accumulate excess goods, squandering available resources, while masses of people are living in conditions of misery at the very lowest level of subsistence. (Pope John Paul II, *1990 World Day of Peace Message*, no. 8)

*The aesthetic value of creation cannot be overlooked.* Our very contact with nature has a deep restorative power; contemplation of its magnificence imparts peace and serenity. The Bible speaks again and again of the goodness and beauty of creation, which is called to glorify God. (Pope John Paul II, *1990 World Day of Peace Message*, no. 14)

We face a fundamental question which can be described as both ethical and ecological. How can accelerated development be prevented from turning against man? How can one prevent disasters that destroy the environment and threaten all forms of life, and how can the negative consequences that have already occurred be remedied? (Pope John Paul II, "International Solidarity Needed to Safeguard Environment," address by the Holy Father to the European Bureau for the Environment, *L'Osservatore Romano*, June 1996)

Environmental degradation makes the life of the poor intolerable. In dialogue with Christians of different denominations, we need to commit ourselves to caring for creation,

without squandering its resources, but instead sharing in them in a collaborative way. (Pope Benedict XVI, remarks after *Angelus* address, August 27, 2006)

The liturgy itself teaches us this, when, during the presentation of the gifts, the priest raises to God a prayer of blessing and petition over the bread and wine, "fruit of the earth," "fruit of the vine" and "work of human hands." With these words, the rite not only includes in our offering to God all human efforts and activity, but also leads us to see the world as God's creation, which brings forth everything we need for our sustenance. The world is not something indifferent, raw material to be utilized simply as we see fit. Rather, it is part of God's good plan, in which all of us are called to be sons and daughters in the one Son of God, Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 1:4-12). The justified concern about threats to the environment present in so many parts of the world is reinforced by Christian hope, which commits us to working responsibly for the protection of creation. (Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* [The Sacrament of Charity], no. 92)

The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole. (Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* [Charity in Truth], 2009, no. 48)

In nature, the believer recognizes the wonderful result of God's creative activity, which we may use responsibly to satisfy our legitimate needs, material or otherwise, while respecting the intrinsic balance of creation. If this vision is lost, we end up either considering nature an untouchable taboo or, on the contrary, abusing it. Neither attitude is consonant with the Christian vision of nature as the fruit of God's creation. (Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* [Charity in Truth], 2009, no. 48)

The right to food, like the right to water, has an important place within the pursuit of other rights, beginning with the fundamental right to life. It is therefore necessary to cultivate a public conscience that considers *food and access to water as universal rights of all human beings, without distinction or discrimination*. (Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* [Charity in Truth], 2009, no. 27)

On this earth there is room for everyone: here the entire human family must find the resources to live with dignity, through the help of nature itself — God's gift to his children — and through hard work and creativity. At the same time we must recognize our grave duty to hand the earth on to future generations in such a condition that they too can worthily inhabit it and continue to cultivate it. (Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* [Charity in Truth], 2009, no. 50)

*The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa. This invites contemporary society to a serious review of its life-style, which, in many parts of the world, is prone to hedonism and consumerism . . . What is needed is an effective shift in mentality which can lead to the adoption of new life-styles.* (Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate [Charity in Truth]*, 2009, no. 51)

"I urgently appeal . . . for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all." (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si' [On Care for Our Common Home]*, 2015, no. 14)

"Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it." (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si' [On Care for Our Common Home]*, 2015, no. 23)

"A true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.*" (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si' [On Care for Our Common Home]*, 2015, no. 49)

"We must continue to be aware that, regarding climate change, there are *differentiated responsibilities*. As the United States bishops have said, greater attention must be given to "the needs of the poor, the weak and the vulnerable, in a debate often dominated by more powerful interests".<sup>[31]</sup> We need to strengthen the conviction that we are one single human family. There are no frontiers or barriers, political or social, behind which we can hide, still less is there room for the globalization of indifference." (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si' [On Care for Our Common Home]*, 2015, no. 52)

"Disregard for the duty to cultivate and maintain a proper relationship with my neighbor, for whose care and custody I am responsible, ruins my relationship with my own self, with others, with God and with the earth. When all these relationships are neglected, when justice no longer dwells in the land, the Bible tells us that life itself is endangered." (no. 70)  
"When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities – to offer just a few examples – it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected." (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si' [On Care for Our Common Home]*, 2015, no. 117)

"What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?" (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si' [On Care for Our Common Home]*, 2015, no. 160)

“Public pressure has to be exerted in order to bring about decisive political action. Society, through non-governmental organizations and intermediate groups, must put pressure on governments to develop more rigorous regulations, procedures and controls. Unless citizens control political power – national, regional and municipal – it will not be possible to control damage to the environment. Local legislation can be more effective, too, if agreements exist between neighboring communities to support the same environmental policies.” (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’ [On Care for Our Common Home]*, 2015, no. 179)

“If we wish to dialogue, we should do this in the first place with the poor. They are not just another party to be won over, or merely another individual seated at a table of equals. They are our principal dialogue partners, those from who we have the most to learn, to whom we need to listen out of a duty of justice, and from whom we must ask permission before presenting our proposals” (Pope Francis, *Querida Amazonia [Beloved Amazon]*, 2020, no. 26).

“The equilibrium of our planet also depends on the health of the Amazon region . . . The cry of the Amazon region reaches everyone because ‘the conquest and exploitation of resources . . . has today reached the point of threatening the environment’s hospitable aspect’<sup>2</sup> . . . . The interest of a few powerful industries should not be considered more important than the good of the Amazon region and of humanity as a whole” (Pope Francis, *Querida Amazonia [Beloved Amazon]*, 2020, no. 48).

“A sound and sustainable ecology, one capable of bringing about change, will not develop unless people are changed, unless they are encouraged to opt for another style of life, one less greedy and more serene, more respectful and less anxious, more fraternal” (Pope Francis, *Querida Amazonia [Beloved Amazon]*, 2020, no. 58).

With the progress of science and technology, questions as to their meaning increase and give rise to an ever greater need to respect the transcendent dimension of the human person and creation itself. (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 2005, no. 462)

Modern ecological problems are of a planetary dimension and can be effectively resolved only through international cooperation capable of guaranteeing greater coordination in the use of the earth's resources. (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 2005, no. 481)

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<sup>2</sup> Saint John Paul II, *Address to an International Convention on “The Environment and Health”* (Mar. 24, 1997), 2.



The present environmental crisis affects those who are poorest in a particular way, whether they live in those lands subject to erosion and desertification, are involved in armed conflicts or subject to forced immigration, or because they do not have the economic and technological means to protect themselves from other calamities. (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 2005, no. 482)

The ecological question must not be faced solely because of the frightening prospects that environmental destruction represents; rather it must above all become a strong motivation for an authentic solidarity of worldwide dimensions. (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 2005, no. 486)

If the relationship with God is placed aside, nature is stripped of its profound meaning and impoverished. If on the other hand, nature is rediscovered in its creaturely dimension, channels of communication with it can be established, its rich and symbolic meaning can be understood, allowing us to enter into its realm of mystery. This realm opens the path of man to God, Creator of heaven and earth. *The world presents itself before man's eyes as evidence of God*, the place where his creative, providential and redemptive power unfolds. (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 2005, no. 487)

## QUOTATIONS FROM THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

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Our Creed begins with the creation of heaven and earth, for creation is the beginning and the foundation of all God's works. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 198)

Creation is the foundation of "all God's saving plans," the "beginning of the history of salvation" that culminates in Christ. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 280, citing the *General Catechetical Directory*, no. 51)

Creation is the common work of the Holy Trinity. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 292)

The world was made for the glory of God. St. Bonaventure explains that God created all things "not to increase his glory, but to show it forth and to communicate it." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 293, citing *Dei Filius*, can. § 5 and *In II Sent.* 1, 2, 2, 1)

Because creation comes forth from God's goodness, it shares in that goodness-" And God saw that it was good ... very good." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 299, citing Gn 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 31)

Use of the mineral, vegetable, and animal resources of the universe cannot be divorced from respect for moral imperatives. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2415)

There is a *solidarity among all creatures* arising from the fact that all have the same Creator and are all ordered to his glory. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 344)

The *right to private property*, acquired or received in a just way, does not do away with the original gift of the earth to the whole of mankind. The *universal destination of goods* remains primordial, even if the promotion of the common good requires respect for the right to private property and its exercise. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2403)

Creation has its own goodness and proper perfection, but it did not spring forth complete from the hands of the Creator. The universe was created" in a state of journeying" (*in statu viae*) toward an ultimate perfection yet to be attained, to which God has destined it. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 302)

Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things which would be in contempt of the Creator and would bring disastrous consequences for human beings and their environment. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 339)

God speaks to man through the visible creation. The material cosmos is so presented to man's intelligence that he can read there traces of its Creator (cf. Wis 13: 1; Rom 1: 19f.; Acts 14: 17). Light and darkness, wind and fire, water and earth, the tree and its fruit speak of God and symbolize both his greatness and his nearness. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1147)

*Political authority* has the right and duty to regulate the legitimate exercise of the right to ownership for the sake of the common good. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2406; cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 71 §4; *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 42; *Centesimus Annus*, nos. 42, 48)

Those *responsible for business enterprises* are responsible to society for the economic and ecological effects of their operations. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2432; cf. *Centesimus Annus*, no. 37)

In his use of things man should regard the external goods he legitimately owns not merely as exclusive to himself but common to others also "in the sense that they can benefit others as well as himself." 'The ownership of any property makes its holder a steward of Providence. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2404, citing *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 69 § 1)

Those who hold goods for use and consumption should use them with moderation, reserving the better part for guests, for the sick and the poor. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2405)

Man's dominion over inanimate and other living beings granted by the Creator is not absolute; it is limited by concern for the quality of life of his neighbor, including generations to come; it requires a religious respect for the integrity of creation. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2415; cf. *Centesimus Annus*, no. 37-38)

Created in God's image and called to know and love him, the person who seeks God discovers certain ways of coming to know him. These are also called proofs for the existence of God, not in the sense of proofs in the natural sciences, but rather in the sense of "converging and convincing arguments," which allow us to attain certainty about the truth. These "ways" of approaching God from creation have a twofold point of departure: the physical world and the human person. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 31)

#### QUOTATIONS FROM THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

Our mistreatment of the natural world diminishes our own dignity and sacredness, not only because we are destroying resources that future generations of humans need, but because we are engaging in actions that contradict what it means to be human. Our tradition calls us to protect the life and dignity of the human person, and it is increasingly clear that this task cannot be separated from the care and defense of all of creation. (*Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*, 1991)

As individuals, as institutions, as a people, we need a change of heart to preserve and protect the planet for our children and for generations yet unborn. (*Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*, 1991)

The whole human race suffers as a result of environmental blight, and generations yet unborn will bear the price for our failure to act today. (*Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*, 1991)

It is to the Creator of the universe, then, that we are accountable for what we do or fail to do to preserve and care for the earth and all its creatures. (*Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*, 1991)

Stewardship implies that we must both care for creation according to standards that are not of our own making and at the same time be resourceful in finding ways to make the earth flourish. (*Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*, 1991)

By preserving natural environment's, by protecting endangered species, by laboring to make human environments compatible with local ecology, by employing appropriate technology, and by carefully evaluating technological innovations as we adopt them, we exhibit respect for creation and reverence for the Creator. (*Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*, 1991)  
Created things belong not to the few, but to the entire human family. (*Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*, 1991)

At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. (*Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*, 2001)

As Catholic bishops, we seek to offer a distinctively religious and moral perspective to what is necessarily a complicated scientific, economic, and political discussion. Ethical questions lie at the heart of the challenges facing us. (*Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*, 2001)

Because of the blessings God has bestowed on our nation and the power it possesses, the United States bears a special responsibility in its stewardship of God's creation to shape responses that serve the entire human family. As pastors, teachers, and citizens, we bishops seek to contribute to our national dialogue by examining the ethical implications of climate change. We offer some themes from Catholic social teachings that could help to shape this dialogue, and we suggest some directions for the debate and public policy decisions that face us. We do so with great respect for the work of the scientists, diplomats, business and union representatives, developers of new technologies, environmental leaders, and policymakers who have been struggling with the difficult questions of climate change for many years. (*Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*, 2001)

Freedom and the capacity for moral decision making are central to what it means to be human. Stewardship-defined in this case as the ability to exercise moral responsibility to care for the environment-requires freedom to act. Significant aspects of this stewardship include the right to private initiative, the ownership of property, and the exercise of responsible freedom in the economic sector. Stewardship requires a careful protection of the environment and calls us to use our intelligence "to discover the earth's productive potential and the many different ways in which human needs can be satisfied." (*Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*, 2001, citing *Centesimus Annus*, no. 32)

True stewardship requires changes in human actions-both moral behavior and technical advancement. Our religious tradition has always urged restraint and moderation in the use of material goods, so we must not allow our desire to possess more material things to overtake our concern for the basic needs of people and the environment. Pope John Paul II has linked protecting the environment to "authentic human ecology," which can overcome "structures of sin" and which promotes both human dignity and respect for creation. Technological innovation and entrepreneurship can help make possible options that can lead us to a more environmentally benign energy path. Changes in lifestyle based on traditional moral virtues can ease the way to a sustainable and equitable world economy in which sacrifice will no longer be an unpopular concept. For many of us, a life less focused on material gain may remind us that we are more than what we have. Rejecting the false promises of excessive or conspicuous consumption can even allow more time for family, friends, and civic responsibilities. A renewed sense of sacrifice and restraint could make an essential contribution to addressing global climate change. (*Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*, 2001, citing *Centesimus Annus*, no. 38)

As people of religious faith, we bishops believe that the atmosphere that supports life on earth is a God given gift, one we must respect and protect. It unites us as one human family. If we harm the atmosphere, we dishonor our Creator and the gift of creation. The values of our faith call us to humility, sacrifice, and a respect for life and the natural gifts God has provided. Pope John Paul II reminds us in his statement *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility* that "respect for life and for the dignity of the human person extends also to the rest of creation, which is called to join man in praising God." In that spirit of praise and thanksgiving to God for the wonders of creation, we Catholic bishops call for a civil dialogue and prudent and constructive action to protect God's precious gift of the earth's atmosphere with a sense of genuine solidarity and justice for all God's children. (*Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*, 2001, citing *The Ecological Crisis*, no. 16)

From the patristic period to the present, the Church has affirmed that misuse of the world's resources or appropriation of them by a minority of the world's population betrays the gift of creation since "whatever belongs to God belongs to all." (*Economic Justice for All*, 1997, no. 34, citing St. Cyprian)