

# Statement on the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation

Archbishop Borys Gudziak  
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
Bishop David J. Malloy  
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
September 1, 2023

---

## “Let Justice and Peace Flow”

On this World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation Pope Francis invites us to reflect on the relationship between justice and creation. Inspired by the scriptures, “let justice flow on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream” (Amos 5:24), the power, simplicity, and clarity of water offers a vivid metaphor. In so doing, the Holy Father recounts our foundational starting point: we must “seek first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33). With our souls rightly ordered to His Kingdom through the waters of baptism, we can properly order our relationship to others and to His creation.

The geography and history of the United States predispose us to recognize the image of divine blessings expressed as flowing waters. Countless rivers and watersheds grace the North American continent, such as the Mississippi, Missouri, Columbia, Rio Grande, Colorado, Great Lakes and St. Lawrence and numerous others, connecting the United States to its immediate neighbors, Canada and Mexico. Furthermore, our nation is bound by the Pacific, Atlantic and Arctic oceans, sources of life, economic wellbeing, biodiversity, recreation, inspiration, and beauty.

The abundant waterways of our country have brought productive farms and flourishing urbanizations. Yet along with economic prosperity and ingenuity, our waterways have been filled with pollution, contamination, and garbage bringing injustice to peoples, creatures, and ecosystems.

We must change! Pope Francis invites us to “transform our *hearts*, our *lifestyles*, and the *public policies* [to] contribute to the mighty river of justice and peace in this Season of Creation.”<sup>1</sup>

Beginning with our hearts, guided by the Holy Spirit, may the powerful imagery of water inspire us towards ecological conversion.<sup>2</sup> Any true conversion has its beginning and end in God himself; it is God, through the saving work of His Son, who converts. Like water, the irresistible current of the Holy Spirit can help make space and find silence so that God can act within us. This Season of Creation let us seek slowness and silence so that prayer can more readily flow. Rather than overly relying on “things that are *faster and faster*... We need a Church that kindles hearts and warms them.”<sup>3</sup>

When it comes to our lifestyles, consider the simplicity of water. Pope Benedict XVI warned of the danger of “a sort of ‘superdevelopment’ of a wasteful and consumerist kind” that is scandalous in a world where “glaring inequalities” persist.<sup>4</sup> In the United States, with our vast economy, we face a perennial temptation to live beyond our needs. Yet with income gaps

---

<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, “Message for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation,” 1 September 2023. <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2023/documents/20230513-messaggio-giornata-curacreato.html>

<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Catechesis* 17 January 2001. Cf. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Meeting with the Bishops of Brazil, 28 July, 2013.

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130727\\_gmg-episcopato-brasile.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130727_gmg-episcopato-brasile.html)

<sup>4</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 22. Cf. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 109.

between rich and poor growing wider, so many brothers and sisters lack the basics. It is not wrong to seek prosperity and to enjoy the pleasures of things—we are called to “till and keep” (Gen 2:15) the earth after all. An ecological lifestyle is not about pauperism or austerity, but an invitation to modesty and simplicity that increases our freedom to live as we ought regardless of our economic means. To live simply allows both the poor and rich to share in a common solidarity with each other and with creation, remembering where all resources ultimately come from. During this Season of Creation, let us consider our lifestyle choices and foster greater generosity towards those who have less.

Finally, we are called to seek environmental justice in public policy. The ecological conversion of hearts and changes in lifestyles are important for us as individuals and our holiness, but it is the public policy decisions about collective impacts that will significantly change the course of our environmental future. The political dimension of public life is essential for integral ecology, and we must be engaged in civic life as people of faith.

We must pursue rapid decarbonization - “an energy revolution” - to seriously address climate change, yet without doing so on the backs of the poor and under-privileged.<sup>5</sup> The injustice here is two-fold. First, the poor suffer the most from climate change and natural disasters, and, deprived of the many goods provided by energy-intense (and historically high carbon-emitting) economies, have less resources to adapt. Second, energy-poor nations are increasingly lorded over with conditions to provide basic energy while the world transitions away from fossil fuels.<sup>6</sup> We recognize this pursuit takes place amidst the complex threats of an increasingly multipolar world, with wars and threat of wars and other critical considerations of justice to our common home and the most vulnerable. This dilemma cries out for greater discernment and action to address to both “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.” With humility and hope, may this serve to call us to a deeper abiding prayer for “thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.”

Recalling the Holy Father’s inspiration from the prophet Amos, let us remain steadfast in light of the unfailing justice and righteousness set before us. As we prepare for the Ecumenical Synod this year, praying the Holy Spirit will guide the People of God, may we be of one Spirit, one people, caring for our one “common home.”<sup>7</sup>

### **USCCB policy letters on environmental justice and water:**

- [Comments to the EPA on power plant and vehicle emissions regulations](#)
- [Letter to Congress Regarding Appropriations for Federal Agencies Charged with Care for the Environment](#)
- [Letter to Congress Regarding FY 2024 State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Appropriations](#)
- [Letter to Congress Regarding FY 2023 Farm Bill](#)
- [Coalition Letter to E.P.A. Administrator with Comments on Proposed Soot Standard](#)
- [Letter to Congress on Inflation Reduction Act](#)
- [Letter to Congress Regarding PFAs Action Act of 2021](#)

---

<sup>5</sup> USCCB-CRS Letter to the Secretary of State, Feb. 17, 2017. <https://www.usccb.org/resources/usccb-crs-letter-secretary-tillerson-care-creation-february-17-2017>

<sup>6</sup> Rose Mutiso, *Net-zero plans exclude Africa*, 2, November, 2022. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-03475-0>. See “Who Decides Africa’s Net Zero Pathways?”, Energy for Growth Hub, October, 2022. [https://energyforgrowth.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Who-Decides-Africas-Net-Zero-Pathways\\_.pdf](https://energyforgrowth.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Who-Decides-Africas-Net-Zero-Pathways_.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 1.