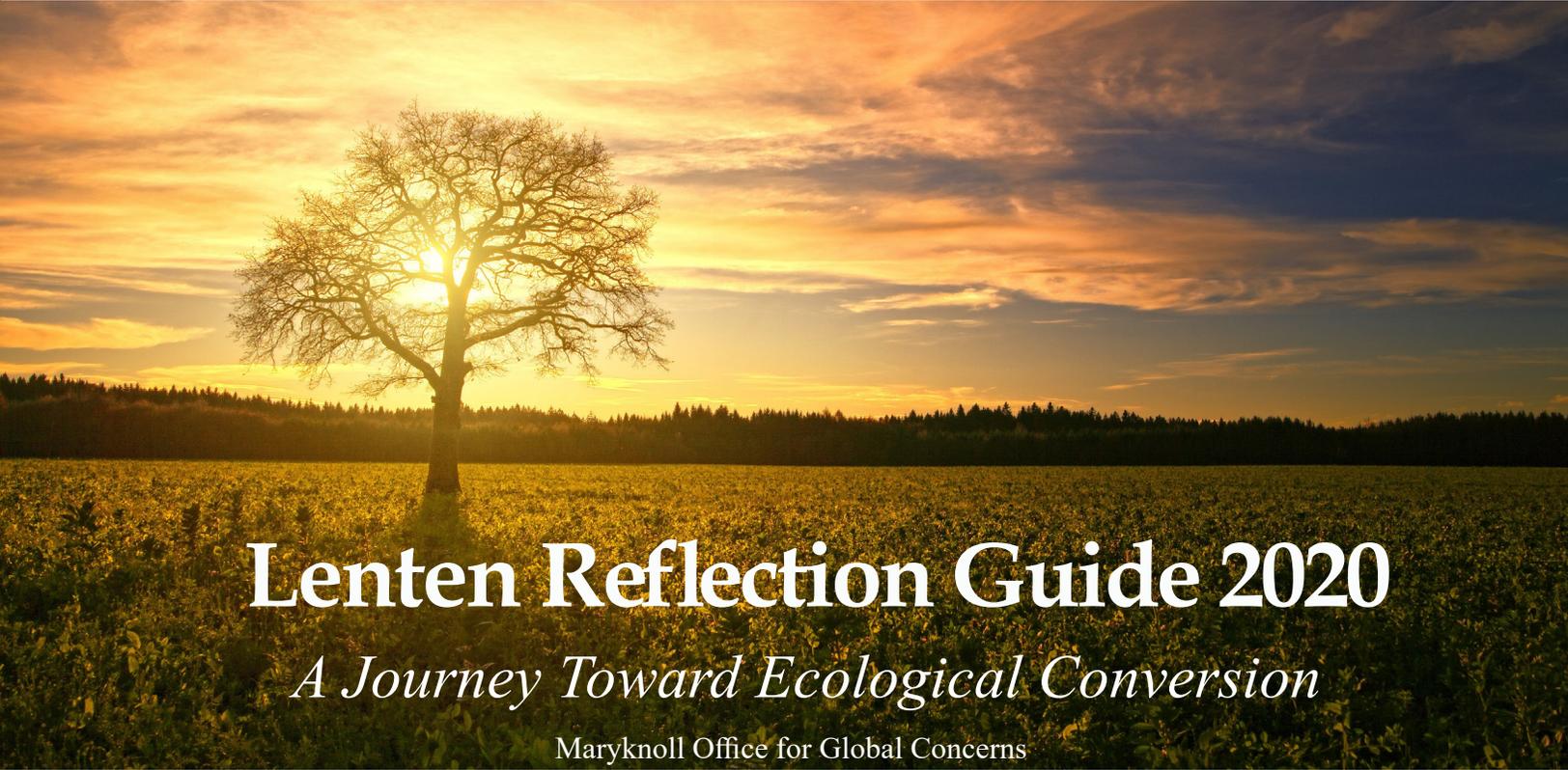




Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns



Lenten Reflection Guide 2020

A Journey Toward Ecological Conversion

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

“We come to realize that a healthy relationship with creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion, which entails the recognition of our errors, sins, faults, and failures, and leads to heartfelt repentance and desire to change.”

- Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*

About this resource

In this Lenten Reflection Guide, we offer reflections, questions, prayers, and actions based on each week's scripture readings in light of the theme of ecological conversion. Use this guide individually or in small groups to reflect upon your life patterns, to pray more deeply, and to renew your spirit to face the realities of our world.

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About us

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) represents Maryknoll missioners, who are Catholic men and women serving in impoverished communities around the world. The MOGC provides analysis and advocacy on issues of justice, peace, and integrity of creation that affect the countries and communities where Maryknoll missioners serve.

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Ash Wednesday

*“When you pray, go into your inner room, close the door, and pray to God in secret.”
- Matthew 6: 6*

In this season of Lent, we are invited to step back and closely examine our lives and our hearts. It is not an invitation to a mere moment of reflection, but to a deep, challenging, and rewarding journey of repentance and renewal. At the end of this six-week journey is the joy of Easter – but before it lies re-conversion and recommitment to loving God and our neighbor with our whole hearts.

This Lent, we invite you to reflect on a certain dimension of conversion: ecological conversion. Pope Francis defines ecological conversion as occurring when “the effects of [our] encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in [our] relationship with the world around [us]...We come to realize that a healthy relationship with creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion, which entails the recognition of our errors, sins, faults, and failures, and leads to heartfelt repentance and desire to change.”

In today’s first reading, the prophet Joel begins the journey of Lent by calling us to conversion: “return to [God] with your whole heart.” What does this truly mean? How is it related to ecological conversion?

Today’s gospel offers us some first steps. It lays out the three pillars of Lenten practice: prayer, fasting and almsgiving, or action for charity and justice. It emphasizes that we are meant to carry out these practices humbly, not seeking attention or praise, but directing our full attention towards loving God, our neighbor, and all creation.

Returned Maryknoll Lay Missioner Dave Kane writes, “As a human family, we have become unaware of, and insensitive to, how our actions and lifestyles contribute to the destruction of both God’s creation and human dignity.” In moving through our days, how often are we aware of how our lifestyle choices – our purchases, travel, food, trash – are related to the earth? Where do

things come from, and where are they going? Whom will our actions harm, and whom will they benefit?

For example, the issue of plastic pollution grows larger every year. Scientists tell us that every bit of plastic that has ever been created is still in existence. About 8 billion tons of plastic have been produced since 1950. Chemicals in plastic are toxic to plants, animals, and humans. Vulnerable people around the world are most exposed to toxins from plastic. However, we largely carry on contributing to the problem, blind to how it affects the poor, the earth, and our relationship with God.

We can begin to approach these large questions and problems by learning to listen – beginning with silence before God and holy attention to the world around us. Pope Benedict XVI, quoted in *Laudato Si’*, said, “We tend to demean contemplative rest as something unproductive and unnecessary... But rest opens our eyes to the larger picture and gives us renewed sensitivity to the rights of others...and motivates us to greater concerns for nature and the poor.”

Let us practice returning with our whole hearts to God by listening carefully for what God is telling us in what Pope Francis calls “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.” After we have listened, we can begin to repent of the harm we have done to our relationships with God, neighbor, and all creation and take steps toward renewal.

Questions for Reflection

How can you build in time for silent prayer?

How are your everyday choices affecting the earth and the people around you?

Pray

An ecological examen in the Ignatian tradition.

The examen has several steps. Begin by placing yourself in a quiet place and a posture of openness to the Holy Spirit.

Gratitude: I ask for the grace to look closely to see how my life choices impact creation and the poor and vulnerable. How can I turn away from a throwaway culture and instead stand in solidarity with creation and the poor?

Awareness: I ask for the grace of conversion towards ecological justice and reconciliation. Where have I fallen short in caring for creation and my brothers and sisters?

Understanding: I ask for the grace to reconcile my relationship with God, creation, and humanity, and to stand in solidarity through my actions. How can I repair my relationship with creation and make choices consistent with my desire for reconciliation with creation?

Conversion: I offer a closing prayer for the earth and the vulnerable in our society.

- Ignatian Solidarity Network



“In the 1950’s, the city [I once lived in in Brazil] started to throw its trash into the swamp and, after so many years, the garbage had built up into a forty-acre island over a hundred feet deep. Until 2003, when the city opened a new landfill, hundreds of men, women and children lived on top of that island and sorted through the city’s refuse...slugging through knee-high mud, they worked long hours to earn minimal incomes.”

- Dave Kane
Returned Maryknoll Lay Missioner

Fast

Take a break from electronic entertainment - TV, computer use, cell phone use. Pay attention to the people in front of you and the natural scenes around you instead. Try to grow comfortable with quiet and stillness.

Act

Read about efforts to ban the sale of single-use plastics by certain state and local governments in the United States: <http://bit.ly/Plasticban2020>. This week, refrain from using single-use plastic, such as plastic bags, silverware, bottles, etc.



First Sunday of Lent

*“One does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.”
- Matthew 4:4*

In this first Sunday of Lent, we are offered two stories to reflect on. In both stories, we are challenged to recall our radical dependence on God, our Creator.

In the creation story, we hear of God creating human beings out of the earth, recalling our intimate relationship with the earth and our Creator. We also are invited to reflect on the ruptures in our relationship with God, reflected in Adam and Eve’s choice to steal fruit from the tree of life in their desire to be like God. Pope Francis writes in *Laudato Si’*, “The harmony between the Creator, humanity, and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations.” When we act towards creation out of greed and lack of respect for its order and beauty, we damage our relationship with God.

Similarly, in the narrative of Jesus’s temptation in the desert, we are invited to remember our ultimate dependence on God as the source, destination, and foundation of our lives. Jesus rejects the temptation of worldly power and insists that God is the foundation of life.

Our dependence on God as creatures is something we have in common with all creation. Once we recall this, we can recognize our call to act with brotherly and sisterly care for all people and created life. How have we ignored our common dependence on God, acting in a spirit of domination over other people and wildlife? How have we supported systems that harm and dominate vulnerable people and ecosystems?

The global, industrial food production system is one way in which we witness the abuse and domination of the earth and vulnerable people by powerful groups. Large companies dominate agricultural production in

many countries around the world, using unsustainable farming practices and putting profit over the wellbeing of communities. Maryknoll missionaries and small-scale farmers in impoverished countries speak out against the ways in which these industrial production systems can disrupt local farming practices, destroy ecosystems in the long-term, and perpetuate poverty by interrupting local economies.

Returned Maryknoll Lay Missioner Jean Walsh describes what she witnessed in Mexico: “Over the years, many farmers were encouraged to adopt chemical-intensive farming methods. After [a while] the soil became depleted and required increased amounts of chemicals. Given the drop in production and high cost of chemicals, farmers were forced to leave their lands because they no longer produced food to feed their families.”

This week, let us pray for a “loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion” (*Laudato Si’*). Then, let us ask for mercy for the ways in which we contribute to broken relationships with God, our brothers and sisters, and the earth, and for courage to heal these relationships.

Questions for Reflection

What experiences have led you to remember your dependence on God?

Where do you witness the harmful domination of vulnerable people and wildlife?

Pray

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes. Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace.

- A prayer for our earth, *Laudato Si'*



“Today only 8 percent of Kenya’s land is arable. Practices like cutting trees for cooking fuel leads to deforestation and land desertification. This brings an increase in landslides, lower rainfall levels, decreased watershed areas, and an increase in drought. Parts of Kenya, especially in the north, are almost always dry, forcing pastoralists to wander in search of good pasture for their livestock.”

- Charlotte Cook
Returned Maryknoll Lay Missioner

Fast

Commit to buying food from local farmers or organic farms as your budget will allow this Lent. Read about the benefits of organic and local farming from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO): <http://bit.ly/FAOOrganic>

Act

- Learn about the benefits of agroecology, or farming methods that prioritize sustainability and the needs of communities: <http://bit.ly/agroecologyCIDSE>
- Sign up for the action alerts of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition to raise your voice in support of sustainable farming: <http://bit.ly/sustainableAG>



Second Sunday of Lent

*“And [Jesus] was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light.”
- Matthew 17: 2*

In this second Sunday of Lent, we hear Matthew’s account of Jesus’s transfiguration in front of Peter, James, and John. Alone with them on a high mountain, Jesus’s appearance is transformed into a picture of his heavenly glory.

The disciples are taken aback. They are overcome with fear when God’s voice rings out from a cloud. As they cower on the ground, Jesus tells them, “Rise, and do not be afraid.”

The Old Testament also includes examples of individuals being exposed to God’s glory and feeling overwhelmed and even afraid. Spiritual writers throughout the ages have commented on the intensity of experiences of God’s glory. However, God gives us moments of “transfiguration,” or glimpses of heavenly beauty and goodness, which can surprise, shock, and challenge us to think outside of our present realities and recommit to building God’s kingdom.

In the face of the scale of the climate crisis, and the depth of the brokenness of our collective relationship with the earth, it can feel impossible to imagine the renewal of God’s people and earth. But small transfiguration moments along the way are gifts from God which reveal the power of God transform even the darkest of situations.

For example, the world is facing a crisis of clean water. Egregious waste and pollution of fresh water along with increasing drought conditions in many parts of the world are leading to a severe shortage of usable water for many countries. Poor people in some regions experience the brunt of the problem.

Returned Lay Missioner Gerry Lee describes a moment when his community’s water shortage in Venezuela was transformed before his eyes: “In our first Christmas in the barrio we had no water for over three weeks and families were desperate. Water finally came a few days before Christmas, in the middle of the night: We were woken up by shouts of joy and the sound of water gushing out of the communal spigot on our terrace... Our barrio came together that night to make sure every household got the water they needed. Teenagers were carrying buckets of water up to elderly neighbors living on the fourth floor of the housing project. Mothers started making arepas, the Venezuelan cornbread, for breakfast for all the workers. Everyone got wet and got happy. What a lesson of solidarity in the face of hardship it was for our family!”

This joyful moment of solidarity in the face of fear and deprivation likely carried the community through future hardships. In our experiences of transfiguration, we can hear God’s voice saying, “Rise, and do not be afraid,” inviting us to carry on in our journeys of conversion and transformation.

Questions for Reflection

What “transfiguration” experiences have you had?

What comes to mind when you envision God’s renewal of the earth?

Pray

Most High, all-powerful, all-good Lord, All praise is Yours, all glory, all honour and all blessings. To you alone, Most High, do they belong, and no mortal lips are worthy to pronounce Your Name.

Praised be You my Lord with all Your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, Who is the day through whom You give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour, Of You Most High, he bears the likeness.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, In the heavens you have made them bright, precious and fair.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air, and fair and stormy, all weather's moods, by which You cherish all that You have made.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, So useful, humble, precious and pure.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom You light the night and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, producing varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord, through those who grant pardon for love of You and bear sickness and trial.

Blessed are those who endure in peace, By You, Most High, they will be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Death, from whom no-one living can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin! Blessed are they She finds doing Your Will.

No second death can do them harm. Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks, And serve Him with great humility.

- St. Francis of Assisi, Canticle of the Creatures



“From the day I arrived in Nepal, I knew the importance of the Bagmati River...the river swelled with seasonal rains my first two years there. Then the stench [of pollution] was no longer flushed with flowing waters. The days of watching people perched on rocks to fish were no more. Remembering the river alone won't cover these stones again or feed the hungry at the shore...How do we look and see as God sees? How do we look through the eyes of Jesus?”

- Sister Janet Hockman
Maryknoll Sisters

Fast

Consider the ways in which you can conserve the precious resource of water in your daily life. Best practices for conserving water can be found here: <http://bit.ly/ConserveWater2020>

Act

March 22 is World Water Day.

- Learn about the sacred role of water for all life: <http://bit.ly/MaryknollWater>
- Find resources for taking action on March 22: <http://www.worldwaterday.org/>
- Watch “The Story of Bottled Water”: <http://bit.ly/StoryBottled>

Third Sunday of Lent



*“Whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst.”
- John 4:14*

In this third week of Lent, the readings offer us the imagery of thirst and of water, inviting us to reflect on our deepest needs and desires, both spiritual and physical.

In the gospel story, Jesus interacts with a Samaritan woman at a well, initially asking for a drink of water. Jesus names the woman’s broken relationships and speaks to her of the living water he offers which will quench all thirst. She marvels at his knowledge, calls him a prophet, and asks for this living water. He stays with her community, preaching the good news.

In the first reading, we hear of God responding to the physical needs of the Israelites, who begged Moses for water while they were stranded in the desert. In the gospel, the connection is made between physical and spiritual needs – the need for physical water from the well is likened to the need for the spiritual, living water of truth that Christ gives.

Through the lens of ecological conversion, we can further reflect on the connection between material resources and spiritual realities. The way we relate to the material world is intimately related to our relationship with God.

The problems of over- and unequal consumption of natural resources have been highlighted by Pope Francis and others who analyze the ecological crisis. One statistical estimate by Friends of the Earth is that the average North American uses 10 times more natural resources per day than the average person in a very poor country. Another is that if everyone on earth consumed as much as people in the United States, we would need three to five planet Earths to sustain the current levels of resource consumption.

Returned Maryknoll Lay Missioner Kathy Dahl-Bredine reflects on the lifestyles of her neighbors in rural southern Mexico in contrast to the average North American lifestyle: “A friend of ours [from the U.S.] tried to give one of his good shirts to a local man. The [local] man...said ‘No thanks, I have two shirts, so I don’t need another one.’ ... Can we look at our industrialized societies of the North and see the problem? Do we see that we, in our drive to be first in the world, to have more than everyone else, to create corporations that control the world, have continued taking more and more of the planet’s limited resources in order to create wealth and power to control the world?”

This Lent, can we recognize that one of our deepest needs – both physical and spiritual – is to have healthy relationship with the natural world, to live in simplicity and concern for care of all life? Like with the Samaritan woman, God sees and loves us amid our broken relationships and offers us the living water of healing and truth. We ask for the grace to examine our relationship with the earth, recognize the truth, and receive God’s mercy for the harm we have done, knowingly or unknowingly.

Questions for Reflection

How do you experience spiritual thirst?

What would it look like to live more simply, using fewer resources?

Pray

Pray in silence with this passage:

All you who are thirsty,
come to the water!

You who have no money,
come, buy grain and eat;
Come, buy grain without money,
wine and milk without cost!

Why spend your money for what is not bread;
your wages for what does not satisfy?

Only listen to me, and you shall eat well,
you shall delight in rich fare.

Pay attention and come to me;
listen, that you may have life.

Seek the Lord while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near.
Let the wicket forsake their way,
and sinners their thoughts;
Let them turn to the Lord to find mercy;
to our God, who is generous in forgiving.

Yet just as from the heavens
the rain and snow come down
And do not return there until they have watered the
earth, making it fertile and fruitful,
Giving seed to the one who sows
and bread to the one who eats,
So shall my word be
that goes forth from my mouth;
It shall not return to me empty,
but shall do what pleases me,
achieving the end for which I sent it.

Yes, in joy you shall go forth,
in peace you shall be brought home;
Mountains and hills shall break out in song before
you, all trees of the field shall clap their hands.
In place of the thornbush, the cypress shall grow,
instead of nettles, the myrtle.
This shall be the Lord's renown,
as an everlasting sign that shall not fail.

- Isaiah 55: 1-3, 6-7, 10-13



“The accustomed times for planting and cultivating the land have varied greatly. Planting later, awaiting the rains, means a shorter growing season and a diminished harvest. The wells are running dry and it is difficult to find water for the cattle. So many are discouraged by the climate and soil conditions that the youth are migrating to the cities, looking for jobs.”

- Father Edmond Cookson (Peru)
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers

Fast

Fast from overconsumption. Refrain from shopping one day of the week. Use the money and time saved to pursue a hobby, build relationships, or support your community.

Act

Learn about the wasteful practices of production and consumption of everyday goods:
<https://storyofstuff.org>



Fourth Sunday of Lent

*“So they said to him, “How were your eyes opened?”
- John 9:10*

The readings this week play on the themes of light and darkness, blindness and sight. In the second reading from St. Paul to the Ephesians, we are told to expose the hidden, “fruitless works of darkness” and instead “live as children of light.” In the gospel, Jesus heals a blind man, and in giving the man the gift of sight, also reveals himself as the Son of God, giving him the gift of faith as well.

As Christians, we are called not to move through this world blind to the injustice and suffering around us, but rather to see and address it courageously, bearing Christ’s light to the world.

For many Christians in the global North, the ecological crisis can seem far away, hidden from our sight. The harmful impacts of our everyday choices on the earth and on vulnerable people can sometimes remain unknown to us. But God calls us to pay attention, to open ourselves to see and, as Pope Francis says, to “hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”

The damage done by extractive industries is one example of harm to the earth that can fall out of sight. Extractive industries take raw materials from the earth, often mining and drilling into the land for precious resources. Much of this extraction is now done in the global South by companies from the global North, and much of it is done unsustainably, creating waste and destroying land that is home to vulnerable communities who struggle to assert their rights to the land they have lived on for generations. The amount of waste, pollution and environmental degradation created by extractive industries is enormous. For example, the production of just one gold ring generates about twenty tons of toxic mining waste.

Maryknoll Sister Mary Ann Smith writes about witnessing the impact of such devastation due to mining while on mission: “My first assignment as a Maryknoll sister was to the province of Luzon, Philippines where mining companies were tearing apart mountains and forests for gold, copper, and timber. Over a period of more than 15 years, I saw beautiful forested mountainsides, home to local indigenous people, literally blown up to build silt ponds from copper mines that polluted the clear spring waters upon which people depended for drinking, cooking and washing themselves and their clothes.”

In offering us the gift of sight, of awareness of the realities around us, we are also offered the gift of faith – the gift of Jesus himself. Walking with us, Jesus invites us to change our behavior, to not just speak faith by our words but live it through our actions as well. Pope Francis reminds us that in taking up this call, we are given strength for the journey ahead: “May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope. God, who calls us to generous commitment and to give him our all, offers us the light and strength needed to continue on our way.”

Questions for Reflection

When have your eyes been opened to injustice?

How can you help open the eyes of others around you?

Pray

God of all,
you made the earth and saw that it was good,
but like robbers we have stripped it of its treasure.

Open our eyes, Lord.

Now the earth cries out
and your people hunger and thirst.

Open our eyes, Lord.

Open our eyes to see the pain of your creation
and move us with compassion for your world.

Open our eyes, Lord.

Lead us to act as neighbors,
who do not pass by on the other side.

Open our eyes, Lord.

So that together we may care for all that you have
made and with all creation sing your praise.

Open our eyes, Lord.

- Catherine Gorman
Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
(CAFOD)

Fast

Think about ways you can opt for buying gently
used items, such as clothing, kitchenware, ap-
pliances, etc., rather than buying them new. This
will save energy and waste from production.



“One rainy Saturday morning high in the mountains of northern Peru, a group of men and women crowded into the tiny chapel for a meeting. A mining company wanted to open a huge copper mine uphill – and up-stream – from the farms where they grew fruit trees and coffee beans.

Outside, the rain poured off the tin roofs of the wooden houses dripped from the umbrella-like leaves of papaya trees and ran down the muddy street where a donkey dozed. Compared to Lima, Peru’s sprawling capital, or most other major cities in the hemisphere, this was a very poor village. But the people who lived there saw it differently.

‘The mining company says that it will help us out of poverty,’ one man said. ‘But we don’t consider ourselves poor. We have our homes. We have our fields, where we grow crops to feed our families. We have a coffee cooperative that is doing well. We would like to have better health care and education for our children, and we would like to have safe drinking water. But we are not poor.’”

- Barbara Fraser
Returned Maryknoll Lay Missioner

Act

Join the Stop the Money Pipeline Campaign and urge banks, investment firms, and insurance companies to stop investing in the fossil fuel industry:
<https://www.stogethermoneypipeline.com/>

Fifth Sunday of Lent



*“Jesus became perturbed and deeply troubled and said, ‘Where have you laid him?’”
- John 11: 33-34*

In this week’s gospel reading, we hear the powerful story of Jesus raising his friend Lazarus from the dead. In the middle of the gospel narrative, one line in particular jumps out: “And Jesus wept.”

What does it mean for us that Jesus, God incarnate, wept over the death of his friend? What does it mean in light of the call to ecological conversion?

In simple yet profound terms, it means that our God is not indifferent to the suffering and death of his beloved creatures. The love of Jesus for his friends and disciples while on earth reflects the love and concern of God for each of God’s creatures. In Genesis, we are reminded that “God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good.”

Scientists explain in increasingly clear terms that life on earth is facing a serious threat. The accumulation of greenhouse gases due to human activity is pushing the average global temperature up, threatening existing ecosystems vulnerable to even small temperature changes. This has effects for plant and animal life – demonstrated by the increasing rate of extinction for many species – and for human life, primarily for people who are already vulnerable.

In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis describes how our complacency has brought us to this crisis: “[Sister earth] now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air, and in all forms of life. That is why the earth herself, burdened and laid

waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she ‘groans in travail.’”

Even in light of his coming resurrection, which would signal the ultimate triumph of life over death, Jesus was concerned about the present suffering and death of his loved ones. This gives us faith that God sees our current realities and mourns with us. Can we imagine Jesus’s mourning over the destruction and harm of the earth and the most vulnerable people due to the ecological crisis? Can we ask for the courage to mourn with him and turn our mourning into action?

Pope Francis has elsewhere written about the power of tears, which people have named Francis’s “theology of tears.” “The tears of Jesus serve as an antidote to my indifference [to the suffering of others],” he said. The globalization of indifference “has taken from us the ability to weep.”

The continual destruction of God’s beautiful earth deserves our tears. As we approach Holy Week, let us pray for the grace to be truly moved by what we have seen and heard out of indifference and into repentance and action.

Questions for Reflection

When have you been moved out of indifference by something you’ve seen or heard?

How can you move from mourning into action?

Pray

Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord;
Lord, hear my voice.
Let your ears be attentive
to my cry for mercy.

If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,
Lord, who could stand?
But with you there is forgiveness,
so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.
I wait for the Lord
more than watchmen wait for the morning,
more than watchmen wait for the morning.

Israel, put your hope in the Lord,
for with the Lord is unfailing love
and with him is full redemption.
He himself will redeem Israel
from all their sins.

- Psalm 130



“Each year, the flooding seems to get worse in Cambodia. This is an effect of climate change, but also of the government’s policy of economic land concessions where precious timber is cut and the land then shifts, and erodes. I [worked] with the faculty at the Royal University in Phnom Penh to establish a renewable energy laboratory.”

- Sister Luise Ahrens
Maryknoll Sisters

Fast

Fast from the constant consumption of global news and instead focus on one or two news stories that have moved you. Pray for the people involved and for renewal of the earth.

Act

Ask your Members of Congress to oppose the Trump Administration’s decision to withdraw from the Paris agreement, a landmark climate accord signed by 197 countries.
<http://bit.ly/OpposeParisExit>



Palm Sunday



*“Jesus cried out in a loud voice again, and gave up his spirit.”
- Matthew 27: 50*

On this last Sunday of Lent, we hear two gospel passages with contrasting tones and images. The first is the joyous procession of Jesus into Jerusalem, where he is hailed by a large crowd. The second is the painful narrative of Jesus’s betrayal and crucifixion.

In this final week, we are invited to sit in the tension between the Kingdom of God that is present to us already and that which is yet to come. We feel the joy of the Palm Sunday procession and wait for Easter, knowing the end of the story already: that God has triumphed over sin and death. Yet we wait and work for the coming of God’s Kingdom in a broken world.

In hearing the passion story, we can reflect on the still-present realities of sin, suffering, and injustice in our world, including the harm done to our planet. We recall all those who, following the example of Jesus, give over their lives to witness to a better world or to the coming Kingdom of God.

Today we witness the death and suffering of people who dare to speak out in defense of their land rights or fragile ecosystems. They often confront economic interests such as mining and agriculture that supply products that end up in our homes in the global North. The human rights organization, Global Witness, found that in 2018, more than three “environmental or land defenders” were murdered each week. The Philippines is the deadliest place to be a defender.

Maryknoll Sister Marvie Misolas writes, “the readings [for Palm Sunday] remind me of the story of a farmer leader with whom I collaborated on a seedling production project outside of the city of Manila, in the Philippines. Her husband had been killed by

powerful politicians and yet she continued to speak out for justice. She receives numerous death threats from landlords she and other farmers accused in lawsuits of land grabbing. Despite the danger and fear she and her family experienced, she chooses to continue to defend her communities’ rights to the land. Her struggle is connected to the struggle of Jesus, to bring new life.”

In Christ’s resurrection he “reconciles all things to himself,” proclaiming the renewal of all creation in the Kingdom of God (Col 1: 19). As Christians, we are called to witness to that Kingdom and work to build it daily through following in the footsteps of Jesus.

“The Season of Lent enables us to perceive the new creation that God is bringing about in each of us and in our world,” writes Father Ray Finch, Superior General of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers. “It helps open our eyes and hearts to the Spirit turning the world upside down.” As we prepare for the joy of Easter next week, let us give thanks for the steps we have taken in our journey toward ecological conversion and for the ways God’s new creation is already emerging in our world. Let us pray for the grace to continue on this journey.

Questions for Reflection

This Lent, what have you learned about your relationship with God, with the earth, and with others?

How will you continue your journey of ecological conversion?

Pray

Father, we praise you with all your creatures.
They came forth from your all-powerful hand;
they are yours, filled with your presence and
your tender love. Praise be to you!

Son of God, Jesus,
through you all things were made.
You were formed in the womb of Mary our
Mother, you became part of this earth,
and you gazed upon this world with human eyes.
Today you are alive in every creature
in your risen glory.
Praise be to you!

Holy Spirit, by your light
you guide this world towards the Father's love
and accompany creation as it groans in travail.
You also dwell in our hearts
and you inspire us to do what is good.
Praise be to you!

Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite
love, teach us to contemplate you
in the beauty of the universe,
for all things speak of you.

Awaken our praise and thankfulness
for every being that you have made.
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined to
everything that is.

God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.
Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good, advance
the weak, and care for this world in which we
live.

The poor and the earth are crying out.
O Lord, seize us with your power and light, help
us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you!
Amen.

- A prayer for the earth from *Laudato Si'*

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“Among the signs of the times, I call to mind these recent messages: the United Nations as an international body announced that we have only a decade to go back to pre-industrial emissions levels to reverse the catastrophes that are caused by climate change. We also have the Church teachings in *Laudato Si'* inviting us to ecological conversion, to change our ways towards nature, God's creation. Indigenous peoples have been gifted with the wisdom to care for the Earth; we need to learn from them how to save ourselves from hurting millions.

[The prophet Isaiah promises] that ‘the redeemed shall walk’ in God's highway and the ransomed of God shall return to Zion singing with joy. Pope Francis invites us to ecological conversion, to have compassionate care for the Earth, to heal the world so that the Earth community will be whole. Admitting that most of these calamities are caused by human activity, let us initiate action so that we can all be redeemed and enter God's highway.”

- Sister Teresa Dagdag
Maryknoll Sisters

Fast

This week, decrease your fossil fuel use by trying out cleaner methods of transportation, including walking, biking, carpooling, and using public transportation. Natural gas, oil and other fossil fuels used for transportation contribute greatly to greenhouse gas buildup in the atmosphere.

Act

Join the Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM), a coalition of Catholic groups committed to ecological justice:
<https://catholicclimatemovement.global/>