



## 2017 Earth Day: Environmental and Climate Literacy

### Our Common Home

### Reflection

Earth Day, annually celebrated on April 22, is the largest secular observance in the world. It was first observed in 1970. Today the Earth Day Network coordinates worldwide events in over than 193 countries. On Earth Day 2016, the United States, China and 120 other countries signed the landmark Paris Climate Agreement that went into effect later that year.

*Environmental and Climate Literacy*, this year's theme, encourages citizens' education on key concepts to prepare them for advocacy.

Numerous communities extend the observance into **Earth Week**, an entire week of activities focused on environmental issues confronting humans. 2017 Earth Week Events include:

- *March for Science* (April 22, 2017)
- *Mercy to Earth Weekend!* (April 23, 2017)
- *People's Climate Mobilization* (April 29, 2017)

Information on these events and more can be found at the Catholic Climate Covenant's website:

<http://www.catholicclimatecovenant.org/>

#### Reflection questions:

- What is my understanding of care for creation and care for the poor? What restraints do I need to make in my own life?

(*Laudato Si Study & Action Guide*, Columban Center for Advocacy & Outreach)

Ours is a planet filled with wonder. It was only a few decades ago that for the first time in history, thanks to groundbreaking advances in technology, humans were able to view planet earth from space.

In the eighties a spacecraft called Voyager captured an image of our solar system from 11,100,000,000 miles away, depicting it as a tiny grain of sand so tiny it was barely detectable. Yet there it was, that planet we call home, not only beautiful but filled with wonder, a home that provides all we need to live: oxygen, water, food, etc. Looking at these images it is hard not to be moved with admiration, respect and amazement. It should make us feel privileged to inhabit this earthly place given to us by God. We now know there are not only trillions of planets in the universe but trillions of galaxies out there. Yet, as far as we know, not even one other is brimming with life like ours. This makes our home Mother Earth and us very unique and special.

What should our response be to such a gift from God, such a blessing? How are we to treat and care for our common home, for one another, and all living things that share this space? What comes to mind when we reflect on these questions? This: have we been mindful and grateful enough for the blessing of this beautiful home?

*On this 2017 Earth Day, let us experience, enjoy and thank God for Creation.*

#### Reflection questions

- What is my understanding of "integral ecology"? How is poverty an environmental issue?

(*Laudato Si Study & Action Guide*, Columban Center for Advocacy & Outreach)

"Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created" (Psalm 148:3-5).

## Church Response



## Action & Prayer

What is stewardship? Biblical stewardship instructs us to work and care for those things given to us by God. The harmful effects of climate change are more and more backed by science, and people of faith are urged to make a commitment to caring for the earth.

Pope Francis made history in May 2015 with the release of his encyclical *Laudato Si*, or *Praise be to You*, the first document of its kind for the Church. The encyclical calls our attention to the exploitation and degradation of our common home and urges countries to take "swift and unified global action."

Pope Francis also makes clear that our care for one another and the earth are intimately bound. The Catholic Church brings a distinct perspective to the debate on climate change by lifting up moral dimensions of this issue and the needs of the most vulnerable among us. As Catholics our faith calls us to care for all of God's creation, especially the 'least of these' (Mt 25:40).

As a congregation the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate are deeply concerned about the impact of environmental degradation on God's creation, human and non-human. The General Council of the congregation, in "Vade Mecum" (first published in 1996 then revised and renamed "The OMI Pastoral Companion" in 2015) calls on Oblates to include this new reality in their missionary consciousness.

Oblate communities are continually searching for new ways to respond to this call. In 2003 the U.S. Province formally established the Oblate Ecological Initiative and approved the founding of the Community Supported Garden at La Vista in Godfrey, IL. In 2004 the parish eco-mission project was established to bring the message to local ministry sites across the country. In 2011 the U.S. Province entered into agreement with Three Part Harmony Farm and provided a 2-acre parcel of land at its residence in Washington, DC for the establishment of an urban commercial garden.

Through the Faith Consistent Investment program the Oblates work with other religious and institutional investors to encourage corporations to include their environmental footprint in their business model.

### TAKE ACTION

- Ask Congress to support the Green Climate Fund and invest in low-emission, climate-resilient development in poor countries. <http://bit.ly/GCFund>
- Operation Noah works to raise awareness of climate change and equip Christians to take a stand on this vital issue. Visit their website to find audit questionnaires on greening your church and many other resources: <http://operationnoah.org/category/resources/church-resources/>
- Calculate your carbon footprint: <https://www3.epa.gov/carbon-footprint-calculator>
- Download Catholic Climate Covenant's <http://www.catholicclimatecovenant.org/earthday> Earth Day toolkits for adults and children. The 2017 program theme is "Know the Creator through Creation."

### PRAYER

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.**

(Excerpted from "A Christian prayer in union with creation," in *Laudato Si'*, no. 246)