An Invitation to Ecological Conversion for U.S. Catholics

"For from the greatness and the beauty of created things their original author, by analogy, is seen." - Wisdom 13:5

A Call to Conversion

We enter this season of Lent recognizing the yearnings of our hearts which can be fulfilled only in Christ. The Desert Fathers and Mothers understood that in order to hear Christ's voice, we must enter into the solitude of the desert. For the one who listens, the desert is not a barren place that is dead and desolate. Rather, it is a place that teems with life, and whose pregnant solitude reveals the Lord, present to us in all of creation.

This time of Lent reminds us that we are in need of conversion—for as Pope Francis wrote in *Laudato si*':

> "'The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast.' For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion" (no. 217).

Indifference and distance from one another have led to devastating consequences for God's creation, including the poor. The conversion that we need is both metaphorical and physical.

The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor

As it is, we rarely pause to listen to "the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor," nor do we regularly reflect on how our choices impact our brothers and sisters around the world. Our world is hurtling toward unsustainable climate conditions that will affect the flourishing of people all over the planet. This unsustainable situation is, in part, caused by ever-increasing consumption enabled by the ability to accumulate with a simple click of the button, and incessant marketing to convince us that we all need more.

At the same time, our country is stepping back from global and national efforts to change course. Progress to slow climate change remains elusive, even while instances of extreme weather, wildfires, droughts, and floods are now common. Receiving the brunt of the burden are people seeking refuge from disasters, farmers struggling to adapt to erratic weather patterns, children suffering from dehydration and hunger, migrants who flee their homes due to loss of livelihood,

and species declining in forests and coral reefs. Never has it been clearer that everything is interconnected.

In the face of these challenges, the Churches of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean raise a prophetic voice from the Global South to share a common conviction: "without climate justice there is no peace, without ecological conversion there is no future, without listening to the people there are no real solutions."

This call to listen is apt. As we seek to respond to these challenges, we must be unafraid to go into the desert, to listen and discern. How well do we listen to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor? How can we better recognize our responsibility for one another? To what more might we be called in this regard?

A Call to Solidarity, Local Discernment, and Action

The path forward must be discerned together, a reflection of our unity as the Body of Christ. Through conversion of our hearts and lived solidarity with the poor, the vulnerable, and creation, we can find a path for all to live in a manner reflective of God-given human dignity.

We each must recognize the power we have as individuals and in community. Echoing Pope Francis in *Laudate deum* (no. 69) and *Laudato si'* (no. 179), Pope Leo XIV noted in his message to the participants at the "Raising Hope" conference, "Everyone in society, through non-governmental organizations and advocacy groups, must put pressure on governments to develop and implement more rigorous regulations, procedures and controls. Citizens need to take an active role in political decision-making at national, regional and local levels." Even where the challenges loom large, we must continue to advocate for changes to care for the earth and the poor, and to ensure opportunities for workers while we transition to more sustainable approaches. Each of us has a role to play in urging leaders at all levels to convert their hearts alongside us.

In addition, we must each make daily choices that reflect our conversion to better care for God's creation and the people, communities, and livelihoods that are interconnected. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and many organizations offer regular opportunities for individuals to express and practice conversion, in their own daily lives and through ongoing advocacy. We invite you to prayerfully discern how you, your parish, and your community might participate in any of the actions below.

Families and individuals can purchase products from companies that prioritize care for creation and consider renewable energy sources for their homes.

Business leaders can work to increase sustainability and ensure justice towards their workers and communities in the areas surrounding their operations.

Schools can integrate care for creation into curricula.

Parishes can create opportunities for prayer in nature, offer pilgrimages, and celebrate a Mass to care for creation.

Dioceses can conduct an energy audit of the buildings they own, which can lead to energy and often cost savings. They can convene synodal listening conversations to learn more about community needs and partner locally to build climate resilience. Priests, deacons and seminarians can receive formation about Catholic social teaching on environmental stewardship, which they can share through homilies.

Religious communities can share with others their successes in utilizing socially responsible investing practices, which work to align investments with the values of Catholic social teaching, including care for creation.

Policymakers can listen to the voices of those most impacted by environmental challenges and seek to create just policies mindful of their well-being, with an eye also to other vulnerable populations, such as workers.

Everyone has a role to play in urging leaders at all levels to convert their hearts—and establish policies to better care for God's creation.

Finally, all Catholics and institutions can develop a *Laudato Si'* Action Plan with the help of the Vatican's website.

A Lenten Challenge and Prayer

This Lent is an opportunity for discernment and action. May we quiet our hearts and enter the solitude of the desert, that we might hear the voice of God and listen to the cries of his children around the world whose livelihoods are impacted by our own actions and lifestyles. May we each reflect deeply—individually and as communities—and discern how to act. How are we being called to enter the desert of Lent and discern how the Spirit invites us to act to protect the book of nature, God's creation?

A Lenten Prayer

O God,

During this season of Lent,
draw us into the desert, a place of fasting and prayer,
removed from the distractions of the world.
Help us listen to the voice of creation.

Turn our hearts to you.
In our innermost space,
let us listen more carefully
to creation, to others and to you.
Help us listen to the voice of creation.

As we are touched in this listening
by your incarnational presence,
remind us of your love and mercy,
your initiative and activity.
Help us listen to the voice of creation.

Show us your attentiveness
to the cry of the earth and cry of the poor
to the little ones wounded by a throw-away culture,
and to those suffering due to natural disasters.
Help us listen to the voice of creation.

Listening to *the voice of creation*,
help us to join in holy witness
to protect those most vulnerable
and to protect our common home.
Amen.

Adapted from [Help me to listen to the voice of creation]

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