

Presentation of the Holy Father's Message for 2023 Celebration of the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation

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“Let Justice and Peace Flow,” the Holy Father pleads, like a healing river over our damaged planet. The image of a mighty river, taken from the prophet Amos (5:24), also illustrates some key themes to help Catholics fully live the Season of Creation together with Christians of other denominations.

1. A river as an ecological image

Pope Francis brings the biblical image of the river into the 21st century, calling our attention to the real rivers that are so badly mistreated that they starkly symbolize the ecological crisis.

“The senseless war against creation,” he writes, “can be seen in so many rivers that are drying up.” Climatic changes, deforestation and erosion that result from human activity lead to mega-droughts and devastating flooding. Ever more frequent and severe, they bring many rural communities to their knees in the face of water shortages and crop failures. The fragility of water and agriculture are now impacting many millions in urban metropolises as well.

Moreover, the Holy Father openly denounces “predatory industries” and “extreme practices such as fracking for oil and gas extraction, unchecked mega-mining projects, and intensive animal farming.” Instead of being “mighty” and “healing”, so many rivers are polluted, flooding, or drying up. They testify starkly to corporate greed, corruption, galloping consumerism, and failed governance.

2. A river as a life-giving image

To counter such pillage of “Sister Water”, Pope Francis invites everyone to join “in a mighty river to irrigate the life of our marvellous planet and human family”. He encourages us to take life-giving action, transforming “our *hearts*, our *lifestyles*, and the *public policies* ruling our societies.”

To transform our *hearts*, we are invited to pray in “the great cathedral of creation” for an “ecological conversion”. The word “creation” has the two interrelated meanings: the divine *act* that created the cosmos – and still keeps on creating today – and, secondly, as a *result* of this great work: the natural beauty all around us. May the Season of Creation remind us to honour God as our active Creator and in his ongoing Creation, otherwise we remain unaware and ungrateful.

To transform our *lifestyles*, the Holy Father urges us to repent of our “ecological sins” and commit to decisive change. I am delighted to cite some good examples:

- community screenings of the film *The Letter*.
- the *Laudato Si’ Action Platform* facilitating coordination and implementation.
- grassroots action in networks such as Caritas and the *Laudato Si’ Movement*.

But scientists remind us of the urgency: many more local actions and more effective public policies are needed everywhere.

To transform *public policies*, Pope Francis calls on the COP28 summit in Dubai (30.11-12.12) to launch “a rapid and just transition to end the fossil fuel era.” He has strong words to denounce the “madness to permit continued exploration and expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure.”

3. A river as a synodal image

This year, two great commitments of the contemporary Church coincide on 4 October, the feast of Saint Francis: the conclusion of the Season of Creation and the opening of the Synod on Synodality.

“Like a river system with its many tiny and larger tributaries,” says Pope Francis, “the Church is a communion of countless local Churches, religious orders and other associations.” The image suggests the synodal nature and process of the Church moving forward in history. Moreover, “in the same way that a river is a source of life for its surroundings, our synodal Church must be a source of life for our common home and all its inhabitants.”

May the *Laudato Si’ Week* currently underway and the Season of Creation in September be moments of both ecological conversion and synodal conversion.