

# Ecological Justice

## Psalm 104:24-30

*O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great. There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it. These all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.*

The use of fossil fuels and other human actions have contributed to climate change in such a way that will bring suffering to millions of the poorest humans living in vulnerable places, and accelerate the extinction of many other species. On this trajectory we will hand to future generations an impoverished planet depriving them of the beauty, joy and wonder we have enjoyed for millennia. We urgently need an ecological conversion – a change of mind and heart towards deepening respect for other species and their habitats, and a commitment to an interrelated global community of life. This is a call to deeper love and respect for all creatures having their own integrity before God and involves making significant changes; for a more sustainable lifestyle, to patterns of production and consumption and to our economic and political choices. The deepest reason for this conversion is that we see all of creation as emanating from God.

The compassionate God revealed in Jesus is the same God of creation – creation and incarnation are interconnected in one great movement of God's self-giving love. Thus, caring for the poor and caring for mother earth go hand in hand, especially as the poorest people on earth are the ones who suffer most from ecological degradation. Action for justice and an ecological way of life are inseparable as aspects of the one human vocation before God.

Old Testament biblical texts put humans in their place before the immensity and wonder of God's creation, and before God (Job 38:39-39:12; Psalm 104; Psalm 148). The Gospels show how Jesus regularly referenced the natural world in parables (Mk 4:3-8; Mk 4:26-29; Mk 4:30-32; Mt 13:33; Mt 13:24-30; Mt 13:47-48; Mt 6:26; Mt 6:28-30; Mt 7:24-27; Mt 7:15; Mt 7:16-20; Lk 13:6-9; Lk 15:4-6). They show someone in touch with the natural world as a gift of God. Reflecting on Scripture and participating in the celebration of the Eucharist calls us to ongoing ecological conversion. As we encounter the risen Christ as the transformation of the whole world, we are drawn into a profound communion that involves the entirety of creation in God.

From the very beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has indicated his concerns about the environment. The Pope's 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si* falls within the body of Catholic Social Teaching, directed not only at Catholics but to all people of good will.

The two key words appearing throughout the document are 'urgent' and 'crisis'. Pope Francis fears we are headed towards an environmental catastrophe that will impact on us all, but most pressingly on the world's poor. The encyclical calls for an integral ecology – an ecological commitment integrated with a commitment to the good of humanity and above all the poor, held together in the same vision. Concern for the environment is connected to sincere love for fellow human beings; integral ecology involves love and respect for animals and plants but also human history, and a particular respect for indigenous peoples.

Pope Francis call upon us all to consider the impact of our decision-making and be prepared to ask difficult questions around our procurement of products and use of resources. The challenge put to leaders is to evaluate and consider our global obligations, to limit consumption and assist developing countries to support programs of sustainable development, such as renewable energy. The call is to develop a new culture informed by principles of participation, care of people and the planet and a spirituality of communion with the earth, recognising that the poor are often ignored in discussions about climate change and economics, whereas they should be at the forefront as they are the first and worst affected by decisions.





## Extract from 'Climate Justice', Mary Robinson

Constance Okollet, a small-scale farmer and community organiser from eastern Uganda, appeared at a tribunal held by Oxfam in 2009 to gather evidence from frontline witnesses to the effects of climate change. Okollet gave testimony of the impact of dramatic changes to weather in her village over several years. In mid-2007, usually the dry season, persistent rain fell preventing farmers from harvesting their crops. One day in September the rain fell more heavily than usual, developing into flash flooding. Along with other residents, Okollet and her family fled the village in swarms, making their way to higher ground as floods ravaged their village. The scene was repeated across Uganda with tens of thousands of people displaced and infrastructure destroyed, and across Africa where in 2007 alone, twenty-two African countries experienced their worst wet season in decades, with devastating rains affecting over 1.5 million people.

Upon returning to their village, Okollet welcomed her destitute neighbours into her badly damaged but intact home. Twenty-nine people sheltered within her tiny home but with no food available and no clean water to drink, the health of the entire village community remained in jeopardy. The government provided families with quick-maturing seeds to replant their crops but the seeds struggled to take hold in the dry soil, the result of a severe drought that followed the flood and lasted for six months. Famine began to take hold and for women already struggling to hold their families together in a subsistence existence, life became unbearably difficult. She testified: "The women in my community have never had time to rest. But now, with climate change, their life is even worse. There is less water now, so I have to go more frequently to the well. Sometimes, when the well is low, I wake up at midnight to fetch water because the line during the day is too long. Sometimes I go to my field only to find that someone has stolen my crops. I know that my neighbours must be very desperate, very hungry, if they are forced to steal."

## Prayer for a Just Climate

*God of Creation,  
You created night and day.  
You separated the sea from the sky.  
You gave life to all living creatures and  
saw that it was good.  
Help us to reconnect with the majesty of  
your creation.*

*God of Love,  
Fill us with your love for all creation.  
Empty us of apathy, selfishness and fear.  
Inspire us to live simply and in harmony  
with creation.  
Help us to be good stewards, caring for  
all creation with self-sacrificing and  
nurturing love.*

*God of Compassion,  
Breathe into us solidarity with all who  
suffer now  
and the future generations who will  
suffer  
because of our environmental  
irresponsibility.  
Help us to put people before profit and  
'being' before 'having'.*

*God of Justice,  
Empower us to work together as one  
global community,  
To find creative and just solutions to  
protect those most vulnerable in our  
world, and all of creation for future  
generations.  
Move us into action for climate justice  
and to restore your creation.*

*Amen.*

*(Caritas Australia)*

*God of Justice,  
Empower us to work together  
as one global community...*