

EARTH DAY 2018

*“I exhort everyone to see the world through the eyes of God the Creator:
the earth is an environment to be safeguarded,
a garden to be cultivated.”*

— Pope Francis, Earth Day, 2016

Since its beginning in 1970, the celebration of Earth Day has been held in over 190 countries by millions of people. The theme of Earth Day 2018 is “A World Without Plastic Pollution.” Pope Francis mentioned the problem of plastic pollution in his *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*, challenging us to limit our own personal use of all plastics and to advocate for systems and structures that limit plastic production.

Plastic pollution is ruining our oceans and waterways. Plastic constitutes about 90% of all trash floating in the ocean, (46,000 pieces of plastic per square mile). Once in the ocean, plastic breaks down into such small segments that plastic from a one liter bottle could end up on every mile of beach throughout the world.¹

In the Los Angeles area alone, 10 metric tons of plastic trash fragments are carried into the Pacific Ocean every day. They contribute to the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, which is the largest floating ocean garbage site in the world, twice the size of Texas.²

One million sea birds and 100,000 marine mammals are killed annually from all this plastic in our oceans. Forty-four percent of all seabird species, 22% of cetaceans, all sea turtle species, and a growing list of fish species have been impacted by this plastic junk; it has caused death as well as injuries to these creatures.³

Almost every piece of plastic that was ever made still exists in some shape or form; it takes 500 to 1000 years for plastic to completely degrade. But plastic is still being produced, using up 8% of the world’s oil production and using crops that could be used for food. And Americans are still using plastic in large amounts, throwing away approximately 185 pounds of plastic per year, using 50% of plastic purchased only once and discarding it—Americans still throw away 35 billion plastic water bottles a year—recycling recovers only five percent of the plastics purchased.⁴

Pope Francis declared, “These problems are closely linked to a throwaway culture which affects the excluded just as it quickly reduces things to rubbish.... We have not yet managed to adopt a circular model of production capable of preserving resources for present and future generations, while limiting as much as possible the use of non-renewable resources, moderating their consumption, maximizing their efficient use, reusing and recycling them...the throwaway culture affects the entire planet.”⁵

As stewards of Creation, we have been called by Pope Francis to take our responsibility to the environment



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seriously. We are called to reject all the plastic products and wrappings that we possibly can, to reuse the plastic we do have, and to always recycle, and to ask our family, friends, schools, parishes, communities to the same. Pope Francis reminds us how we deal with material things is a spiritual issue, thus becoming responsible with plastic is part of our spiritual growth, and it is a way of showing gratitude to God for the gift of Creation.

We are also called to advocates to ensure local, regional and national systems and structures help, not harm, the environment. Solidarity with groups and organizations that are trying to make positive change on national and international levels is crucial: the Pope has emphasized that “enforceable international agreements are urgently needed. . . Global regulatory norms are needed to impose obligations and prevent unacceptable actions.”⁶

Faith in Action

- Every day, be mindful to limit, even eliminate, the use of plastic in your home, schools, places of work, etc. Say a prayer for the healing of Creation each time you make a conscious effort not to use plastic, reuse, or recycle.
- Advocate for policies, regulations, and laws that help to fight plastic pollution in local, statewide, national and international communities. For more information see the Plastic Pollution Coalition: <http://bit.ly/2wDRdZO>.

Endnotes

¹ “22 Facts About Plastic Pollution (And 10 Things We Can Do About It).” EcoWatch. February 26, 2018. <http://bit.ly/2GTxzO2>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’ (On Care for Our Common Home)*, May 24, 2015, #22, <http://bit.ly/1SGuv5R>.

⁶ Ibid, #73.

Prayer for Earth Day

We are so grateful, Creator God,
For your gift of the earth.
We praise its beauty and bounty;
We recognize the interconnectedness
Of all life, animate and inanimate,
On this blazing blue planet,
Which echoes your sense
Of the communion of all Creation.

Forgive us our trespasses
Against our mother earth,
Especially for the pollution
We have created through
Greed and negligence.
We have littered your Garden
And defiled its waters
With tons of plastic debris.

Give us the grace to restore
The seas, waterways, and the land
By committing to use less of what harms
And by being more mindful and diligent
To use only materials that are will help.

Call us to our responsibility, and our right,
To advocate for more diligently
The care of Creation, in our local,
National, and global communities.
Guide us to show our deep appreciation
Though every action we take for Creation.
Amen.

