

Earth Day Prayer Service

Ecological Conversion and Saint Augustine

Call to Prayer

“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. It must be said that some committed and prayerful Christians, with the excuse of realism and pragmatism, tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment. Others are passive; they choose not to change their habits and thus become inconsistent. So what they all need is an ‘ecological conversion’, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.” – *Laudato Si’*, 217



These words of Pope Francis remind us that our faith impels us to care for the earth – to live in right relationship with all that exists. To live out this call, however, we will need the motivation to renounce some of the conveniences to which we have grown accustomed, changing our habits to reflect our commitment to oneness in Christ. Pope Francis calls this “ecological conversion.” Conversion is never an easy task, as Saint Augustine knew well, so let us reflect on his conversion experience for inspiration into pursuing our own.

Opening Song

[“How Can I Keep from Singing”](#)

Please click the link to hear an arrangement by Audrey Assad (with lyrics), or use the attached sheet music for the original.

Reading 1 – Confessions 8.7-12

I had pretended to myself that the reason why, day after day, I staved off the decision to renounce worldly ambition and follow you alone was that I could see no certain goal towards which I might steer my course. But the time had now come when I stood naked before my own eyes, while my conscience upbraided me. ... To make the journey, and to arrive safely, no more was required than an act of will. But it must be a resolute and whole-hearted act of the will, not some lame wish. ... In my heart I kept saying ‘let it be now, let it be now!’, and merely by saying this I was on the point of making the resolution. I was on the point of making it, but I did not succeed. ... I was held back by trifles, the most paltry inanities, all my old attachments. In my state of indecision, they kept me from tearing myself away, from shaking myself free of them and leaping across the barrier to the other side, where you were calling me. Habit was too strong for me when it asked “Do you think you can live without these things?” ... I kept crying “How long shall I go on saying ‘Tomorrow, tomorrow’? Why not now?”

Responsorial – Confessions 10.6

My love of you, O Lord, is not some vague feeling: it is positive and certain. Your word struck into my heart and from that moment I loved you. Besides this, all about me, heaven and earth and all that they contain proclaim that I should love you, and their message never ceases to sound in the ears of all [people].

... But what is [that message]? I put the question to the earth. It answered,

All: I am not God.

And all things on earth declared the same. I asked the sea and the chasms of the deep and the living things that creep in them, but they answered,

All: We are not ... God.

I spoke to the winds that blow, and the whole air and all that lives in it replied,

All: I am not God.

I asked the sky, the sun, the moon, and the stars, but they told me,

All: Neither are we the God whom you seek.

I spoke to all the things that are about me, all that can be admitted by the door of the senses, and I said, 'Since you are not my God, tell me about [God]. Tell me something of my God.' Clear and loud they answered,

All: God is [the one] who made us!

I asked these questions simply by gazing at these things, and their beauty was all the answer they gave.

All: Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost forever. The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right. (*Laudato Si'*, 33)

Reading 2 – From “A Green Augustine” by Arthur Ledoux

Now [Augustine shows that] for us to see the world the way God sees it is to touch on nothing less than mystical union with God. When our self becomes fully open to and aligned with God's perspective, we seem to become transparent, “to people who contemplate creation in the Spirit of God, ‘It is not you who are seeing this’.... God views its goodness through the person's human eyes” (*Conf.* 13.31). Even as the subject who is seeing becomes transparent to God, so too does the object that is seen, “God is loved in what [God] has made,” so what we are doing is to “let [God] love [Godself] through us” (*Conf.* 13.31).

Our situation is much deeper than we thought it was; we thought we were seeing and loving the things of nature. In fact, God is seeing and loving God's self through us. To be an open pathway for such seeing and loving is, Augustine thinks, to participate in the inner life of the Trinity and to have a foretaste of the beatific vision in paradise.

Reflection/Sharing

- * What might it look like to make the effects of our encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in our relationship with the world around us?
- * Are there areas of my life that I hold onto for convenience or out of habit, despite their negative environmental impact? Areas where I say, "tomorrow, tomorrow..."
- * Am I open to the grace of participation in the Trinity? What might this mean for my engagement with the world – human beings, the environment, and all of creation?



Prayer Intentions

Our response will be, "How long shall I go on saying 'Tomorrow, tomorrow'? Why not now?' May our conversion lead to change, O Blessed Trinity."

For an increased commitment to living in right relationship with all that exists, we pray –

"How long shall I go on saying 'Tomorrow, tomorrow'? Why not now?" May our conversion lead to change, O Blessed Trinity.

For the species that are going extinct and the ecosystems that are deteriorating, we ask forgiveness and pray –

"How long shall I go on saying 'Tomorrow, tomorrow'? Why not now?" May our conversion lead to change, O Blessed Trinity.

For the oceans and habitats damaged by plastic pollution, oil spills, and air pollution, we ask forgiveness and pray –

"How long shall I go on saying 'Tomorrow, tomorrow'? Why not now?" May our conversion lead to change, O Blessed Trinity.

For the animals and people forced to migrate because of climate-related changes and disasters, we ask forgiveness and pray –

"How long shall I go on saying 'Tomorrow, tomorrow'? Why not now?" May our conversion lead to change, O Blessed Trinity.

Closing Prayer

O Holy Trinity, like Augustine, we marvel at the wonders of your creation and our place in it. We repent for the ways we have hesitated to follow you and participate in your creative goodness; for the ways we have desecrated your good and holy creatures, our pride and selfishness wreaking havoc in our spirits as well as on your earth. We ask you to lead us toward an ecological conversion, through which our hearts and minds will be focused on living in right relationships with all that is, for you have called us to oneness. We ask this in the name of the Incarnate Christ,

Amen.

