



Economy for our common home

An Advent Reflection Guide based on *Laudato Si'*

The weeks of Advent are about waiting, preparing, and anticipating the coming of Christ in our lives. But how shall we wait? We give thanks, we pray, and we open our hearts to the cry of the earth and the poor.

In his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis calls people of faith and people of goodwill to dialogue about our common home. As we enter the Advent season, it is a time for preparation and hope for an earth and spirit renewed. This year, the Faith Economy Ecology Transformation Working Group's Advent guide will explore some of the teachings of *Laudato Si'* and how we can live them out in a way that brings greater joy in our everyday lives and more justice in our public policies.

While we continue to witness people in poverty suffering the most from environmental devastation and an economic system that prioritizes powerful interests over the common good, there are also signs of hope. Right now thousands are gathering in Paris for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change COP21. There is great expectation that an agreement will come out of Paris that will set us on the right track to keep the Earth's temperature below 1.5 to 2 degrees C.

The encyclical acknowledges the "solid consensus" of the scientific community – that without immediate and sustained action, we are headed toward disaster.

But even with an agreement, there is much work to be done. By sharing stories of how people are resisting policies that keep people and the Earth impoverished and by modeling sustainable lifestyle choices that reflect a "culture of care" of our Earth and our neighbor, we can begin to realize a vision of a new economy that prioritizes the whole of God's creation.

At the heart of the current global social and ecological crises is an economic system that tries to lock interconnected societies into unsustainable patterns of production, over-consumption and waste generation, all driven by the mandate to grow.

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Climate action, ecological conversion, and systems change

REFLECTION

By Chloe Schwabe, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Advent Readings: Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalms 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14; 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2; Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (Luke 21:25-26)

We are living on the cusp of an exciting moment. As people from around the world are gathering right now in Paris for the United Nations Forum on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) COP 21, there is great hope that world leaders will agree on a plan to drastically reduce our carbon dioxide output to keep the earth below 1.5 to 2C degrees and to curb the devastating effects of climate change.

But this is only the beginning. A lot won't happen in Paris that will be necessary to transform our economy to be in right relationship with God's Earth and people. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis recognizes the steep mountain we face as individuals and as the Church to channel our hearts and minds towards an "ecological citizenship" in the face of "a milieu of extreme consumerism and affluence."

Can we shift back our focus to build and strengthen local economies and reduce our consumption of "things" produced in faraway places that require fossil fuels, and people working under subpar standards as long as transnational corporations have a preferential option over the poor?

We can learn from the humble way Jesus lived, the teaching from Psalms and also from indigenous wisdom found among communities around the world to refocus our hearts and minds towards an abundant living that celebrates community and creation.

"If we want to bring about deep change, we need to realize that certain mindsets really do influence our behavior. Our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature. Otherwise, the paradigm of consumerism will continue to advance, with the help of the media and the highly effective workings of the market." (Laudato Si' 215)



TAKE ACTION

Watch this online panel on energy democracy held on the "People's Climate Agenda" day as part of the New Economy Coalition Week.

<http://neweconomyweek.org/day-4-people%E2%80%99s-climate-agenda>

PRAYER

Creator God, we can choose to live differently! Inspire us as we make choices so that we will recognize the impact our lives have on our environment and our human family around the globe.

We pray to the Lord: **Lord, help to reclaim the future!**

Loving God, we can reclaim the future! Encourage us to be people of hope as we look forwards in faith, knowing that we can build a world of justice and peace.

We pray to the Lord: **Lord, help to reclaim the future!**

Brilliant God, we can choose to live in a way that creates a better world for everyone. Help us to know that our individual actions are made in solidarity with our sisters and brothers.

We pray to the Lord: **Lord, help to reclaim the future!**

Wonderful God, you invite us to live simply, to live sustainably, and to live in solidarity with the poor. So help us to respond to that invitation with conviction and generosity.

We pray to the Lord: **Lord, help to reclaim the future!**

Adapted from *Prayer for the Sustainability of Our Earth*
[http://greeneconomy.ph/download/mrm2014/day2/Prayer%20for%](http://greeneconomy.ph/download/mrm2014/day2/Prayer%20for%20)

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Option for the Poor: Meeting the needs of the “unbanked”

REFLECTION

By John Martinez, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Advent Readings: Baruch 5:1-9; Psalms 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6; Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11; Luke 3:1-6

““A voice of one calling in the wilderness, Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all people will see God’s salvation.”” (Luke 3:4-5)

In *Laudato Si’* Pope Francis calls for greater attention to be given to “the needs of the poor, the weak, and the vulnerable, in a debate often dominated by more powerful interests.”

One need in the United States is access to the banking system for nearly 64 million people. Predatory payday lenders have stepped in to fill that need. Households using check cashers and payday lenders earn around \$25,000 a year and spend roughly \$3,000 – more than ten percent of their total income – on interest and fees. The exploitative interest rates charged by payday lenders can trap families in a cycle of poverty, and leave them unable to look toward and plan for the future.

One way to address the needs of the “unbanked” would be to expand financial services that the Postal Service delivers, bringing low-cost and accessible financial opportunities to millions of families in need. The Postal Service could provide savings accounts, check cashing, low-fee ATMs and more to the most vulnerable communities. While 38 percent of zip codes in the United States have no bank, every one of those has a Post Office.

The United States actually had postal banking from 1910 –1968. So it would not be a new service so much as a renewal of a practice that once served millions. In fact, every other “developed” country has a postal banking system. Our system was abolished when people were able to have accounts insured by the FDIC and receive better interest rates from the banks.

But today, banking services can be expensive or difficult for people in poverty to attain. We are again in need of affordable and accessible banking services.



Typical afternoon on 6th Avenue in New York City . Photo by Flickr user [Kevin Case](#).

TAKE ACTION

Call on the Postmaster General to reinstate a postal banking system. We need a not for profit banking option to meet the needs of underserved residents across the United States and to preserve the U.S. Postal Service.

<http://www.campaignforpostalbanking.org/>

“The same mindset which stands in the way of making radical decisions to reverse the trend of global warming also stands in the way of achieving the goal of eliminating poverty. A more responsible overall approach is needed to deal with both problems: the reduction of pollution and the development of poorer countries and regions.” (Laudato Si’ 175)

PRAYER

O God, help us to be compassionate to our most vulnerable communities, who often lack the basic resources we take for granted. Help us to magnify your spirit of mercy and love for all your people, and reflect in our actions the compassion you showed us by sending your Son. Please give us the righteous spirit and moral clarity to work for change in our community, and fill our hearts with compassion and love for all God’s children. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Breaking the chains of ecological debt

REFLECTION

By Marianne Comfort, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

Advent Readings: Zephaniah 3:14-18; Isaiah 12:2-3, 4, 5-6; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:10-18

“And the crowds asked him, ‘What then should we do?’ In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise. Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you. Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.” (Luke 3:10-14)

Like John the Baptist, Pope Francis is proclaiming the signs of the times and calling for repentance. He describes a planet marred by environmental destruction and inequalities, noting an “ecological debt” that the wealthy of the world owe those whose land, health, and very lives are being sacrificed, for a notion of progress that benefits only a privileged few. In quoting the New Zealand bishops, he asks what the commandment “thou shall not kill” means when “20 percent of the world’s population consumes resources at a rate that robs the poor nations and future generations of what they need to survive.”

We are left with the question the crowds posed to John: “what then should we do?”

Pope Francis responds with invitations to adopt a “prophetic and contemplative lifestyle” free of “the obsession with consumption” and to take up “little daily actions” such as reducing the use of fossil fuels and water. He urges consumers to support small-scale food producers and energy cooperatives.

Pope Francis issues challenges to government leaders. “True statecraft,” he writes, “is manifest when, in difficult times, we uphold high principles and think of the long-term common good.” He calls on leaders to regulate practices such as mining that are degrading Earth and local communities’ health and livelihoods. He notes the necessity of international cooperation in addressing climate change. And he warns against officials ceding their responsibilities to business interests.



Maryknoll Father Joe Thaler visits a family that works in a brick factory in Nepal. Photo courtesy of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers.

TAKE ACTION

As we enter the 2016 election season, reflect on how candidates are answering the question: “*what then should we do?*” Write a letter to the editor in your local newspaper urging candidates to address the pressing issues of our day, such as climate change and global inequality. Challenge candidates who are speaking more to the interests of businesses and wealthy Americans than to the needs of Earth and people who are poor.

PRAYER

Let us pray with Pope Francis from his “Christian prayer in union with creation”:

“God of love, show us our place in this world as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth, for not one of them is forgotten in your sight. Enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live.”
Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Solidarity with the Earth and Humanity

REFLECTION

By Susan Thompson, Medical Mission Sisters Alliance for Justice Office

Advent Readings: Micah 5:1-4A; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45

“Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my lord should come to me?” (Luke 1:30–45)

This is the story of Mary, the mother of Jesus, meeting her kinswoman, Elizabeth who is carrying John the Baptist. It is the story of the joy of two women excited for themselves and each other that the births of their sons are imminent. They have come together to celebrate their happy news and to give mutual support to one another.

We retell this story in Advent every year, not just because it is a moving story, nor because it leads us to Christmas, but that through it we can see our own path to justice. It is a story of anticipation and preparation. It reminds us that neither economic nor environmental justice come in a day or a week or a year but through diligent and careful preparation and work, justice will prevail.

In our work for economic and environmental justice we often gather to share information about those events in the world that are challenging. It gives us hope and joy to meet others who have taken up this same struggle for justice. Like Mary and Elizabeth our coming together gives us renewed energy and the confidence to continue this often difficult work. Solidarity with those most impacted by economic injustice and environmental degradation means working side by side, and sharing information, resources and strategies to do the work of understanding the problems, and heralding new ways of being as did John the Baptist as well as teaching and risking the cross as Jesus did in order to bring about a just and fair economy and a world where all of God’s creation is valued.



TAKE ACTION

Attend Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD) in Washington DC in April 2016, see <http://bit.ly/EAD2016>

The theme “Lift Every Voice: Racism, Class and Power” gives people of faith an opportunity to come together in prayer, worship, advocacy training, networking and mobilization, – all culminating with EAD’s Congressional Lobby Day on Capitol Hill.

“Society is enriched by a countless array of organizations which work to promote the common good. Around these community actions relationships develop and a new social fabric emerges. In this way, the world, and the quality of life of the poorest, are cared for, with a sense of solidarity which is at the same time aware that we live in a common home which God has entrusted to us.” (Laudato Si’ 232)

PRAYER

God of joy and peace, give us the companions on our journey who will spur us to be better than we are alone. Allow us to be catalysts for those who want to do your will. Give us the compassion and love that will allow us to recognize you in the faces of all people and in all your creation. Amen