

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

Tomás Insua

It is a great honor to be part of the presentation of this papal message for “Creation Day” and the broader Season of Creation. Inspired by the momentum of Laudato Si’ Week, we can begin preparing together for the ecumenical Season of Creation, that special *kairos* when the People of God join hands to pray with and act for our common home.

This year, the Pope’s message is an invitation for us all to join the “mighty river” of prayer and action for our common home. As usual, he brings up the dual themes of contemplation and action – or "Contempl-Action" as we like to say at LSM. The critical importance of tackling both the *spiritual* roots and the *material* drivers of the ecological crisis.

Regarding contemplation, Pope Francis invites us to celebrate the Season of Creation as a moment for “ecological conversion”. As a moment for prayer in “the great cathedral of creation”, as he writes, to honor “the great Artist” who created this stunning planet and spectacular cosmos. We are invited to celebrate our liturgies with a renewed awareness of the inseparability of Creation and Redemption, as the Holy Father points out. Throughout September, let us find ways to lift up the season’s theme and its symbol of a mighty river within our communal prayer.

Regarding action, I’ll just point out a key highlight: the prophetic edge of the papal statement. In line with his earlier magisterium, this message doesn't mince words about the dramatic urgency of the climate emergency and wider ecological crisis. Likewise, he doesn't shy from naming the powerful interests driving the desecration of God's Creation, calling out “predatory industries” and their “extreme practices such as fracking for oil and gas extraction, unchecked mega-mining projects, and intensive animal farming.”

While most other global leaders, particularly the most powerful ones, remain lukewarm and subservient to corporate interests, Pope Francis continues to be a beacon of moral leadership. Grounded in the recognition of “this injustice towards the poor and towards our children, who will bear the worst effects of climate change”, he denounces the “consumerist greed” driving “the unrestrained burning of fossil fuels and destruction of forests”.

A highlight is his appeal to COP28, calling for “a rapid and equitable transition to *end* the era of fossil fuels”. He then adds, “it is *absurd* to permit continued exploration and expansion of fossil

fuel infrastructure.” This mainstream view among scientists is unpopular among the largest powers, regardless of where they stand in the geopolitical divide. Still in 2023, at a time when the Paris Agreement implementation should be in full swing, powerful nations and corporations keep building more and more oil and gas wells, pipelines, coal mines and power plants – exactly what the Pope denounces.

Next September, we can join the Holy Father in lifting up the impacts of climate injustice to government leaders. The season’s ecumenical committee encourages communities worldwide to host prayer services in places impacted by the climate crisis as a way to highlight the urgency of the crisis and then send the stories to their representatives at COP28.

Finally, in his message Pope Francis also shares this year’s Season will also be a time of preparation for the Synod starting on October 4, the last day of the Season. We are called to journey alongside the ecumenical family, with whom we are united by one Baptism in caring for God’s Creation. A relevant milestone will be the prayer vigil of September 30, “Together - Gathering of the People of God”, organized by Taizé and ecumenical partners, which we are proud to support.

May the Holy Spirit move our whole Church to speak out with and for communities and creatures most impacted by the ecological crisis, joining the mighty river of justice and peace.