



COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION

USG/UISG SECRETARIAT

Via Aurelia 476, 00165, Rome, Italy.

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Prayer Service

United Nations International Year of the Forest - 2011

Let all the rivers clap their hands...let all the woodland trees cry out for joy (Psalms 98 and 96)

Depending on circumstances, this prayer can be celebrated in an open space, in a wooded area, close to a river...or, alternatively, the prayer space can be decorated with photos or posters of forests, waterfalls, the sea...



Introduction

The objective of 2011 United Nations International Year of the Forest is to create awareness of the urgency to protect fragile global forestry and encourage a greater sustainability in their use. This International Year will help cultivate an appreciation of the role of forests in conserving the strength and vitality of the planet, as well as achieving certain goals in global development, particularly those outlined in the Millennium Development Goals. In an attitude of prayer, let us focus on the intrinsic link of dependency between forests and water. The UN has dedicated March 21 (Forest Day) and March 22 (Water Day) International Days and thus provide us with an opportunity to reflect on the importance of these God given gifts for sustaining life. In conjunction with civil society, the JPIC Commission of the USG/UISG, encourages religious women and men, along with other faith communities to pray and work for a more sustainable world for every person and the whole of creation.

Hymn (to the Creator Spirit..., praise and thanksgiving to God, the giver of life..., Cantic of Creatures (St. Francis of Assisi...))

In the name of the Creator, the fountain of life,
in the name of Christ, the pulse of life,
and in the name of the Spirit, the breath of life.

Amen.

The Lord of life be with you.

And also with you.

God, we gather in your name
to worship in this sanctuary called Earth,
a planet filled with your presence,
quivering in the forests,
vibrating in the land,



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pulsating in the wilderness,
shimmering in the rivers.
God, reveal yourself to us in this place,
and show us your face in all creation.

(All) Holy! Holy! Holy! Earth is filled with God's presence.

With an attentive gaze and a contrite heart ...

The aspects of conquest and exploitation of resources has become predominant and invasive and today has become a threat to the carrying capacity of the environment: the environment as a 'resource' risks threatening the environment as a 'home'.

The destruction of forests, also as a result of intentional forest fires, is accelerating desertification resulting in dangerous consequences for water reserves, as well as compromising the wellbeing of indigenous peoples and future generations. (*The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 461.466*)

A sung Refrain.: Lord God of life, have mercy on us! or, Kyrie eleison!

On April 20, an explosion and fire on British Petroleum's (BP's) Deep Horizon oil rig resulted in the death of 11 workers and the sinking of the rig two days later. It was discovered that the well 5,000 feet beneath the ocean surface was leaking crude oil directly into the Gulf of Mexico, washing up on the Gulf coast of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida, polluting vital wetlands and beaches; killing birds, fish, shrimp, oysters, crabs, and other sea creatures; and destroying the livelihoods of communities throughout the region. Out at sea vast plumes of oil and chemical dispersants further threaten the fragile ocean ecosystem.

Refrain.

The Amazon region is 'one of the world's most precious natural regions because of its bio-diversity, which makes it vital for the environmental balance of the entire planet' (*The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 466*)

'The entire world has been deforested before anyone realized their importance to the survival of humanity. Only the Amazon now practically remains and we dare not destroy this as well. The world needs the Amazon to breath. Petroleum, gas, mineral resources and water – the water which one day will be more valuable than petrol – need to be used, but let us save the forests and desist from cutting down trees'. (Words by Edmílson, a rubber tapper of the Amazon)

Refrain.

The Congo is the Earth's second largest river by volume and has the world's second largest rainforest. The Congo Basin makes up a large portion of Africa's biodiversity with over 600 tree species and 10 000 animal species. Six nations share the 1.5 million square mile Congo basin. The Congo is one of the world's most threatened ecosystems. Commercial logging, clearing for subsistence agriculture, and widespread civil strife has devastated forests, displaced forest dwellers,



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and resulted in the expansion of the "bushmeat" trade. Since the 1980s, Africa has had the highest deforestation rates of any region on the globe.

Refrain.

Indonesia has a total forest area of about 10 percent of the world's remaining tropical forest. But the tropical Southeast Asian country - whose forests are a treasure trove of plant and animal species including the endangered orangutans - has already lost an estimated 72 percent of its original frontier forest. The country is now the world's second-largest palm oil producer and has about 5 million hectares planted with oil palm. Palm oil companies are burning peat forests to clear land for plantations in Indonesia's Riau province, despite government pledges to end forest fires. Forest fires are an annual menace for Indonesia and the country's neighbors, who have grown deeply frustrated at the apparent lack of success in curbing the dry-season blazes and vast smoke clouds, or haze that smothers the region. Apart from the health risks to millions of people and damage to the environment, the smoke also releases large amounts of carbon dioxide, fuelling global warming.

Refrain.

In the region of Murcia, Spain, 45% of the territory is covered by forest. Deforestation in this region is principally due to fires and the removal of trees and brush to make way for agriculture and urban expansion. Forest fires have become common in pine forests over the last fifty years. Pine trees are not natural to the area. They were introduced for forestry reasons, because they grow quicker than 'natural' forests and can be used to harvest for timber.

Refrain.

The introduction of European farming and water management techniques has had a dramatic effect on the Australian environment. Salinity is one of the most serious causes of water degradation facing Australia's rivers today. Another problem is that more water is being taken out of Australian rivers than is going into them. Because Australia is so dry, there is only a limited amount of water available. A river needs a certain amount of water to flow properly, to provide the right living conditions for animals and fish, and to provide enough water for plants.

Refrain.

Participants could contribute some information about the forests and rivers in their own regions.

Faith in God the creator of the Universe, the good God of every creature invites us to acknowledge responsibility for the wounds inflicted on the forests, for the abusive use of water and for the consequences of such actions on the most vulnerable.

(Together): " I am the forest that is being cut down.
I am the rivers and the air that are being polluted,
and I am also the person who cuts down the forest
and pollutes the rivers and the air.
I see myself in all species,



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and I see all species in me.

(Thich Nhat Hanh in *Plum Village Chanting and Recitation Book*)

God's project

'On the contrary, one must take into account the nature of each and of its mutual connection in an ordered system, which is precisely the cosmos.' (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 34).

From the Book of Genesis (1, 6-12)

Then God said, "Let there be a dome in the middle of the waters, to separate one body of water from the other." And so it happened:

God made the dome, and it separated the water above the dome from the water below it. God called the dome "the sky." Evening came, and morning followed--the second day. Then God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered into a single basin, so that the dry land may appear." And so it happened: the water under the sky was gathered into its basin, and the dry land appeared. God called the dry land "the earth," and the basin of the water he called "the sea." God saw how good it was. Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth vegetation: every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it." And so it happened: the earth brought forth every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it. God saw how good it was.

Silence for reflection

The attitude that must characterize the way man [woman] acts in relation to creation is essentially one of gratitude and appreciation; the world in fact, reveals the mystery of God who created and sustains it. (*The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 487)

For sister water,
which is very humble, useful, precious and chaste:
Blessed be you, Lord, for creating her!

For sister mother earth,
who produces various fruit
with coloured flowers and herbs
Blessed be you, Lord, for creating her!

For the forests which purify the water and air,
protecting the soil from erosion and strong winds
and preserving biological diversity
Blessed be you, Lord, for creating them!



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For streams and rivers,
for the springs and rain,
for the seas and oceans:

Blessed be you, Lord, for creating them!

Experiences

God himself offers humanity the honour of cooperating with creation through the strength of his intelligence. Each individual and institutional subject must involve him and herself in protecting the patrimony of forests and, where necessary, promote adequate reforestation programmes.

The use of water and connected services must be oriented towards satisfying everyone's needs, especially people who are poor. Without water life is threatened. Therefore, the right to water is a universal and inalienable right. (*The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 460.466.484.485*)

South Korea is in many ways a reforestation model for the rest of the world. When the Korean War ended, half a century ago, the mountainous country was largely deforested. Beginning around 1960, the South Korean government launched a national reforestation effort. Relying on the creation of village cooperatives, hundreds of thousands of people were mobilized to dig trenches and to create terraces for supporting trees on barren mountains. The result was a seemingly miraculous rebirth of forests from barren land.

Today forests cover 65 percent of the country, an area of roughly 8 million hectares. While driving it's gratifying to see the luxuriant stand of trees on mountains that a generation ago were bare. We can reforest the earth!

In Bangladesh a campaign to plant a million trees is initiated through a vehicle known as the Child Forest Campaign. The future of the global environment required the development of a whole new generation of environmental leadership. The Child Forest Campaign intended to plant trees from village to village, covering 1,000 villages in an effort to minimize the loss of core forests and create buffer zones to protect mainstream forestry. Forests must be seen through the eyes of children, in order to save a sick planet.

In Italy, in the province of Aquila, during the annual Daffodil Festival, one of the wagons in the procession was dedicated to water and was called 'Clear? Most Pure? Dearest!' The wagon highlighted problems related to water. With new government legislation water has become a product and not a good available to everyone. With increasing water shortages the poor will be penalized even more. The story goes that the drop of water that emerged from the fountain became enslaved by a new owner. Our responsibility is to ensure that water remains a public and accessible good and not a market product out of reach of the general population.

In Italy, one million four hundred thousand signatures were collected and handed to the Court of Appeal calling for a Referendum against the privatization of water services

Each person can share a positive experience or initiative undertaken in his or her own area and/or share ideas stemming from what has just been heard.

Let us pray (or sing) together with the words of the Psalm:



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Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.

Sing to the LORD, praise his name;
proclaim his salvation day after day.

Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns."

The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved;
he will judge the peoples with equity.

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;
let the sea resound, and all that is in it.

Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them;
let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.

Let all creation rejoice before the LORD, for he comes,
he comes to judge the earth.

He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples in his faithfulness.

Glory be to the Father...

(Psalm 96,1-2.10-13)

Let us pray:

Creator God and Gardener of the world,
Tender of trees, of the field and the grass,
Keeper of forests, woodlands and wide-open plains,
Fecundity of the waters, the One who vests our Earth in its blue breathing veil,
We ask you your blessing on each of us and upon all who have the power
To change our destructive ways;
We ask your blessing upon our commitment to preserve life for all humanity
and for the entire Earth Community.
Bless the Earth and bless us your creatures, the temples of Your Holy Spirit.
Through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord.
Amen.

Final Hymn (of blessing, of thanksgiving, of praise...)



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Some Questions for reflection:

1. As members of international religious institutes, how do you find yourselves in solidarity with your brothers and sisters in the countries we have just prayed for in this service?
2. As you prayed did you identify any particular feelings, make any connections with aspects of your own life, the life of your family or related issues concerning our Christian calling to be instruments of life?
3. In what ways can you bring concerns regarding our forests and the people who depend on them to your prayer throughout this year?
4. Are there any practical things you and/or your community can do to live in a more sustainable way, to replenish our forests and/ or to improving some local, national or international ecosystem?

This prayer service was prepared by the Poor Clares of Cortona, Italy for the JPIC Commission.