

NEWS

On Earth Day, Pope Francis repeats belief that natural disasters are the planet's revenge

Humanity has 'sinned against the earth,' said Pope Francis.

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Pope Francis attends the Pachamama ritual in the Vatican Gardens where a pagan 'sacred tree' planting ceremony took place, Oct. 4, 2019, Rome.

By Dorothy Cummings McLean

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VATICAN CITY, April 23, 2020 (LifeSiteNews) – Pope Francis has insisted once again that natural disasters, like the Wuhan coronavirus, are the unforgiving earth's revenge for sins against the environment.

The pontiff made his remarks as part of yesterday's weekly general audience, one dedicated to celebrating the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. Because of the current lockdown in Vatican City, the papal speech was broadcast from inside his library.

Pope Francis declared that humanity has "sinned against the earth, against our neighbors and ultimately against the Creator."

"There is a Spanish saying that is very clear about this," he said.

"It goes: 'God always forgives; we humans sometimes forgive, and sometimes not; the earth never forgives'. The earth does not forgive: if we have despoiled the earth, its response will be very ugly."

This was an echo of previous statements about the cause of the Wuhan pandemic and the beliefs of eco-theologian Leonardo Boff, one of the pontiff's chief influences.

Using the Book of Genesis, his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, and his recent post-synodal exhortation *Querida Amazonia* as source material, Pope Francis stressed that humanity has failed in our responsibility to care for the earth. He also praised secular environmentalist groups for taking "to the streets" to raise awareness.

"Because of our selfishness we have failed in our responsibility to be guardians and stewards of the earth. 'We need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair,'" the pontiff said, quoting *Laudato Si'*.

"We have polluted it, we have despoiled it, endangering our very lives. For this reason, various international and local movements have sprung up in order to appeal to our consciences. I deeply appreciate these initiatives; still it will be necessary for our children to take to the streets to teach us the obvious: we have no future if we destroy the very environment that sustains us."

The pontiff called for a "new way of looking at our common home" as something other than a "storehouse of resources for us to exploit." He stated again that "natural tragedies" are caused by human mistreatment of the planet.

"For us believers, the natural world is the 'Gospel of Creation': it expresses God's creative power in fashioning human life and bringing the world and all it contains into existence, in order to sustain humanity. As the biblical account of creation concludes: "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (*Gen 1:31*)," he said.

"When we see these natural tragedies that are the earth's response to our mistreatment, I think: 'If I ask the Lord now what he thinks about it, I do not believe he is saying it is a very good thing'," the pontiff continued.

"It is we who have ruined the Lord's work!"

In March, Pope Francis told a Spanish journalist that he believed the coronavirus pandemic was the result of nature "throwing a fit" in response to environmental pollution. Earlier this month, he told his English biographer that natural disasters like fires and floods are nature's

response to human activity. One of his theological advisors, Leonardo Boff, published an article in March saying that diseases were Gaia's "reprisal" against human beings.

Pope Francis' approach contrasts slightly with the perennial doctrine of the Church that pestilence and other natural disasters are a corrective punishment from God, caused by original and individual sin.

During yesterday's audience, the pontiff also touched on two other controversial themes of his reign: the sacralization of the planet and globalism.

Pope Francis stated that humanity is "called to renew our sense of sacred respect" for the planet, which he said was not only "our home but also God's home." The ground we stand on is "holy ground."

The pontiff then praised indigenous peoples for their "gift of contemplation" and, calling for one world plan to confront ecological damage, gave his stamp of approval to two meetings of the United Nations' governing body about the planet.

"As a single and interdependent family, we require a common plan in order to avert the threats to our common home. 'Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan'," he said, again quoting his *Laudato Si'*.

"We are aware of the importance of cooperation as an international community for the protection of our common home. I urge those in positions of leadership to guide the preparations for two important international Conferences: COP15 on Biodiversity in Kunming, China, and COP26 on Climate Change in Glasgow, United Kingdom. These two meetings are of great importance."

The pontiff also pledged his support for national and local environmental action, saying that it would be helpful if people at "all levels of society" would come together to create a popular movement "from below."

The speech was in keeping with Pope Francis's keen interest in the environment which became globally known with the 2015 promulgation of his *Laudato Si'*. Critics of the pontiff's approach to the theology of creation have subsequently objected to actions and rhetoric that divinize the planet, suggesting that the earth is conscious or even supernatural.

The introduction of the Andean figure of the Earth Mother, or "Pachamama," to ostensibly Christian worship during the 2019 Synod of Bishops for the Amazonian Region shocked many faithful Catholics and led to a purging of several wooden copies of the image from a Roman church by Austrian layman Alexander Tschugguel. The working document and final report for the Synod on the Amazon came under heavy criticism for their departures from orthodoxy, and the resultant post-synodal exhortation *Querida Amazonia* has been questioned for its rosy view of indigenous pagan spirituality.
