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The peak of Mount Sinai, traditionally known as Jabal Musa, where, according to the Bible, Moses received the Ten Commandments (EarthBeat photo/Doreen Ajiambo)



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Mount Sinai, Egypt — November 15, 2022

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As dawn broke on the site where the Ten Commandments are believed to have been delivered to Moses, hundreds of Catholics led by dozens of priests knelt before the foot of the mountain. They prayed for world leaders at COP27 to submit to God's will and fully commit to fighting climate change.

"God, we seek your intervention at this sacred place where Moses received the Ten Commandments," prayed Fr. Vitalis Anaehobi, the secretary general of the Regional Episcopal Conference of West Africa, as he led Catholics in prayer after climbing down the mountain on Nov. 14, the start of the second and critical week of the United Nations climate change negotiations.

"We commit to continue taking care of the environment, and we pray that you change the hearts of our leaders to take immediate action on climate change and save lives," he prayed.

The Nigerian priest continued, asking God to "intervene now in all these problems we are facing due to climate change. God, I ask you to give humanity the willingness to obey you so that the Earth will not revolt against humanity that has been abusing it."



Religious actors and climate activists climb down Mount Sinai after watching the sunrise Nov. 14. At the foot of the mountain, they prayed to God to intervene and save the world from climate change. (EarthBeat photo/Doreen Ajiambo)

Earlier that morning, climate activists smashed mock tablets of stone atop the mountain in reaction to world leaders' failure to follow through on commitments to mitigate and adapt to climate change. The act referenced the story in Exodus 32 when after descending Mount Sinai, an angry Moses smashed the Ten Commandments in protest against the Israelites worshipping other gods.

The activists later repented and asked for God's intervention at COP27, being held just 50 miles southeast of the sacred mountain in the Egyptian resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh on the Red Sea.

Catholic and other faith-based organizations have been pushing world leaders since the convening began on Nov. 6 to take seriously actions and commitments on emissions reductions and financing loss and damages resulting from climate change.

The global climate summit is expected to address the role of climate finance, adaptation ambition and implementation of the Paris Agreement. After a fortnight of deliberations, delegates from nearly 200 nations are expected later this week to unveil a final document outlining next steps toward curbing the climate crisis.

Feeling politicians have so far failed them, the group of Catholics attending the conference sought out divine intervention at Mount Sinai, traditionally known as Jabal Musa.



A religious leader climbs down Mount Sinai after watching the sunrise Nov. 14. At the foot of the mountain, he joined climate activists to pray for world leaders to change their hearts and save the planet from damage. (EarthBeat photo/Doreen Ajiambo)

"The discussions at COP27, as I already know, do not seem to be sincere," said Anaehobi. "The consciousness of common humanity is still lacking. Instead of thinking 'world,' many are thinking 'country' or 'investment and gain.' ... We have to

keep hoping that things will be good one day. This is faith, faith that humanity will one day understand their common destiny."

In the Book of Exodus, Mount Sinai is where Moses saw the burning bush, and God spoke to him before sending him on a mission to Egypt to rescue the Israelites from slavery. It's also the mountain where God met with Moses and delivered the law after crossing the Red Sea, making it a symbol of God's covenant with Israel.

"Mount Sinai is a sacred place, and our presence here is in search of communion with God, who hears the cry of the poor," said Fr. Leonard Chiti, a member of the Society of Jesus in southern Africa. "We need those cries again and to be re-missioned by the God of Joseph and Moses."

In an interview with EarthBeat at the foot of Mount Sinai, Chiti said he believed God would hear their prayers for protecting and caring for the Earth. He lamented that many of the world's wealthiest nations — often in the Global North — are responsible for nearly half of global greenhouse gas emissions, and yet those who suffer — including many women and children — are often from the Global South.

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The Zambian-born Jesuit noted that climate change has contributed to hunger, death, floods, loss of livelihoods, loss of shelter, displacement and fear — especially in Africa. He said such happenings worldwide can be addressed through prayers, and Mount Sinai was a meaningful place to make them.

"Going to Mount Sinai represents identification with Moses, the liberator of the Hebrew people from slavery," he said. "The people I represent need liberation from the suffering induced by climate change."

Chiti said they had trusted world leaders, who have met nearly every year for the last three decades, to forge a global response to the climate emergency. Still, leaders have failed to satisfactorily implement solutions they have pledged to mitigate climate change's repercussions.

Chiti and other Catholics who visited Mount Sinai are now relying on God for an answer to climate change and to speak to the hearts of world leaders as God spoke to Moses to lead the Israelites to the promised land, he said.



Frs. Vitalis Anaehobi, left, and Leonard Chiti stand at the peak of Mount Sinai Nov. 14, in front of a house where it's believed the tablets with the Ten Commandments were kept. (EarthBeat photo/Doreen Ajiambo)

"Politicians and bureaucrats are not interested in saving people from the current crisis. We need leadership inspired by God and motivated by his concerns for the little ones who could not be present at the COP to represent them," he said.

Damian Spruce, head of advocacy at Caritas Australia, said the visit and prayers at Mount Sinai could convert the hearts of world leaders before the U.N. climate convening is scheduled to end on Friday. He wished the leaders could turn the discussions into implementation to aid climate change adaptation and mitigation.

"There is not enough progress being made on agendas like loss and damage, and there is not enough urgency in addressing these questions when villages are already being washed away by flooding and climate change," he said. "Islands and communities are being threatened by inundation. More commitments need to be made quickly before the week is out."

Spruce said their visit to the mountain was significant at a time when the world needs a solution to climate change. Quoting from Genesis 1:31, he said that God had an answer: "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning — the sixth day."

"From the heights of Sinai, we looked out at the mountains, the sky, the dramatic landscapes of the Earth and its beauty. We felt that immense duty to protect God's creation, the glory of the ecologies and environments around us, which are threatened and indeed already being destroyed by climate change. The urgency of protecting the Earth has never been greater," he said.



People gather at the peak of Mount Sinai Nov. 14 to take photos of the sunrise, while others offer prayers as they believe it was the time the Ten Commandments were delivered to Moses. (EarthBeat photo/Doreen Ajiambo)

Catholics worldwide have been fighting climate change through the Laudato Si' Movement, an international network of Catholic individuals and organizations responding to Pope Francis' call to care for our common home and achieve climate

and ecological justice.

Lindlyn Moma, global advocacy director for the Laudato Si' Movement, said that the Catholic Church advocates for ecological justice because climate change negatively touches on the lives of everyone, and the pilgrimage to Mount Sinai was a plea for divine intervention to transform society and change the minds and hearts of world leaders to avert the worst impacts of a rapidly warming world.

"Going to Mount Sinai was a spiritual journey of renewal. It was a journey to reconnect with my inner self to regain strength because the COP has been very disappointing," she said. "It was a journey to ask God for guidance and forgiveness because the beautiful Earth he gave us is already in peril because of our actions."

"So going to Mount Sinai was also to renew my passion for doing the right thing on climate change and be able to come back and influence negotiators at the COP to do the right thing," Moma added.

This story appears in the **COP27 Egypt** feature series. View the full series.