News
EarthBeat
A firefighter walks next to rising flames as a wildfire burns near the village of Vati, on the isla

A firefighter walks next to rising flames as a wildfire burns near the village of Vati, on the island of Rhodes, Greece, July 25, 2023. Extreme heat waves in summer 2023 saw Greece, Italy and Spain record all-time high temperatures with the heat index in several Middle Eastern countries reaching 152 degrees Fahrenheit, near the limit of human survival. (OSV News photo, Nicolas Economou, Reuters)



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Rising global temperatures are a sign not just of climate change but a signal the planet is sick, Pope Francis said in a new video announcing his prayer intention for the month of September.

The pope has requested that prayers in the coming month be focused "for the Cry of the Earth" — a reference to an oft-quoted passage from his 2015 encyclical "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home." In that papal teaching document, Francis wrote that "we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social

approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

Francis expanded on that theme in the video, released Aug. 30 on social media and produced by the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network.

"If we took the planet's temperature, it will tell us that the Earth has a fever. And it is sick, just like anyone who's sick. But are we listening to this pain?" Francis asks.

"Do we hear the pain of the millions of victims of environmental catastrophes? The ones suffering most from the consequences of these disasters are the poor, those who are forced to leave their homes because of floods, heat waves or drought," he said.

A video on Pope Francis' prayer intention for September 2024, "the Cry of the Earth."

Addressing human-caused environmental crises, like climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, "begs responses that are not only ecological but are also social, economic and political," the pope said.

"We must commit ourselves to the fight against poverty and the protection of nature, changing our personal and community habits," he said.

Pope Francis speaks on his prayer intention for September 2024 in a video produced by the P

Pope Francis speaks on his prayer intention for September 2024, "the Cry of the Earth," in a video produced by the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network. (NCR screenshot)

Since pre-industrial times, the planet has heated 1.1 to 1.2 degrees Celsius (roughly 2 degrees Fahrenheit). Countries have committed under the Paris Agreement to limit average temperature rise to 1.5 C — a level scientists say would prevent the most devastating impacts of climate change — but remain well off pace of goals to slash global heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions nearly in half by 2030 and reach net-zero by 2050.

This summer has seen the latest wave of environmental and weather-related disasters, with devastating heat waves and wildfires and deadly storms and flooding. July 2024 was the hottest July on record, according to the National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration, continuing a streak of the past 14 months ranking at the hottest for monthly global temperatures. The year 2024 is on pace to surpass 2023 as the hottest on record.

On biodiversity, countries have committed to conserving 30% of lands and water by 2030 to stem the alarming pace of biodiversity loss around the world. In 2023, 21 species were declared extinct in the United States.

Major international meetings on climate change, biodiversity and plastic pollution will take place later this fall.

Next week, Francis will travel to southeast Asia and Oceania, where he is expected to spotlight the plight of island nations facing rising seas and stronger storms exacerbated by climate change.

The September prayer intention for the Earth aligns with the Season of Creation, an ecumenical period of prayer and action for Christians around the globe. It begins Sept. 1 with the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation and extends until Oct. 4, the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology and animals.

This year, the Season of Creation carries the theme of "Hope and Act with Creation."

A virtual Christian prayer service is planned for Sept. 1, and will include Salesian Sr. Alessandra Smerelli, secretary of the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, as well as Bishop Gerardo Alminaza of San Carlos, Philippines.

Francis in June released his message for the World Day of Prayer for Creation, in which he repeated his calls for an ecological conversion that "entails leaving behind the arrogance of those who want to exercise dominion over others and nature itself."

"To claim the right to possess and dominate nature, manipulating it at will, thus represents a form of idolatry," the pope wrote, "a Promethean version of humanity who, intoxicated by its technocratic power, arrogantly places the earth in a 'dis-graced' condition, deprived of God's grace."

In his own message, issued Aug. 28, Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, known as the "green patriarch," said that respecting the God-given dignity of the human person and the integrity of God's creation "are inseparable."

The patriarch echoed the pope's insistence that religious groups have an important role to play in fighting climate change because true progress will require conversion.

"Genuine religious faith dissolves the arrogance and titanism of humankind" by helping people realize they are not God, Bartholomew said. A person has no right to abolish "all standards, boundaries and values, while declaring himself 'the measure of all things' and instrumentalizing both his fellow human beings and nature for the satisfaction of his unquenchable needs and arbitrary pursuits."

"Respect for the sacredness of the human person and the protection of the integrity of the 'very good' creation are inseparable," the patriarch said in his message.

Bartholomew's statement, like that of Francis, also emphasized the connection between care for creation and love for one another, especially the poor.

"There is a close and indissoluble bond between our care of creation and our service to the body of Christ, just as there is between the economic conditions of the poor and the ecological conditions of the planet," he said. "Scientists tell us that those most egregiously harmed by the current ecological crisis will continue to be those who have the least."

Reporting from Catholic News Service was included in this article.

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