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Going on a 'carbon fast' for Lent

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NCR Today

Given the perils facing our planet, it may be time to observe Lent in a different way: with a "carbon fast."

For starters, I listened to President Barack Obama's State of the Union address with a special interest in his message on climate change.

I was delighted that he cited the "overwhelming judgment of science" on this subject, citing the increasing frequency of heat waves, droughts, wildfires, floods and storms in a period when 12 of the hottest years on record have come in the last 15 years.

I was happy to hear his willingness to take action even if Congress does not budge. His emphasis on wind and solar power was welcome.

But I was disappointed he did not mention carbon or fossil fuels as the center of the problem.

And he offered praise for natural gas, which is a fossil fuel, even though it is "cleaner" than oil or gas. Then this sentence slipped in almost unnoticed: "That's why my administration will keep cutting red tape and speeding up new **oil and** gas permits" (emphasis mine).

Oil? Oil is much dirtier (in carbon) than natural gas. If we need to move away from carbon, why the oil permits? Is this a signal that he will approve the controversial Keystone XL pipeline, which would carry dirty oil from the tar sands region of Canada to the Gulf of Mexico? I hope not.

On Wednesday, 48 civic and environmental leaders, including Bill McKibben, Julian Bond, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Daryl Hannah were arrested in front of the White House for protesting that Keystone pipeline. And this weekend, thousands of people concerned about the earth will rally Sunday on the Mall

in Washington to do the same thing.

Meanwhile, religious activists such as those with Interfaith Power & Light are promoting a "Carbon Fast" for Lent, offering daily ideas for moving away from a carbon-based economy. Click here for a Lenten calendar with lots of great ideas.

So this Lent, maybe it's time to turn off lights, drive less, insulate more and join the movement for a low-carbon planet.

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