

Tracing the clues to Pope Francis' ecology

Brian Roewe | Apr. 2, 2013 Eco Catholic
Pope Francis

With a name like Francis, it's not hard for a pope to draw the attention of environmentalists.

It's even easier when the Francis in reference is Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals and ecology.

For some, the namesake indicated Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio would place respect and protection for creation as a central tenant of his papacy, following the [footsteps of his predecessor](#) [1], Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.

But with little known of his writings and statements, if any, on the environment as Bergoglio, attention shifted toward what he has said and done as Francis.

In the almost three weeks since his papacy began, Francis has slipped the idea of protecting creation into numerous public speeches, homilies and addresses. He first spoke of it three days after his election, during a March 16 audience with the media while explaining his namesake: "For me [Francis of Assisi] is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation; these days we do not have a very good relationship with creation, do we?"

Francis followed up that observation with a call to action [in his second tweet](#) [2], on March 19 saying: "Let us keep a place for Christ in our lives, let us care for one another and let us be loving custodians of creation."

The tweet echoed the message Francis delivered [during his inaugural Mass](#) [3] that same day. In his homily for the Feast of St. Joseph, Francis tied Joseph's role as a protector "one who hears God's will and is open to it" to everyone's responsibility toward the earth.

"In him, dear friends, we learn how to respond to God's call, readily and willingly, but we also see the core of the Christian vocation, which is Christ! Let us protect Christ in our lives, so that we can protect others, so that we can protect creation!" Francis said.

He continued: "It means protecting all creation, the beauty of the created world, as the Book of Genesis tells us and as Saint Francis of Assisi showed us. It means respecting each of God's creatures and respecting the environment in which we live. In the end, everything has been entrusted to our protection, and all of us are responsible for it. Be protectors of God's gifts!"

A similar message permeated ensuing addresses, including at audiences with [ecclesial and interfaith leaders](#) [4], with [diplomats to the Holy See](#) [5], and in his [Palm Sunday homily](#) [6] and ["Urbi et Orbi" message](#) [7] on Easter Sunday:

"Let us accept the grace of Christ's Resurrection! Let us be renewed by God's mercy, let us be loved by Jesus, let us enable the power of his love to transform our lives too; and let us become agents of this

mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation and make justice and peace flourish. ? Peace to this our Earth! Made the risen Jesus bring comfort to the victims of natural disasters and make us responsible guardians of creation.?

More than words, a guest at the inauguration ceremony suggested Francis' commitment to conservation extended back to his Argentine roots. Among the politicians, royalty and other dignitaries, Francis invited Sergio Sanchez, a garbage scavenger from Buenos Aires, as part of the Argentine delegation.

As a ?cartonero,? Sanchez and others take to the Buenos Aires streets at night, searching trash bins and containers for recyclable materials they can sell. He [told the news agency Agence France-Presse](#) [8] he considers the pope an old friend, and recalled him preaching against exploitation and for the poor.

?We're very happy with our new cartonero Pope,? he told AFP.

That Francis thought to include a cartonero, particularly one who lost his truck-driving job during Argentina's economic collapse in the early 2000s, offers another sign of his closeness with the poor.

But, for environmentalists, inviting someone who recycles for a living might also signal that the pope has long shared their concerns for the planet, well before he became bishop of Rome.

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