Defending the Beauty of Life

Earth Day 2020

Opening Song: (Choose appropriate music, if desired.)

Opening Prayer:
Leader: We find ourselves at a moment in time where the suffering of creation is reflected in the suffering of humanity. The Amazon in all of its majestic beauty, home to diverse forms of life, cries out to us to embrace it, to love it as ourselves, to preserve it. As the very lungs of our planet, the Amazon now gasps for breath. Loving God, move us to appreciate the beauty of Amazonia and all of creation, and to act wisely in its defense. Amen.

Adapted from Pope Francis’ Querida Amazonia

Leader: The equilibrium of our planet also depends on the health of the Amazon region. Together with the biome of the Congo and Borneo, it contains a dazzling diversity of woodlands on which rain cycles, climate balance, and a great variety of living beings also depend. It serves as a great filter of carbon dioxide, which helps avoid the warming of the earth. … in an ecosystem like that of the Amazon region, each part is essential for the preservation of the whole.¹
Reader: The cry of the Amazon region reaches everyone because “the conquest and exploitation of resources… has today reached the point of threatening the environment’s hospitable aspect: the environment as ‘resource’ risks threatening the environment as ‘home’”i. The interest of a few powerful industries should not be considered more important than the good of the Amazon region and of humanity as a whole.iii The colonizing interests that have continued to expand…the timber and mining industries, and have expelled or marginalized the indigenous peoples, the river people, and those of African descent, are provoking a cry that rises up to heaven….iv The inescapable truth is that, as things stand, this way of treating the Amazon territory spells the end for so much life, for so much beauty.v

Reader: [E]ach distinct species has a value in itself, yet “each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost forever.vi The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity.vii Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right”.viii A sound and sustainable ecology, one capable of bringing about change, will not develop unless people are changed, unless they are encouraged to opt for another style of life, one less greedy and more serene, more respectful and less anxious, more fraternal.ix

Leader: From the original peoples, we can learn to contemplate the Amazon region and not simply analyze it, and thus appreciate this precious mystery that transcends us. We can love it, not simply use it, with the result that love can awaken a deep and sincere interest. Even more, we can feel intimately a part of it and not only defend it; then the Amazon region will once more become like a mother to us. For “we do not look at the world from without but from within, conscious of the bonds with which the Father has linked us to all beings”.x

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**Personal Reflection**

- Which of the above stanzas speak most to you?
- What are your deepest hopes for our common home?
- What commitments will you assume to bring these hopes about?

**Shared Reflection (If desired.)**

**Expression of gratitude for the gifts of Amazonia**
Closing Prayer

Mary, Mother of Life, reign
in the beating heart of Amazonia
Show yourself the Mother of all creatures
in the beauty of the flowers, the rivers
the great river that courses through it
and all the life pulsing in its forests
Tenderly care for this explosion of beauty…

Mother, look upon the poor of the Amazon region,
for their home is being destroyed by petty interests.
How much pain and misery,
how much neglect and abuse there is
in this blessed land
overflowing with life!

Touch the hearts of the powerful,
for, even though we sense that the hour is late,
you call us to save
what is still alive.
Resources

*Faiths for Forests* is a global call to action to all faith-based organizations, networks and places of worship around the world to join the movement to end destruction of the planet’s rainforests and advocate for climate justice.

- *Indigenous Peoples: Guardians of the Forests*. An issue primer on the historical role that indigenous peoples have played around the world in forest protection, and how securing land rights is a powerful strategy for forest protection and climate mitigation. Available in English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish.
- Faith Toolkits (available for many faith traditions). *Catholic: A Toolkit on Forest Protection for Religious Leaders and Faith Communities*. (English only).
- Faith for Forests’ *Educational Materials* page provides many more tools, including country-specific resources in multiple languages.

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ii Ibid.
iii Ibid.
vii Ibid.
viii Ibid; Secondary quotation from *Laudato Si’*, paragraph 33.

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