

Protecting God's Creation • Embracing Gospel Justice • Nurturing Spiritual Fulfillment

Water

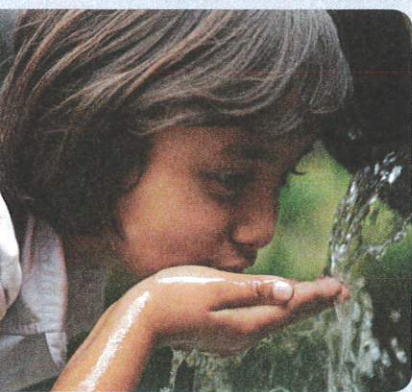
Our Lenten practice this week is to conserve and protect the gift of water.

Water is essential for life. If life is sacred, then whatever supports life is sacred.

The oceans, rivers, lakes, and streams are part of God's wondrous creation. Looking at our blue planet from space, it might appear that we have a lot of water. But only 1 percent is available for human consumption. Since there are over 7 billion humans—not to mention all the plants and other animals that depend on water to stay alive—we must learn to share and use water wisely. As God's stewards we are called to care for this sacred gift. We must learn to protect water (don't pollute) and use it carefully (conserve, don't waste). That's going to be our focus this week.

The world water crisis is one of the largest public health issues of our time. Millions of women and children spend hours every day walking miles to collect water. Nearly 11 percent of the world's population lacks access to safe drinking water. Approximately 1.6 million people die annually from unavoidably consuming polluted water. Just because we have access to water doesn't mean that we can be wasteful. Our observance of Lent this week is a call to use water more responsibly, keeping in mind the many who suffer for lack of this essential resource.

At home, we have many opportunities to reduce our water footprint by up to 25 percent. Wasting water—with leaks, long showers, letting it run unnecessarily while washing teeth or dishes, and careless landscape watering—is not only expensive, but an issue of justice as well.



"We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth; . . . our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters."

—Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*

"You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it."

—Psalm 65:10

What the Church Is Saying

1. Access to Safe and Sufficient Water Is a Basic Human Right

"Access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights. Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity."

—Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*

2. The World Water Crisis Is an Ethical Issue

"Attention also needs to be paid to the world-wide problem of water and to the global water cycle system, which is of prime importance for life on earth. . . . The ecological problem must be dealt with not only because of the chilling prospects of environmental degradation on the horizon; the real motivation must be the quest for authentic world-wide solidarity inspired by the values of charity, justice and the common good."

—Pope Benedict XVI

3. Overconsuming Water Impairs the Well-Being of Society

"The hoarding of resources, especially water, can generate serious conflicts among the peoples involved. Peaceful agreement about the use of resources can protect nature and, at the same time, the well-being of the societies concerned."

—Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*

4. Dangers of Privatizing Water by Corporations

"By its very nature water cannot be treated as just another commodity among many, and it must be used rationally and in solidarity with others. . . . The right to water, as all human rights, finds its basis in human dignity and not in any kind of merely quantitative assessment that considers water as a merely economic good."

—Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church

"Praise to you, my Lord, through Sister Water, so useful, humble, precious, and pure." —St. Francis of Assisi

Our water consumption is measured in three categories: home, agricultural, and industrial. The average American lifestyle requires nearly 2,000 gallons of water per day. Only 5 percent (100–150 gallons) passes through the kitchen, bathroom, laundry, and yard. Nearly 95 percent of water usage is hidden in the food we eat, energy we use, products we buy, and services we rely on. For example, it takes approximately 40 gallons for a bag of potato chips and a whopping 1,500 gallons of water to produce one pound of beef. Water is required to manufacture our clothing (650 gallons for a cotton T-shirt), paper (three gallons for one sheet), a pair of leather shoes (2,114 gallons), and to produce steel for one car (32,000 gallons). It's important to learn more about the water footprint of our food and manufactured goods. If each of us learned to conserve just a little more water, it could add up to big savings.

How much is needed?

Each person needs about twenty-one gallons of water a day for a reasonable standard of living. In the world's poorest countries, people use just 2½ gallons a day to wash, clean and cook. In the United States, the typical lifestyle requires 100–150 gallons per day in home usage. On average, it takes: two to six gallons per minute for a shower; ten to thirty-five gallons for a full load in the washing machine; two to five gallons per flush of the toilet; five to fifteen gallons to run the dishwasher.

Action Steps

This Lent we are trying to live a more just and sustainable lifestyle. Listed below are suggestions for using water in more thoughtful and conserving ways. Consider the steps you can take this week.

If There's Only One Thing You Can Do . . .



Kick the bottled water habit this Lent (and thereafter).

This is an easy yet effective water-choice to live more simply. In the United States, over a half billion bottles of water are bought every week—enough to circle the globe more than five times. It's a waste of energy and resources. Over 70 percent of them end up in landfills where it can take 700 years for them to decompose. Don't trash the planet. Instead, buy a reusable bottle and go to the water tap.

In the Kitchen

- ☐ Run your dishwasher only when fully loaded; skip the pre-rinse cycle.
- ☐ Avoid wasting water by letting it run thoughtlessly during food preparation and cleanup.
- ☐ Put aerators on faucets to reduce household water flow by two gallons a minute.

In the Bathroom

- ☐ Fix leaky faucets and toilets. One drip per second equals 3,000 gallons of wasted water per year.

- ☐ Use a timer to reduce shower time by 2–5 minutes. Extra credit: install low-flow showerheads to decrease water use by 20–60 percent.
- ☐ Turning off water while brushing teeth can save two gallons per minute.
- ☐ Replace old toilets with modern low-volume dual-flush models.
- ☐ Keep water clean and safe. Household hazardous waste and pharmaceuticals thrown into the toilet make our streams unhealthy.

Other

- ☐ Eat a bit less meat, especially beef. A typical hamburger can take 400 gallons to produce.
- ☐ Only run your washing machine with full loads—and use the coolest water possible.
- ☐ Purchase products with minimal packaging. One pound of plastic equals twenty-four gallons of water!
- ☐ Choose outdoor landscaping appropriate for your climate—native plants and grasses that thrive on natural rainfall.
- ☐ Practice sustainable irrigation and responsible lawn care. Don't water in the heat of the day.

Steps Continued

1. Calculate your water footprint at www.waterfootprint.org. Learn how much water it takes to produce an apple, a pound of chicken, or a microchip.
2. Watch the documentary *Flow: For Love of Water*. Learn how the world's water supply is being privatized and taken over by corporations.
3. Join the campaign to End Water Poverty, a global injustice causing millions to live without access to clean water and sanitation.
4. Watch *The Story of Bottled Water* at storyofstuff.org.
5. Participate in World Water Day on March 22. Become educated on water issues.
6. Learn about your contribution to the water problems in California where one-third of the nation's vegetables and two-thirds of its fruits and nuts are grown.

All this and more available online at www.Lent42.org.

Prayer

*Creator God,
your waters refresh our bodies
and give life to Earth.
From the hardness of our hearts,
bring forth the waters
of compassion and care.
Open our hearts
to the water crisis of our world.
Guide us in ways to reduce waste
and over consumption of your resources.
Teach us to use our sacred waters wisely.
Amen.*