

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

Energy

Our Lenten practice this week is to use more clean energy and to consume energy more efficiently.

We need energy to live and our appliances need energy in order to function. But where does energy come from?

Most of the energy used to keep our homes cozy, our appliances humming, and our cars running comes from fossil fuels—coal, oil, and natural gas. These enable us to live with comfort and conveniences. Because energy seems to just come out of the socket, many of us are unaware of how our energy choices affect God's creation. Electric power plants that convert coal into electricity are the country's largest industrial source of pollutants.

Flip on the lights, turn on the television, power up the computer, brew coffee—an average American burns about forty-one pounds of coal every day for residential and transportation energy consumption. That's almost 15,000 pounds of coal a year.

Each of us has a responsibility to use energy more efficiently. Conserving energy translates into cleaner air, cleaner water, and preservation of our land from damage caused by drilling or mountaintop-removal mining of coal. A bonus is that it also saves money.

Our home is a terrific place to begin making a difference in energy consumption. This week of Lent you can learn simple ways to consume less energy from fossil fuels. Pope Francis suggests that small steps can make a difference. "A person who could afford to spend and consume more but regularly uses less heating and wears warmer clothes shows the kind of convictions and attitudes which help to protect the environment. There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions" (*Laudato Si*).

We live in an energy-hungry country. God has entrusted one Earth to us—we must learn to share it, care for it, and preserve resources for future generations.

Small steps add up to important ways of caring for creation and saving precious nonrenewable resources for future generations.

"I am only one, but I am still one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something." —Helen Keller

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

—John 8:12

What the Church Is Saying

1. An Obligation to Lower Energy Consumption

"The technologically advanced societies can and must lower their domestic energy consumption, either through an evolution in manufacturing methods or through greater ecological sensitivity among their citizens. It should be added that at present it is possible to achieve improved energy efficiency while at the same time encouraging research into alternative forms of energy. What is also needed, though, is a worldwide redistribution of energy resources, so that countries lacking those resources can have access to them."

—Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*

2. Vatican Solar Panels

In 2008 the roof of the papal audience auditorium was covered with 2,400 solar panels to produce energy for the Vatican, cutting carbon dioxide emissions by about 225 tons per year. The solar panels produce energy equivalent to the annual consumption of almost 100 families, making the building completely self-sufficient as far as electricity is concerned.

3. Protect the Air You Breathe

"As people of religious faith, we . . . believe that the atmosphere that supports life on earth is a God-given gift, one we must respect and protect. It unites us as one human family. If we harm the atmosphere, we dishonor our Creator and the gift of creation."

—United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

4. Find New Sources of Renewable Energy

"We know that technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels—especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas—needs to be progressively replaced without delay."

—Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*

"Lord, hold us with your power and light, so we protect every life, preparing for a better future."

—Pope Francis, World Day of Prayer for Creation 2015

Action Steps

Burning fossil fuels—coal, oil, and natural gas—releases the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the atmosphere. At present, it is extremely difficult to avoid using any one of these forms of energy. But taking steps to reduce our carbon emissions is important. CO₂ affects the air we breathe and the quality of life on our planet.

This week try fasting from carbon by using less energy. Rethink how your lifestyle impacts God's creation and people's lives. Take two important steps: use energy more efficiently and try finding alternatives to consuming fossil fuels. Pope Francis reminds us in *Laudato Si'*, "Reducing greenhouse gases requires honesty, courage and responsibility."

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

Replace home light fixtures with LED or compact fluorescent bulbs (CFL).

It's a simple way to reduce energy consumption and save money over the long term. Using a standard 100-watt incandescent light bulb for one year requires over 700 pounds of coal. About 90 percent of the energy consumed by incandescent light bulbs creates heat instead of light. They use four times more energy than CFLs and seven times more than LEDs for the same amount of light. Switching off unnecessary lights also helps.

Heating and Cooling Air

- ☐ Give up two degrees. For every degree the thermostat is below 68°F (in winter) or above 78°F (in summer) there's a 3–5 percent savings in energy use and cost.
- ☐ Reduce drafts by caulking, weather-stripping, and adding insulation. Keep heated and cooled air in the house.
- ☐ Install a programmable thermostat for efficiency and savings.

Know Where Your Energy Comes From

Almost 40 percent of energy consumed in the United States comes from coal. Learn about mountaintop removal, a commonly used method to extract coal in the cheapest way possible. Forest and topsoil are scraped away, up to 800 feet of a mountain is blasted off, coal is scooped out, and then giant machines push tons of rock and debris into valleys and streams below. The result is extensive damage to nearby communities and the poisoning of their water supply.

Heated Water

- ☐ Use the shortest wash that will get the job done for dishwashing, laundry, and showers. Heating water is an energy guzzler.
- ☐ For laundry, most loads don't need hot water. Wash in cold. Ninety percent of the energy used by washing machines goes into heating the water.
- ☐ Wash laundry and run dishwashers only when full. Also, air dry—it's free!
- ☐ Lower the temperature of your water heater to 120°F. Don't overheat.

Appliances

- ☐ Abstain from the clothes dryer (or overdrying) whenever possible. Line drying saves energy and money.
- ☐ Use energy-saving settings on the big four: refrigerator, dishwasher, clothes washer, and dryer.
- ☐ Power down. Five to ten percent of home energy can be consumed by electronics when they are not in use. Use power strips for televisions, computers, or anything with a light.
- ☐ Get an energy audit from your local utility company.
- ☐ When replacing appliances, go with Energy Star models.
- ☐ Get rid of any old second refrigerators. About 5 percent of a household electric bill is due to the refrigerator.

Alternative Energy

- ☐ Many utility companies offer the option of purchasing green power. Find out how you can buy it by visiting the Department of Energy's state-by-state list of providers.

Prayer

*Good and gracious God,
you are the light of the world.
Forgive us for acting as if creation
belongs to us, rather than you.
Help us to conserve and use wisely
the treasures of our Earth.
Teach us lifestyles that
are a blessing for creation.
May your Spirit light the way.
Amen.*

Steps Continued

1. Take the virtual energy savings tour of your home.
2. Identify the best ways to save energy by using an online home energy saving calculator.
3. Join the Catholic Climate Covenant by taking the St. Francis Pledge to care for creation and the poor.
4. Become acquainted with the Interfaith Power and Light organization in your state.
5. Learn how mountaintop removal mining is devastating God's creation and harming the poorest in Appalachia.

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