

# Novena for Earth Defenders



Written by the Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach  
and the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas' Institute Justice Team

Cover image by the Indigenous Environmental Network



## Novena for Earth Defenders Before You Begin

The Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach and the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas' Institute Justice Team created this novena to invite you to stand in solidarity with the people, especially indigenous communities, who are courageously speaking out against the impacts of extractive industries.

Too many of them have sacrificed their lives to protect water, land, and sacred territory. Despite their experience of life-destroying and systemic oppression, they continue to bring hope to our world, claiming their fundamental rights, their essential and sacred dignity, and their vision, which we all share, of God's creation as a source of life.

We hope that this "Novena for Earth Defenders" will be an opportunity for you to encounter God in those who are rendered poor, and to respond with justice, mercy, and compassion. We pray that our solidarity with these courageous people will awaken within us the grace of God, the Holy Spirit, who sets our hearts on fire and empowers us to be faithful witnesses to the Gospel.

We recommend that you to begin praying this novena eight days before a major moment or anniversary associated with our common home or the work of earth defenders. Maybe that's Earth Day (April 22), the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation (September 1), the anniversary of the publication of *Laudato Si'* (June 18), the anniversary of the martyrdom of Sr. Dorothy Stang (February 12) or Berta Caceres (March 2), or another occasion. This format will enable you to pray "Day 9" of the novena on the date you've chosen to commemorate.

This novena is written with the prayerful reading technique, *lectio divina*, in mind. *Lectio divina* is a method of praying where you read a scripture passage several times during one sitting, each time drawing out a deeper layer meaning. Instead of doing this during one sitting, however, with this novena you will meditate on certain prayers over the course of the next nine days.

As you enter these nine days, consider listening each day to some native flute music as background for your daily prayer. You can find some music [here](#) by R. Carlos Nakai, who is of Navajo-Ute heritage.

As a Columban missionary once said, based on his own experience accompanying oppressed communities in the Philippines, "without solidarity there can be no love, and therefore, no peace and justice."

# Day 1

## Remembrance & Repentance

**Opening Prayer:** “Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful with justice and mercy, and kindle in us the fire of your love.”

**Our Father ...**

**Hail Mary ...**

**Glory Be ...**

**Reading:** Even now, says the LORD,  
return to me with your whole heart,  
with fasting, and weeping, and mourning;  
Rend your hearts, not your garments,  
and return to the LORD, your God.

–Joel 2:12-18

**Reflection:** “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” –*Laudato Si'* 160

As we begin this novena for Earth Defenders, let's remember Pope Francis' challenge, that we keep in mind the needs of vulnerable communities and future generations, and repent for the voracious greed of ever-expanding development that threatens their health, culture, and territories. Indigenous people often take the lead in sounding the alarm, and the tearful words of native activist and environmentalist Casey Camp-Horenek on the [impacts of fracking](#) in her community in Oklahoma offer us such a warning.

**Prayer for Ourselves:** “God of love, may we grow in our love for you, responding with justice and mercy to the cry of the poor and with reverence and care to the cry of the earth.”

**Prayer for Our Earth:** All powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes. Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth. Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace.

–Concluding prayer of *Laudato Si'*

## Day 2

# A *Laudato Si'* Martyr

**Opening Prayer:** “Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful with justice and mercy, and kindle in us the fire of your love.”

**Our Father ...**

**Hail Mary ...**

**Glory Be ...**

**Reading:** I call heaven and earth today to witness against you:

I have set before you, life and death,  
the blessing and the curse.

Choose life, then,  
that you and your descendants may live.

–Deuteronomy 30: 15-30

**Reflection:** “Sister Earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, is crying out, pleading that we take another course.” –*Laudato Si'* 53

[Berta Caceres](#) was a leader of the Lenca people in Honduras and a human rights defender who won the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize. She is among more than 120 people who have been [killed in Honduras](#) since 2010 for taking a stand against dams, mines, logging, or agriculture on their land – murdered by state forces, security guards, or hired assassins. Countless others have been threatened, attacked, or imprisoned.

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–Concluding prayer of *Laudato Si'*



## Day 3

# Standing Rock & the Cry of Indigenous Peoples

**Opening Prayer:** “Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful with justice and mercy, and kindle in us the fire of your love.”

**Our Father ...**

**Hail Mary ...**

**Glory Be ...**

**Reading:** Is this not the fast I choose? Releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own.

–Isaiah 58:1-9

**Reflection:** “Today, we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.” –*Laudato Si'* 49

The Standing Rock Sioux and their allies, collectively known as the water protectors, were praying for months to change the minds and hearts of policymakers determined to build the [Dakota Access Pipeline](#) near the tribe's lands. Their pleas at the construction site against both the desecration of their land and the potential risk to the water supply for millions of people were met with violent repression by a militarized police force. While construction was temporarily halted in late 2016, a decision by the Trump administration in 2017 gave the project the green light. We join in prayer the Standing Rock Sioux and other indigenous people, who are experiencing yet another injustice on their long road to freedom.

**Prayer for Ourselves:** “God of love, may we grow in our love for you, responding with justice and mercy to the cry of the poor and with reverence and care to the cry of the earth.”

**Prayer for Our Earth:** All powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

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–Concluding prayer of *Laudato Si'*

## Day 4

# Standing Rock & the Cry of the Earth

**Opening Prayer:** “Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful with justice and mercy, and kindle in us the fire of your love.”

**Our Father ...**

**Hail Mary ...**

**Glory Be ...**

**Reading:** Then the LORD will guide you always and give you plenty even on the parched land. He will renew your strength, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring whose water never fails. The ancient ruins shall be rebuilt for your sake, and the foundations from ages past you shall raise up; “Repairer of the breach,” they shall call you, “Restorer of ruined homesteads.”

—Isaiah 58:9-14

**Reflection:** “Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother River, and Mother Earth.” —*Laudato Si’* 92

The water protectors have caught the global imagination, with indigenous people and their allies traveling to North Dakota from around the world to join the Standing Rock in prayer for tribal rights and for creation. Let’s join them in song as “[the whole world is watching](#).”

**Prayer for Ourselves:** “God of love, may we grow in our love for you, responding with justice and mercy to the cry of the poor and with reverence and care to the cry of the earth.”

**Prayer for Our Earth:** All powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

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## Day 5

# Repenting for our Sins against the Earth & Indigenous Peoples

**Opening Prayer:** “Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful with justice and mercy, and kindle in us the fire of your love.”

**Our Father ...**

**Hail Mary ...**

**Glory Be ...**

**Reading:** Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;  
in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense.  
Thoroughly wash me from my guilt  
and of my sin cleanse me.  
For I acknowledge my offense,  
and my sin is before me always:

A clean heart create for me, O God,  
and a steadfast spirit renew within me.  
Cast me not out from your presence,  
and your Holy Spirit take not from me.  
Give me back the joy of your salvation,  
and a willing spirit sustain in me.

–Psalm 51

**Reflection:** “The fact is that contemporary man has not been trained to use power well, because our immense technological development has not been accompanied by development in human responsibility, values and conscience.” –*Laudato Si’* 105

The Internet, social media, and a fast-paced lifestyle too often cause relationships – with people, with Earth, and with God – to suffer. We repent that we’ve neglected our neighbors, the communities most impacted by extractive industries, and all creation. Mercy Sister Edia Lopez, who ministers with the Ngäbe people of Panama protesting a hydro-electric dam that threatens to flood their cultural heritage, [calls us to change the nature of our relationships](#) in order to achieve a new type of development that benefits people and Earth.

**Prayer for Ourselves:** “God of love, may we grow in our love for you, responding with justice and mercy to the cry of the poor and with reverence and care to the cry of the earth.”

**Prayer for Our Earth:** All powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

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–Concluding prayer of *Laudato Si’*

# Day 6

## What Have We Done?

**Opening Prayer:** “Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful with justice and mercy, and kindle in us the fire of your love.”

**Our Father ...**

**Hail Mary ...**

**Glory Be ...**

**Reading:** “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him and say, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And the king will say to them in reply, “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”

–Matthew 25:42-46

**Reflection:** “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? ... We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity. Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is, first and foremost, up to us. The issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn.” –*Laudato Si'* 160

[Residents of Flint, Michigan](#), have been dealing not only with contaminated water but also with the psychological ramifications of knowing that authorities ignored a massive public health hazard for far too long. We pray that we heed this warning, that we hold our elected officials to greater account and take actions on our own when necessary to protect our land, water, and communities.

**Prayer for Ourselves:** “God of love, may we grow in our love for you, responding with justice and mercy to the cry of the poor and with reverence and care to the cry of the earth.”

**Prayer for Our Earth:** All powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

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–Concluding prayer of *Laudato Si'*



# Day 7

## We Are Called to be Fertile, Fruitful & Faithful

**Opening Prayer:** “Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful with justice and mercy, and kindle in us the fire of your love.”

**Our Father ...**

**Hail Mary ...**

**Glory Be ...**

**Reading:** Thus says the LORD: just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to the one who sows and bread to the one who eats, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.

–Isaiah 55:10-11

**Reflection:** “In calling to mind the figure of St. Francis of Assisi, we come to realize that a healthy relationship with Creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion, which entails the recognition of our errors, sins, faults and failures, and leads to heartfelt repentance and desire for change.” –*Laudato Si'* 218

Indigenous peoples around the world call us to [stand in solidarity with them](#) and with Earth out of love, not anger or hate. Will we hear their challenge to us to break our addiction to fossil fuels, which is based on the oppression of so many communities?

**Prayer for Ourselves:** “God of love, may we grow in our love for you, responding with justice and mercy to the cry of the poor and with reverence and care to the cry of the earth.”

**Prayer for Our Earth:** All powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

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–Concluding prayer of *Laudato Si'*

## Day 8

# We Are Called to Wisdom, Compassion & Interdependence

**Opening Prayer:** “Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful with justice and mercy, and kindle in us the fire of your love.”

**Our Father ...**

**Hail Mary ...**

**Glory Be ...**

**Reading:** Jonah began his journey through the city, and had gone but a single day’s walk announcing, “Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed,” when the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in the ashes.

–Jonah 3:1-10

**Reflection:** “Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan ... A global consensus is essential for confronting the deeper problems, which cannot be resolved by unilateral actions on the part of individual countries.” –*Laudato Si’* 164

[Women in Africa](#) are courageously speaking out about their particular concerns in areas scarred by mining, and are pointing the way to a future of smaller-scale extraction of natural resources that benefits local communities and minimizes impact on Earth. We pray that their voices are heard in discussions about implementing global goals for sustainable development.

**Prayer for Ourselves:** “God of love, may we grow in our love for you, responding with justice and mercy to the cry of the poor and with reverence and care to the cry of the earth.”

**Prayer for Our Earth:** All powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

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–Concluding prayer of *Laudato Si’*

## Day 9

# We Are Called to Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples & the Earth

**Opening Prayer:** “Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful with justice and mercy, and kindle in us the fire of your love.”

**Our Father ...**

**Hail Mary ...**

**Glory Be ...**

**Reading:** Jesus said to his disciples: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”

—Matthew 7:7-12

**Reflection:** “A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings.” —*Laudato Si’* 91

The Standing Rock Sioux, other indigenous people, and their allies come to Washington, DC to speak with policy makers about their sacred duty to protect the water, the land, all of creation. We are invited to join them in [“standing up like a mountain”](#) with our own prayers, advocacy, and public witness.

**Prayer for Ourselves:** “God of love, may we grow in our love for you, responding with justice and mercy to the cry of the poor and with reverence and care to the cry of the earth.”

**Prayer for Our Earth:** All powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

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# Novena for Earth Defenders After You Finish

As you conclude this novena, we invite you to continue praying and advocating with communities impacted by extractive industries. You can learn more about some of these communities, the impacts of extractive and fossil fuel industries, and indigenous people's rights here:

## Churches and Mining Network in Central and South America

- <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/latin-american-coalition-mining-causing-damage-not-delivering-benefits>
- <http://www.cidse.org/articles/business-and-human-rights/extractive-industries-in-latin-america/churches-and-mining-network-calls-for-building-alternatives-to-extractivism.html>

## Church Network in the Amazon Region (REPAM)

- <http://redamazonica.org/en/>

## Human Rights Abuses in Extractive Industries

- <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/>
- <http://earthjustice.org>
- <http://justresponse.faith>

## Exposing the True Costs of Fossil Fuels

- <http://priceofoil.org/about/>

## Advancing the Rights of Indigenous Communities

- <https://www.culturalsurvival.org>
- <http://www.ienearth.org/>

*Cover photo: Indigenous Environmental Network*

*First page banner photo: "Standing Rock" by Mary Button*

*Last page banner photo: People carrying the coffin of Sr. Dorothy Stang*

