

Easter with an Amazonian Face

Weekly reflections on resurrection from participants of the Amazon Synod



Interreligious Working Group on Extractive Industries

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INTRO

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This Easter the Interreligious Working Group on Extractive Industries invites you to encounter God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and in the beauty and suffering of the Amazon region and its people.

As the coronavirus spreads across the world, we are reminded yet again of our interconnectedness on this, our Common Home. Where one part of the human family is hurting, others are sure to follow in that suffering. And where one area of the world is starting to experience healing and a resurrection in resuming the fullness of daily life, others find hope for their own futures.

We also recognize that this season that is meant to be celebrated with great joy in community may instead be spent in personal prayer, family traditions and, perhaps, even mourning the loss of loved ones.

We hope that this guide provides some spiritual comfort and inspiration as you journey through this season with participants in the Synod on the Amazon, a gathering of Catholic and indigenous leaders at the Vatican in October 2019.

Through their stories of struggle and resistance, you can walk with communities impacted by an extractivist economy in the Amazon and

beyond, and find hope in the many ways we can all work together to form “new paths for the Church and for an integral ecology.”

May we join the people of the Amazon -- who celebrate the rich natural, cultural and spiritual diversity of the region as well as suffer through its degradation and threats to their land, culture and rights -- in facing today's immense challenges without losing heart. May we rather allow ourselves to be filled with Paschal hope, believing in the resurrection of Jesus in our lives and all creation. And may we embrace Pope Francis' call in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Querida Amazonia*, for an 'interior conversion' – a change of heart – and to envision a new way of living in harmony with the natural world and one another. ■



Amazon Easter

By Mauricio López Oropeza

The colonizing interests that have continued to expand - legally and illegally - 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: "Many are the trees where torture dwelt, and vast are the forests purchased with a thousand deaths."

-Querida Amazonia, #9

Easter is, no doubt, the most significant feast for Catholics as it represents the completion of the journey of Jesus, the fulfillment of His mission, and the invitation to everyone, with no distinction or preference, to participate in His calling to contribute in the building of the kingdom. It is the distinctive remembrance of the path between the Incarnation and the Resurrection of Christ.

This year we are called to recognize again the path of Jesus among us in our beautiful and injured Amazon reality. It is through the eyes of the indigenous peoples and the Amazon communities that we are confronted by the presence of a Jesus who suffers and encounters His fate, as so many do in this region, for standing up and defending their culture, their territory,

the place in which their spirituality blossoms, and their rights. There is no romantic portrait about the Amazon these days, her beauty is under threat, and her sons and daughters are being criminalized, expelled from their lands, and even assassinated because they stand in the way of so-called progress.

Inequality is reaching a point in which more and more people become disposable, producing a "throwaway" society, where diversity has no place. We are experiencing the most severe climate crisis in history, and even so, we fail to recognize the radical change we have to undergo, especially by those more developed societies.

Our common home, including the Amazon, is literally on fire as a result of the unlimited desire to accumulate more and more by very few, as if there were no tomorrow, no future generations.

As we face this, we are tempted to lose hope and to abandon any pursuit for truthful change, but this is where the Paschal hope overcomes any feeling of despair: we know death will never have the final word. The certainty of our hope in the resurrection is the result of our trust in a Jesus who does not abandon us, as he has committed himself to unite his life with our own lives. He is present in the beauty of the

diversity of the Amazon region, in the cultural expressions of those communities in which He lives and is present undeniably through the seeds of the incarnated Word, and in the daily resistance of the Amazon communities who refuse to be dominated by the powers of this world. They know that God journeys with them, and they shall prevail as they always have, just as surely as the risen Christ will return to them over and over again.

In this Easter season, may your heart be filled with the hopeful indignation of allowing your heart to recognize the resurrection of Christ in your midst, and to find your own call to action to make this world a better one.

May your life be full of reasons to stand up for justice and with an ongoing pursuit for the kingdom in your ordinary life, in which extraordinary things can happen when we allow that Easter hope to take place. During these days you're invited to feel the calling and to recognize your own inner and outer Amazonia. By finding the mystery of God in that, do whatever it takes to protect it, defend it, and to see it blossom once again. ▀

About the Author

Mauricio Lopez is executive secretary of the Pan-Amazon Church Network (REPAM), which connects the bishops' conferences and church communities across the nine-nation Amazon region. He was the only layperson among the 18 members of the council that helped draft the Synod's working document, and was later a participant at the Synod.



For Reflection

Is your life “full of reasons to stand up for justice?” What might that look like for you in this Easter season?

Suggested Action

Organize a small group to study and reflect on the Pope's exhortation on the Synod on the Amazon, *Querida Amazonia*, using a [study guide](#) prepared by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.



WEEK 2

Photo credit: Jesuit Conference

Indigenous Solidarity at the Amazonian Synod

By Rodney M. Bordeaux

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ... In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials.

-1 Peter 1:3-6

Participating in the Amazon Synod as a North American Indigenous leader was a powerful experience. I was honored to meet with the people of the Amazon, with whom I felt a deep kinship. Hearing their stories and experiences brought back what our people dealt with in the United States in the mid- to late-1800's. I told Amazonian leaders that we Indigenous of the United States and Canada are very supportive of their cause. The threats they currently face—natural resource extraction, loss of lands, and violence against activists—are the threats that nearly eradicated North American indigenous peoples over 125 years ago.

Although our language differences kept our group of Lakota leaders from communicating directly with Amazonian leaders, we easily connected with each other and shared

commonalities. Our future collaborations will only be enhanced through the Synod, as we face the same racist attitudes and state policies.

Genocide is a common issue facing the Indigenous of the Americas and the entire world. Why? Our way of life is one with nature and in protecting Mother Earth. That is a great feeling! However, our cultures and ways of living do not matter to the wider society. Indigenous peoples are still looked upon as less than human, and too frequently decisions are made for us rather than by us. There's a total disregard for our rights as humans.

The Catholic Church can continue to work with all Indigenous relatives in the Western hemisphere through the Synod. By standing in solidarity with Indigenous communities, we embrace the higher power of God and prayer. The Church and North American Indigenous can leverage our political connections to promote ecological justice rather than ignoring the environmental and human rights abuses facing the Amazon and my own people in the U.S.

As a leader from North America, it is my hope that we, too, can get an audience with Pope Francis and have a serious dialogue. I urge Pope Francis to revoke [the Papal Bull "Inter Caetera" of 1493](#), which authorized

Spanish and Portuguese colonizers to enslave, oppress, and rule the American Indigenous as subjects. Revoking this will demonstrate that the Catholic Church is answering the call of the Synod and open up a new future between the Church and Indigenous. We need to continue to build upon this dialogue and expand the issues of indigenous land and water rights, as well as human rights, to new arenas, such as the United Nations.

Threats to our natural resources continue to be an issue in North America. Indigenous lands and water are still being sought after by oil and gas corporations looking to exploit them—drilling and transporting fossil fuels across treaty territories. It seems to me that the states, the U.S. Congress and the White House continue to disregard our treaty rights when it comes to energy development. They attempt to consult with us only to disregard our input.

We are used to being exploited and disregarded, but this does not deter American Indigenous peoples. We are very proud of who we are as a people and want to remain who we are. Unfortunately, this identity also makes us a target. ▪

About the Author

Rodney Bordeaux is a member and current President of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Rosebud, SD. His entire career has been in service to his people, the Sicangu Lakota Oyate, in the field of education, as a member of the legislative body and currently serving as president.



For Reflection

Have you ever been able to rejoice while suffering "through various trials"? What was that experience like for you?

Suggested Action

Watch a [5-minute video](#) from members of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) confederacy to learn more about the Papal Bull of 1493 and how it was a factor leading to the exploitation of land and Indigenous peoples.



Easter Reflections on Conversion, Dreaming, and Renewal

By Josianne Gauthier

Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?" So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, "The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!" Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of bread.

- Luke 24:32-35

Ever since my earliest memories in childhood, the time leading up to and following Easter filled me with a kind of light and plenitude that my limited words and life experience could not yet explain. How does a child understand the mystery of our Saviour's sacrifice and resurrection? As a mother, I still struggle to communicate how this most holy of times of the year can be the anchor from which we can safely travel and navigate, knowing that we will find our way home again. I too try to share what I am feeling with them, and invite them to explore how they feel God's presence in these moments, both dark and light. It is not just that coming from a cold country (Canada), Easter

represents life after darkness and awakening of flowers and birds after the sleepy months that precede it. Easter is mystery, beauty, openness, and vulnerability. It's a time to listen to stillness, to our hearts and ask the difficult questions which we often try to avoid. Jesus spoke of justice and was put to death. So many people still face violence and death when standing up for justice. What is our part in this? How can we speak out and defend the oppressed? It is even more challenging when we consider that our lifestyles are opulent compared to others, that our comforts come at a very high price to the lives of others and to the planet. How do we reconcile these things and what must we do about it?

I draw great parallels between the time of Easter and the moment we are living on this Earth and in our Church. It is an exciting time for us all. I recently had the opportunity to participate in the extraordinary Synod on the Amazon. Before embarking on this adventure, I understood but could not measure the importance and significance of this process and of this gathering. To say that this experience was transformative would be inadequate. Everything about the time we spent together for three weeks, but also the preparation we undertook in the months before, the testimonials we heard, and the communion we felt with the people and land of the Amazon, was

of conversion and reconciliation. Conversion, because we had to listen and see the world we live in and recognize the pain, violence, and injustice being suffered by people and nature. Then, we needed to understand how we play a role in this web of unjust structures, and how some of us benefit from this more directly and indirectly. I came through the Synodal process of listening and awoke with the even more profound realisation that my blessed life of happiness, love, and material comfort has come at a high cost to others and to our earth. But the process does not, and cannot end there.

As Pope Francis tells us in the Apostolic Exhortation "Querida Amazonia", we must feel legitimate outrage and then we must take action based on love. Conversion is also waking up after a long sleep, which may have been more comfortable in its innocence and ignorance, but truly seeing now what cannot be unseen, taking responsibility that is ours, and acting for change out of sincere love. We have the opportunity to awaken and act out of love for our family, our land and culture, and our neighbours, while loving and being loved by our planet, and our God. ▪

About the Author

Josianne Gauthier is secretary general of the Catholic development agency CIDSE, an international network of Catholic social justice organisations working for transformational change to end poverty and inequalities. As an auditor at the Synod, she listened in, participated in conversations and offered testimony.



For Reflection

How do I stir up "legitimate outrage" over what's happening in the Amazon and to our common home? And how do I "take action based on love?"

Suggested Action

Recognizing that buying consumer goods is a moral act, conduct an examination of some of your recent purchases.



WEEK 4

Easter as a Time for Ecological Conversion

By Fr. Rigobert Minani Bihuzo, S.J.

So Jesus said again, "Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly."

-John 10:7-10

A synod on the Amazon could not logically ignore the Church of Africa and especially that of the Congo Basin, which covers just over 4 million square kilometers over 14 countries.

The Holy Father drew attention to these two lungs of the planet in his encyclical *Laudato Si*: "... These lungs of the planet full of biodiversity that are the Amazon and the basin of the Congo River ..., we do not ignore the importance of these places for the whole planet and for the future of humanity" (LS #38).

As in the Amazon region, the Congo Basin is increasingly exposed to the international market and to large mining and forestry

companies. Competition for access to the region's mineral resources causes political destabilization, conflicts and wars. The wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Central African Republic (CAR), and South Sudan are essentially conflicts over the control of minerals. Apart from ecological challenges, this is one of the challenges facing the Ecclesial Network of the Congo Basin forest (REBAC).

The Church of Africa also faces other challenges: deforestation, expanding deserts, the shrinking of Lake Chad, forced migration and an exploding population of people needing food, energy, housing and employment. The African continent also is the least prepared for the effects of climate change.

The Synod on the Amazon was a "Kairos" moment for the Church of Africa.

It called on the Church to develop pastoral ministry as a "guardian of God's work" and to defend the victims of destructive industries. "Today we must train pastoral agents and ordained ministries with socio-environmental sensitivity," the Synod's final document recommends.

This ecological pastoral care will require a renewal of ministry in the Church and a dedication to ecological questions. The

Synod on the Amazon has also challenged the theology of creation and redemption. It has envisaged the recognition by the Church of “ecological sin,” which is a sin against future generations manifest in the pollution and destruction of our environment’s harmony.

To achieve ecological conversion, the Church must strengthen its teaching that “planet earth is a gift from God.” This gift is not done once and for all. The faithful are called not only to take care of the planet but also to answer for it, because it is mainly human activity that endangers our “common home.”

Ecological conversion requires that promotion and respect of human rights, both individual and collective, no longer be optional for the Church. Defending the rights of victims is a political duty, social task and requirement of faith.

We can all take action in this conversion process. These acts can start with planting flowers and trees or changing personal eating habits, and move to reducing dependence on fossil fuels, decreasing consumption and adopting simpler lifestyles. ▪

About the Author

Fr. Rigobert Minani Bihuzo, S.J., is the Jesuit social ministry coordinator for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola. He also is coordinator of the ecclesial network of the Congo basin forest (REBAC).



For Reflection

What does it mean for you “not only to take care of the planet but also to answer it?” What ecological sins might you confess and repent?

Suggested Action

Take this [Ecological Examen](#) as a way to reflect on your commitment to care for creation during this Easter Season. There are six steps in the Examen. Go at a pace that works for you, pausing in the sections that you would like to reflect more on.



WEEK 5

Photo credit: Flickr

Signs of Resurrection in a Crucified World

By Sr. Roselei Bertoldo, IHM

Beloved: Come to him, a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God, and, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ For it says in Scripture: You are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises" of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

-1 Peter 2:4-5, 9

We live in a very fruitful time in the Church, especially in the Pan-Amazon region.

It's a time of synodality, when we can walk together, and when we walk together, we perceive the other, we feel their joys, their pains, we feel committed to those who walk with us. In this walk together, we perceive the pain of children, young people and women, who are victims of the crime of human trafficking, are crucified by the greed of a market system that excludes, and are killed by projects of death in mining, hydroelectric plants, logging, and agribusiness projects that exploit and turn

people into merchandise to buy, sell and dispose of.

We cannot get used to this system that steals and kills the dignity of life. In this fertile time of Easter, we realize that these signs and systems of death do not have the last word. In every process leading up to and during the Synod, it was possible to perceive the new paths, full of life, where people, groups, and communities meet to discover alternatives to face everything that harms life and destroys our Common Home.

There are many signs of resurrection on this path. When a person who is a victim of the crime of human trafficking finds someone who welcomes them, who helps them to recover their dignity while being the protagonist of their history, that is resurrection, it is Easter.

Signs of resurrection appear in the work that many religious congregations and groups have been carrying out in order to raise awareness, to share information about human trafficking, to train multipliers for prevention education, to intensify the fight for public policies to face this reality and to assist victims of crime.

The resurrection is seen in the work done collectively, in strengthening the actions of each institution that contribute to the expansion

of the protection network. It is seen in care for our Common Home, in the preservation of biodiversity, of cultures, of peoples, preserving the ethical values of each group.

More than ever, we need to revive people's dreams, dreams of better times, of an egalitarian, more humane society and to contribute to making these dreams a reality.

In this fruitful time of synodality we have the capacity to generate life from communion between different cultures, raising a great network of solidarity in the care of life where it is most threatened and ensuring that everyone can live with freedom and dignity, celebrating the resurrection of Jesus in every being. ▀

About the Author

Sister Roselei Bertoldo, IHM, an auditor at the Synod, is part of the Cry for Life Network which assists victims of human trafficking in the Brazilian Amazon. In January 2020, she received an award from the Catholic Church Reform International for her work with the Cry for Life Network.



For Reflection

What signs of resurrection do you see amid the world's suffering? What groups do you see in your community that are discovering alternatives to "everything that harms life and destroys our Common Home?"

Suggested Action

Read about how women are particularly harmed by extractive industries such as mining and oil and gas exploration. Consider how you might minimize their suffering and educate others about their reality.



WEEK 6

Photo credit: Tania Avila Meneses

Bringing Our Dreams to Fruition

By Tania Avila Meneses

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.... Yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God."

-Acts 2:4, 11

In *Querida Amazonía*, Pope Francis' heart is beginning to beat as one with the indigenous peoples and reflect our own way of thinking. Within indigenous thought, there are many languages by which to communicate. One form of language is dreaming. It is very fitting that Pope Francis structured the exhortation into four different dreams for the Amazon.

For the Quechua, and other indigenous peoples, dreams are a way to make a plan for life. It is a map by which to construct realities. There are also dreams that can put life at risk, which then need to be "cleansed" by the community.

Rites are another form of language. At the synod, there was the procession from the Basilica to St. Peter's Square whereby a canoe was carried from hand to hand, accompanied by a net supported by many people. This net

is an expression of how the Church is walking with the Amazon.

Symbols are another powerful form of communication in indigenous cultures. A net can also symbolize a change of thinking over time. This change in the Church has been possible through the process of weaving together *Laudato Si'*, the Working Document, the Final Document and ultimately, *Querida Amazonia*. This process will continue beyond the Exhortation.

Another powerful symbol at the Synod was the Amazon River. A river doesn't separate us; it unites us. It leads us from one place to another in journeys that aren't always easy and tranquil. Another symbol was a table. A table represents a place for dialogue and support, a space for us to learn through mutual listening.

For intercultural dialogue to succeed, each group needs to look for threads of knowledge and understanding that they can weave together. We need to understand each other's cultural symbols to allow for the possibility for dialogue. This requires careful training.

Song is also a language, an expression of the voice and culture of each community. It is an instrument that can convene, denounce, and propose. In *Querida Amazonia*, Pope Francis

references the songs of the Amazon, in which beauty of life in the Amazon is revealed: *"If we enter into communion with the forest, our voices will easily blend with its own and become a prayer 'as we rest in the shade of an ancient eucalyptus, our prayer for light joins in the song of the eternal foliage.'"* - Pope Francis quoting Iquitos-based Poet Sui Yun [QA 56]. ▪

About the Author

Tania Avila Meneses is a Quechua indigenous theologian and official auditor at the Synod. She is Bolivia coordinator for the Amerindia network and works for the Maryknoll Mission Center in Latin America based in Cochabamba. The above is a [summary of her analysis](#) of the pope's exhortation on the Synod.



For Reflection

When have you experienced understanding across cultures and languages? What were the fruits of that experience for you personally, for your work or ministry, for your engagement in the world?

Suggested Action

Take one step to immerse yourself in another culture. For example, read and reflect on one of the poems in *Querida Amazonia*, attend a worship service of another faith or in another language, attend a festival celebrating another culture.



Spirit of the Martyrs and a New Pentecost

By Marianne Comfort

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

-John 20:19-22

In this season of renewal and remembrance that death doesn't have the final word, my mind drifts back to a bright, sunny morning in St. Peter's Square last October.

Visitors from around the world gathered at Rome's Castel Sant Angelo, and processed down the Via della Conciliazione and around St. Peter's Square in a Way of the Cross built around the themes of the Synod on the Amazon, which was taking place nearby.

As we re-created the 14 stations of Jesus' journey to his death on the cross, indigenous

leaders and bishops of the region and those in solidarity with them reflected on the pain and suffering of the peoples of the 9-country Amazon territory.

Prayer themes included violation of human rights, exploitation of Earth by extractive industries and violence especially experienced by women. And at each stop we remembered martyrs of the Amazon and other critical bioregions such as the Congo Basin in Africa who had died defending their land, their water and their people's rights.

The large wooden cross that led the procession gradually became covered with photos of these martyrs, with a new depiction or two added at each stop. Among them was Saint Oscar Romero of El Salvador and Sister of Notre Dame de Namur Dorothy Stang, an American killed in Brazil for standing in solidarity with local peoples against ranchers and loggers.

As we re-formed our circle at each stop, we also carried into the new space a canoe, a wooden carving of a pregnant woman and other symbols and banners representing the abundant life of the region.

At the end, in front of Saint Peter's Basilica, a number of participants lay down on the hard pavement to symbolize the death of all of these

martyrs we had named over the past couple of hours in our slow procession of prayers and songs.

Then they all arose, all these martyrs in a mass resurrection. We no longer were just remembering the martyrs and their courage. We were also being reminded that they live on within us, within their local communities and within the ongoing struggles for justice in the Amazon and elsewhere.

All of those dreams for the future that the martyrs instilled in us were then symbolically handed over to the next generation in a moment that blended Easter hope with foreshadowing of the sending out of newly emboldened disciples at Pentecost.

With no words spoken, an indigenous woman dressed a girl appearing to be of European heritage in a t-shirt with a message about the struggles of the Amazon, streaked her cheeks with paint and placed a rattle in her hand and a feathered crown on her head before others lifted the girl into the air in the canoe. A small group joyously carried the girl around a circle of onlookers, making it clear without any interpretation needed that we were getting a glimpse of the realization of the Synod's call for new paths for the Church in the Amazon. ▀

About the Author

Marianne Comfort is justice coordinator for Earth, anti-racism and women for the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. While in Italy for a meeting of the Global Catholic Climate Movement, she participated in some of the public events around the Synod.



For Reflection

Remember a time when you experienced the joy of the Resurrection flowing into a sense of empowerment to live the Gospel in a bold new way.

Suggested Action

Research legislation being proposed in your state that addresses climate change, mining and other extractive industries, and/or environmental degradation. Invite others to join you in writing letters of support or visiting legislators to talk about your concerns.

ABOUT US

Photo credit: Wikimedia

About the Intrreligious Working Group on Extractive Industries

The Inter-religious Working Group on Extractive Industries is a Washington, D.C. based coalition of faith, human rights, and environmental organizations concerned about the negative impact of extractive industries on creation which includes both the human and natural world.

As people of faith, working in the United States and abroad, we witness and support communities devastated by the irregularities of extractive ventures such as oil extraction, mining, and logging. We have seen that ill-conceived and poorly managed projects can bring conflict, damage human health, displace people from their homes and lands, pollute the environment, and feed corruption. Expanded exploration by extractive companies has weakened local economies, hindered development and curbed human rights, in the United States but even more so in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

We are committed to a reduction of the exploitation of God's creation.

Learn more about us at our [website](#).

Members of the Working Group

