

One Amazon, Many Voices

Examining topics to be addressed at the Synod for the Amazon

Issue 1

Indigenous wisdom

Modern society is dominated by consumerism and an egocentric lifestyle, generating a desire for unnecessary things. It promotes competition among people and the extraction of natural resources in order to accumulate money and power. These actions have fragmented relationships between people and nature and generated a social-environmental crisis that puts the present and the future of our planet at risk.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis says these problems are closely linked to what he calls the “throwaway culture,” a culture in which people and God’s creation are exploited as if they are disposable merchandise. The Council of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) addressed this in the January 2018 pastoral letter, *Missionary Disciples: Custodians of our Common Home* by pointing to the ancestral wisdom of indigenous peoples as an alternative to the throwaway culture and an important knowledge to include in dialogue.

“The upcoming Synod for the Amazon in 2019 opens a horizon for renewed theology and pastoral creativity,” CELAM says, “that invites an ecological conversion, a spirituality of communion and a vision towards ‘*Buen Vivir*,’ in harmony with the cycles of nature, water as a fundamental right and intrinsic value for every creature. Such a vision, based on God’s love for all creation, illuminates every place on every continent to enter into intercultural dialog and make commitments that lead us to an abundance of life in our common home.”

Amazonian and Andean indigenous peoples have managed to maintain an ecological balance with Mother Earth in their territories even as the customs and number of inhabitants have changed over the course of time. In some places, the presence of the Amazonian people has even strengthened the biodiversity of forests.

We can learn, and in some cases, relearn, from indigenous peoples how to minimize our impacts on Mother Earth.

Here are a few lessons to consider:

Everything is interrelated as one living being. Everything and everyone is made of the same substance: earth. People and communities are not separate from their environment. When we subject a forest to mining, the water becomes contaminated, the animals become homeless, the health of human beings is damaged, and ultimately, communities are fractured. Nothing is done in isolation; every action has repercussions on everything and on everyone. This is because we are interdependent, although we may not always perceive this reality.

Living in a community means living in a reciprocal relationship. An attitude of gratitude for life grows when we freely return the good deeds another person has done for us. This is how we become co-responsible for the continuous interwovenness of community, which is renewed each day. This reciprocity is lived out in relationship with Mother Earth, with the Divine, with one's self and with community. A creative movement of life is generated by continuous gratitude.

As God communicates with all people, daily life expresses our close relationship with the divine, like a tapestry woven together with a thousand colors. The shared wisdom of all people can show us a pathway to peaceful, sustainable life together in our common home. It is up to each of us to incorporate this wisdom into our own life.

Written by Tania Avila Meneses and Father Paul Masson, M.M. and translated by Kitty Schmidt, Maryknoll Mission Center, Cochabamba, Bolivia. Contributions made by Chloe Noel, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

Reflect

What are some examples of a culture of consumption and egocentrism in your own community or life?

What ways can you incorporate lessons of Andean and Amazonian spirituality into your own life or community?

Pray

Everything is interconnected

by Cireneu Kuhn, SVD

Everything is interconnected
as if we are one.

Everything is interconnected
in this common home.

We care for the flowers,
the forests, rivers and springs,
the air and the biomes,
the land and the animals.

We care for the being in gestation,
with special love for the children.

We care for the sick and the elderly,
with a preferential option for the poor.

[English translation of the original Portuguese. Video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1do_VBZG9Ps]

What is the Synod for the Amazon

The Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon region is scheduled to meet in Rome from October 6–27 2019. Pope Francis announced in 2017 that it would work “to identify new paths for the evangelization of God’s people in that region,” specifically the indigenous peoples who are experiencing the destruction and exploitation of their natural environment and live “often forgotten and without the prospect of a serene future.” The Amazon basin, roughly the size of the forty-eight contiguous United States, with a population of 2.8 million divided among approximately 400 tribes, includes all or parts of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guyana, Peru, Venezuela, and Surinam, all countries where most of the population is Roman Catholic. <http://www.sinodoamazonico.va>

Bringing indigenous voices to Washington

Since 2015, the Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network (REPAM) has coordinated the work of the Catholic Church in the Amazon region, marshaling the work of priests and missionaries, national representatives of Caritas and lay advocates to protect both the indigenous peoples of the Amazon and the natural resources of the region from exploitation. The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) has accompanied REPAM in Washington, D.C. by working to open spaces for indigenous leaders and pastoral companions from the Amazon region to share their experiences and advocate for their rights. REPAM has provided important expertise and voices in the development of the documents for the Synod for the Amazon.



Chloe Noel/MOGC and Rosildo da Silva, indigenous leader of the Jaminawa Arara people of the state of Acre, Brazil, and member of a Pan-Amazonian Delegation organized by REPAM to advocate for their territorial rights and protections for indigenous cultures, at the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., 2017.