

Sam Meraw

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Without water, devastating effects can occur such as the death and decline of plants, animals, agriculture, and humans. Not only is water a necessity but it is also a human right just like access to food and housing. Catholic social teachings teach members of the church about the importance of loving thy neighbor and caring for others while Laudato Si preaches caring for the earth and creation. Both Laudato Si and the Catholic Social teachings can help people on earth to better understand the importance of helping others, the earth, and people in need, and how to do so.

In the video, "Americans Without Water", the daily struggles of Americans lacking access to water are explained so that others can better understand their struggle. One woman named Hattie Avery talks about her struggle with the water shortage in West Virginia. She shares her frustrations, saying that her state and town are neglected even though they have done nothing wrong to deserve this treatment. When inquired about why she thinks no lawmakers have helped her town, she pauses and says that her town is the town that "time has forgotten" (3:17) and that "we (the town) don't matter enough" (3:20). Catholic social teachings teach to stand in solidarity with those who are struggling and to care for God's creation, whether that is people, animals, plants, or other aspects of nature. Catholic social teachings also preach standing up for human rights. If governors or politicians were able to make laws that could help Hattie and so many others, Hattie as well as other Americans would feel at peace because they wouldn't need to struggle and fight for the basic human right of clean water. Not only that, but politicians would be fulfilling the Catholic social teachings of protecting human rights and protecting God's creation. The Laudato Si' document focuses on how we as common people can care for the environment and God's creation. Hattie and so many other Americans in battles for their human

Sam Meraw

18 November 2022

rights are not being taken care of or even listened to. In paragraph 14 of the Laudato Si' document by Pope Francis, he explains that all of us are capable of caring for creation. The book reads, "All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents" (Bergoglio). Standing in solidarity is an action that the common people could take as well. By standing in solidarity with Hattie, she could see that she has not been forgotten and her town does matter. Writing letters to lawmakers in West-Virginia, voting for clean water bills, and speaking on the news are just a few actions that can be taken to stand up for Hattie and her community. Not only is 73-year-old Hattie struggling for clean water, but so are people with families to take care of.

Families in West Virginia are fighting for clean water as well. In Keystone, Tori Sato shares what her daily life looks like without water. She has a two-year-old daughter, Iris, who needs water just as much as any other kid. Tori's water goes out often for weeks without any warning. It is a rarity that she has time to prepare for the taps turning off and a luxury to be able to shower with no hassle. Tori travels miles to nearby muddy streams to collect water for the week, often in cold weather or snow. Sometimes her water source is muddy or unreliable, but the most reliable source of water she has is a small trickle from a pipe near an abandoned mine. Not only do Tori and Hattie collect water, but so do thousands of other Americans in West Virginia. At the roadside near a pipe of flowing water, citizens of Keystone were seen pulling over and gathering water for the week or month. On World Water Day in 2019, Pope Francis wrote a letter titled, "Message of His Holiness Pope Francis on the Occasion of World Water Day 2019". In paragraph 4, he says that leaving nobody behind means, "being aware of the need to respond with concrete actions; not only with the maintenance or improvement of water facilities, but also by investing in the future, educating new generations in the use and care of water" (Bergoglio).

Sam Meraw

18 November 2022

Right now, Hattie, Tori, and so many others without access to water are being left behind in the dust. Clearly, action needs to be taken in order to not leave anyone behind or leave anyone out. Advancements in the government, support from communities, and leaders taking action are essential to change.

Last but certainly not least is the perspective of a politician, Ed Evans. Ed is a delegate working in the state capitol, he expresses his worries about the water shortage as well as the policies failing to be made around water accessibility. Ed expresses his concerns for the locals but he explains that there is not much “political will” to change anything regarding the accessibility of water in West Virginia. He describes his ideas around the availability of water, saying that some money in the government needs to be set aside to implement safe and easily accessible water systems, but it is difficult to do so due to the lack of urgency in the state government. Because changes are not taking place in the government, something clearly needs to be changed. Whether you are 70, 50, 20, or even 10, there are a plethora of actions you can take to support those in West Virginia with a lack of access to water. First, if you are of voting age, vote for bills that promote clean drinking water for everyone. Secondly, if you can't vote yet, you can write letters to congress encouraging them to consider passing a bill so that people in West Virginia and elsewhere have access to clean water. Not only that, but you can start petitions with friends or family in your neighborhood, schools, or work in order to support those in West Virginia and all over the world. Furthermore, you can also make a difference simply by taking showers that are shorter or turning off the tap when you're brushing your teeth. Little actions like this make a huge difference even if you can't see the shift right away. For example, when I turn off the tap while I am brushing my teeth, I save about four cups of water everyday, but that adds up. In a month, four cups will become 120 cups. In a year, 120 will become 1,440 cups of water.

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That's about 90 gallons a year! If your family, neighborhood, friends, or even town participates by making little changes like these, the effects can be monumental in the long run. In the Pastoral Statement by the California Conference of Catholic Bishops, the article explains how humans also deserve to live without a struggle for basic necessities. The article reads, "Human beings too are creatures of this world, enjoying a right to life and happiness, and endowed with unique dignity" (N/A). Humans of all races, religions, and levels of wealth deserve happiness, but it becomes so much harder to live happily when you feel like Hattie or Tori when their human rights are taken away. Nobody deserves to struggle for human rights, especially if they live in a society where they contribute and make the world a better place.

Through the firsthand experiences and stories of people struggling without water, the Laudato Si' document, and Catholic Social Teachings, people who are a part of the church as well as non-religious communities are able to better understand the effects that occur when communities don't have access to clean water. After listening to Ed, Hattie, and Tori's stories, others can use Catholic Social Teachings to better support them. They can stand in solidarity with them, care for creation, and protect the human rights being threatened using Catholic Social Teachings. Not only do we need to stand up for those lacking access to water, but we also need to stand up for those facing other struggles, such as poverty, bullying, food insecurity, and a myriad of other social injustices. Spreading the message that we all need to stand up for those struggling either using Catholic Social teachings or other methods ultimately makes the world a better place and helps others to lead happier and healthier lives.

Sam Meraw

18 November 2022

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