



# The Pope and I

Third Grade  
Math and Science  
Florida

I am not Catholic. Yet when Cardinal Robert Prevost became Pope Leo XIII, I was exhilarated, inspired, and hopeful. Here was a man who the *Wall Street Journal* described as “from the U.S., but of the global south” and who has been described by many as “a citizen of the world.”

To achieve climate justice, I believe people need to think of themselves as citizens of the world (or global citizens) and not only as citizens of a town, state or country. Climate justice requires this mindset because our climate knows no boundaries. It relates to taking responsibility for and taking action to ensure the well-being and survival of humans or other living organisms, regardless of where they are located on Earth in this era of climate crisis. It is grounded in the idea that one’s location, characteristics, or station in life should not cause one to disproportionately bear the costs and adverse impacts of climate change or of efforts to reverse or mitigate its effects.

To lay the foundation for climate justice, I work hard to help my third-grade learners understand that we are members of many different and significant local, regional, and global communities that may include family, our classroom, our city, state and country, our fellow beings around the world, and, importantly, our natural world. We learn how important it is to be able to contribute to and function in all of them. This includes learning to respect others’ existence, perspectives and experiences, to communicate constructively with others, to actively support each other, and to value and sustain our natural world.

In practice, building this foundation involves a wide range of activities ranging from a virtual exchange with peers in Mexico to food tastings to meeting with our city’s mayor. With these activities my goal is to set the stage for my students to take action as they develop a sense of responsibility and deep feelings of empathy toward others—ones that extend beyond their immediate surroundings and ones that encompass all beings—just as Pope Leo XIII has done.

Without them, we will not be able to meet our moral obligation to save what Pope Leo's predecessor called "our common home."

In his 2015 papal encyclical *Laudato Si: On Care of Our Common Home*, Pope Francis emphasized that its message was addressed to all people and wrote:

*Authentic human development has a moral character. It presumes respect for the human person, but it must also be concerned for the world around us and take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system...*

*The climate is a common good meant for all, and belonging to all...*

*If present trends continue this century may well witness... an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us...*

*Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day. Its worst impact will probably be felt in developing countries. Many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming.*

Pope Francis' words from a decade ago capture why I am committed to teaching about climate justice. Pope Leo XIII inspires me to redouble my efforts.