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Climate change is the prophetic call to repentance of our time

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In biblical times, repentance manifested itself in external signs such as fasting, public lamentations, loud cries and in the wearing of sackcloth and ashes. These external signs indicated a change of heart, a radical turning about. Repentance signified a turning in direction, not a minor one, but a 180-degree turning away from one's previous path.

When an individual person or an entire civilization is headed full speed toward a precipice, the smartest and holiest thing to do is to repent, to make a total change in direction. What kind of turning is required of humanity in our 21st century?

We are approaching a planetary precipice. We are increasingly aware of climate change, or what is more accurately called catastrophic climate disruption. Forests are disappearing, water tables are falling, soils are eroding, fisheries are collapsing, rivers are running dry, glaciers and ice caps are melting, the ocean is becoming more acidic, plant and animal species are going extinct, and the children of all species are increasingly being born sick.

All of this casts a dark shadow over our lives and has become the

overarching issue of our time.

More: "[Catholics rebuke executive order on climate, energy policy](#)" (March 29, 2017)

This climate issue is the context within which all of our future efforts to nurture greater justice and more authentic relationships will become increasingly difficult. By mid-century, our children and grandchildren likely will be living on a severely compromised planet. Later in the century, they will possibly be facing more serious and catastrophic disruptions within Earth's web of life.

For some of us, this reality is too fearsome to face and so we move into denial or paralysis. This fear is understandable because we are the first humans ever called to face such a planetary precipice, such an ultimacy. No previous humans could even have imagined it. Even our genetic endowment does not seem that helpful in helping us to act.

Things, however, are not hopeless. Our hope is to be found in a present-day radical 180-degree turning in our consciousness and actions — a repentance. Never before has such a change of heart has been required of us. It is a change that is difficult to fully imagine. It is the prophetic call of our time.

Our turning will require that we reinvent ourselves. For example, we will have to move out of the illusion of human separateness into the truth that we are integral members of Earth's web of life. We will have to experience ourselves not as being on Earth but as being of Earth. We will have to nurture our awareness that we have a role to play in the sacred drama of Earth's evolutionary unfolding.

The challenge before us is soul-sized. Some questions for our

Lenten observance, in its final days this year, as individuals and as a human community are: Do we want to repent? Do we have the courage to make that 180-degree turn? What will we humans choose to do?

Our children, grandchildren and their children are awaiting our answer.

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