

I THINK OF NOTHING MORE SARCASTIC THAN TO PRAISE A BOTTLE, PLASTIC



Unless I remain isolated in my home, a day does not pass where I don't see a plastic water bottle being sold, offered or used. Each instance reminds me of the misuse of our Earth's resources. I am constantly reminded of the short-sightedness of the for-profit corporations who offer the unnecessary alternative to public tap water.

When the University of Portland discontinued the sale of disposable plastic water bottles on campus in 2009, President Father William Beauchamp said "The University of Portland takes seriously its commitment to being a good steward of the planet. This will not only reduce the amount of waste generated on our campus but will help focus attention on the critical issues of sustainability and water rights."

First, let us consider the issue of water rights: Pope John Paul II wrote in 2004 that "As a gift from God, water is a vital element essential to survival; thus, everyone has a right to it."

"By its very nature water cannot be treated as just another commodity among many, and it must be used rationally and in solidarity with others ... If water distribution is entrusted to the private sector it should still be considered a public good. *The right to water*, as all human rights, finds its basis in human dignity and not in any kind of merely quantitative assessment that considers water as a merely economic good. Without water, life is threatened."¹

Pope Benedict XVI said in 2006, "Water is much more than just a basic human need. It is an essential, irreplaceable element to ensuring the continuance of life."

Second, consider the issue of sustainability: Less than 25 percent of disposable plastic water bottles are recycled. Producing plastic emits gases into the environment. Much of the water contained in disposable plastic bottles comes from distant locations, requiring a large environmental cost to transport.

Plastic bottles are a petroleum-based product. Bottled water production in the United States used the energy equivalent of 32 and 54 million barrels of oil to produce and transport plastic water bottles in 2007.

Finally, consider the poor: "Satisfying the needs of all, especially of those who live in poverty, must guide the use of water and the services connected with it. Inadequate access to safe drinking water affects the well-being of a huge number of people and is often the cause of disease, suffering, conflicts, poverty and even death. For a suitable solution to this problem, it 'must be set in context in order to establish moral criteria based precisely on the value of life and the respect for the rights and dignity of all human beings'" (*The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* 484).

In 2012, over 700 million in the world lacked access to clean drinking water. In the United States we are blessed that because of our laws and public structures, we can turn our faucets on and drink clean tap water.

Is there a need for plastic-bottled water? Use a cup. If you're hosting a meeting, use pitchers and glasses and wash the glasses afterwards. Offer your clients a cup of water, not a bottle.

As water in the Church symbolizes life and rejuvenation, the plastic water bottle symbolizes excess and waste.

Let the plastic water bottle serve as a reminder of the ease with which we can harm *all* God's creation.

1. Cf. John Paul II, Message for the 2003 World Day of Peace, 5: AAS 95 (2003), 343; Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Water, an Essential Element for Life*. A Contribution of the Delegation of the Holy See on the occasion of the 3rd World Water Forum, Kyoto, 16-23 March 2003.



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