

**MESSAGE OF
HIS BEATITUDE ARCHBISHOP IERONYMOS II
OF ATHENS AND ALL GREECE
ON THE OCCASION OF THE
WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY (June 5, 2020)**

This day —the World Environment Day—, which, as is known, was established by the UN General Assembly 48 years ago as a day of commemoration and preservation of, and respect and love for the environment, is a significant occasion for all of us, who are called upon to put it to due use in order to redefine our relation to it.

Certainly, our Holy Church always with much love and affection prays to the Merciful God, the Creator "*of all things visible and invisible*", in favour of the preservation and protection of the environment.

Moreover, by means of the Holy Scriptures and its tradition in the Holy Spirit, it reminds us that, if he or she wishes to live in balance, peace, good health and happiness in this world, the human being, as the crown of God's creatures, should respect and appreciate the environment as the outcome of divine creation and should not abuse this great gift of God but should in deeds demonstrate his or her earnest gratitude to the Gift Giver, through the appropriate use and utilization of the goods provided by Him.

Our Holy Church declares that the human being cannot conceive of itself as autonomous from the rest of the creation nor can it exist without it in its historical presence (*Dasein*) on this planet and, therefore, by preserving and safeguarding the environment, it is its own self that it preserves and safeguards.

The Lord of Glory placed the human being in the world as king and priest of the creation so that it may produce works of light and love and not destroy God's creation through his or her bad use of it. He or she who does not appreciate the cosmos in a eucharistic and prayerful manner nor does he or she look up to the Maker of the sun, the earth, the moon, the stars, the asteroids, the galaxies and the entire firmament doxologically; he or she who is not grateful to God as Creator of the biosystems of the Earth, the oceans, the rivers, the trees, the other plants, the flowers, the living organisms in general;

he or she, sadly shows contempt of the creative divine energy and, in so doing, does not use well what has been created by God.

In this sense, he or she errs, misses the point, sins before God, his or her own self and his or her fellow human beings; before the present and the future; before the generations to come, which will unfortunately suffer the dire consequences of human foolishness due to the abuse of the creation and material reality.

Being conscious of the purpose of man's existence and of the creation of the world, on the one hand, and partaking of the divine and unspeakable glory already from the present time, on the other, the Saints of our Church in every way indicate to us the authentic environmental and ecological - ecclesiastical frame of mind.

The hermit of the Greek Mount Helicon, for instance, i.e. Saint Luke of Steiris, took care most diligently of plants, trees, birds, the rational as well as the irrational creatures. Saint Cosmas of Aetolia used to say that "*men will end up poor because they will have no love for trees*", and Saint Amphilochios of Patmos would often urge those coming to confess to him, instead of another *epitimion*, to go and plant pine trees on that dry island of the Archipelago.

Saints respected and honoured the environment and the creation as made *ex nihilo* by the only true God.

Throughout the history of mankind and down to the modern years, the misuse of creation brought about lesser ecological problems, as its development was relatively slow. However, through the industrial revolution and the growth of science and technology, that misuse got out of control. The pollution of the air, the contamination of the seas, the soil, the subsoil, the human organism itself, has now become a deadly threat to the human being and to life itself.

To sum up, may we point out that, if the environmental problem is essentially a spiritual one, with unfathomable ethical and moral aspects, then, as long as man does not adopt the right stance to it, this problem will not cease to be there, so that man may at last come out of the maze he has trapped himself in.

Otherwise, without an ascetic and evangelical outlook on God's creation, without a reasonable and wise use of material goods and resources, the environmental problem will continue expanding endlessly, instead of shrinking.

Our Church does not cease through word and deed to recommend respect for the environment as the outcome of divine creation : by means of relevant courses in its schools of catechism; lectures to the circles of study of the Holy Scriptures; a World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation (September 1) established by the Ecumenical Patriarchate; its liturgical prayers and many other spiritual ways. Moreover, it encourages actions undertaken by its parishes and beyond in relation to the environment such as tree planting, recycling, the restriction of the use of cars, renewable energy sources etc.

May we wish from the depths of our heart that this year's celebration of the World Environment Day may awaken the consciousness of us all so that we may appreciate and respect divine creation at all times and, through it, first and foremost the Maker and Creator of all.