

## ***A Reflection for September 1 – The Beginning of the Liturgical Year***

**Archpriest Terence Baz  
Assumption of the Holy Virgin Orthodox Church, Clifton, New Jersey  
Diocese of New York and New Jersey**

As we come to the beginning of the New Liturgical Year, the Orthodox Church calls us to lift up our hearts, minds and souls to Christ as we journey through the Church's seasons in our worship.

The beauty of our church buildings teaches us that Christ, through Whom the universe was created, is the foundation of the universe in all its beauty. Likewise, in the Church's iconography, we see stories that reveal how God has intervened in human history. Everything will culminate in Christ, Who links the created world to the uncreated. Our souls are drawn to this beauty, and when we choose to follow Christ, He inspires us to strive in every way to lift up our souls to worship Him, instead of sin.

Thus, Jesus calls us to repent because the Kingdom of God is near. We need to turn away from everything that separates us from the immeasurable blessings He continually offers us. We can abide in His countless blessings through the cleansing of living water and the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit. We can unite ourselves to Christ and His created cosmos through the Eucharist, offering everything we encounter back to Him at the Divine Liturgy. In our love for Him and His cosmos, we use the grace granted us in our baptism and in our priesthood to fervently pray and intercede before the Most-Holy Trinity in response to all the chaos and anguish we see in this fallen world.

The Church also inspires us through the study and celebration of the lives of the Saints during the liturgical year. We draw strength from their lives, knowing in humble gratitude that, although we are unworthy, we have been given the privilege of participating in this Communion of Saints because of Christ's love for us. Jesus Christ gave us the example of His love by washing the disciples' feet and then by shedding His blood on the Cross into the earth.

The Tradition of the Church teaches us, however, that these immeasurable blessings also bring sacred responsibilities.

The Book of Genesis teaches us that we are called to care for God's creation. In giving us dominion over it, He expects us to show great respect for creation, naming the plants and animals with affection. Unlike Cain, we must control our appetites by curbing such passions as greed and lust of power. The liturgical seasons are provided to help us fight this life-long battle within our hearts, to help us deepen our communion with Christ.

This battle, however, is not simply something that impacts our own souls. Nor is it merely symbolic. This spiritual struggle against the passions – waged personally, within each of our lives, and waged together, as the family of the Church – impacts every facet of creation. Thus, the closer the Saints come to Christ, the more they realize how their behavior has cosmic implications. This is why the Saints in their writings and teachings so often exclaim their

complete unworthiness! Like them, we, the “Saints in the making,” unworthy yet equipped for the task by our Creator, are the point of connection between the visible and the invisible, the created and the uncreated. Therefore, we cannot focus only on our own salvation, ignoring the conditions of the world around us. The struggle against sin, death, and the devil is always both personal and cosmic.

The Orthodox Church firmly teaches that God’s creation is ongoing. At every service we invoke the Holy Spirit “Who art everywhere and fillest all things,” asking Him to “abide in us”, to continue His work of enlivening the universe. Creation is not something that stopped eons ago, left to its own devices. In fact, the forces of chaos continue to wage against God’s good order of creation – but the Scriptures tell us that they will be banished (Is. 51:9 f) and combated with mighty blows (Ps. 104:7). Thus, when we love and respect creation, we love and respect God’s ongoing plan to save it and all of us.

So, we must recognize what is happening to this material earth on which we live. Scientists are warning us that the cumulative effects impacting the earth from the time of the industrial revolution, such as land and ocean pollution, fresh water degradation and carbon emissions, are placing our planet in imminent and great danger. They tell us that this danger is so acute that the global community is on a precipice. Instead of enjoying the summer season, many local communities in the U.S.A. now dread the summer because of the increasing threat of major storms and fires. If temperatures and oceans continue to rise at the current rate, it will be the poor and disadvantaged who will suffer the most.

It would be irresponsible to brush aside these warnings. So, how can we as Orthodox Christians respond?

Aside from the prayerful and liturgical participation already mentioned, we need to consciously make lifestyle choices that embrace Orthodoxy, rather than the enticements the fallen world offers which threaten our environment. Perhaps we can look to the Orthodox monastic way of life for a good guide. Most people cannot be monks, but there is a lot to learn from their way of life.

For example, we can endeavor to be attentive to personal prayer by using the Jesus Prayer throughout the day. We can choose to eat modestly and simply by embracing the fasts and reducing our meat consumption. We can read and reflect on the daily Scripture readings listed in the Liturgical Calendar. We can earnestly pray for and seek the wisdom of the Holy Spirit when choosing what to purchase for our needs. We can be careful not to be wasteful regarding plastic and paper products, making sure we recycle properly. We can regulate our energy consumption at home and in our cars.

Just as important as personal lifestyles are the choices our parish communities make to care for their grounds by keeping the lawns and grounds in good shape without using pesticides, by recycling properly, by reducing energy output by undertaking an energy audit, by using LED lighting, by replacing inefficient heaters, boilers, air conditioners and by fixing leaky windows. In the parish, we can form a discussion group to reflect on what the Orthodox Church teaches in its Tradition about the care of creation. Information can be found on websites such as [www.orth-transfiguration.org](http://www.orth-transfiguration.org) for discussion materials.

Finally, where does the Church look when it faces a crisis? Where do we find God's plan unfolding when the Church has nowhere else to look? God sent a Son, born of a woman, to confound the forces of chaos and darkness. It was because the Theotokos said, "Let it be done according to your word," that the Church ponders the mystery of her whose womb became "more spacious than the heavens." It is little wonder, then, that we have prayers and devotions calling on the Mother of God's intercession, throughout the year. When we use those devotions, let us raise our whole heart, mind and soul to Christ, offering this awesome responsibility as stewards of creation back to Him, along with all the many struggles and questions we face in our daily lives.

The best way to be environmentally responsible is to strive to be faithful Orthodox Christians throughout the coming year.