

A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift

by
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At a Minimum, We Should Pray for Our Environment

Every day we read more bad news about the deterioration of our environment. Most recently, it was noted that twelve billion tons of Greenland ice melted in just one day. This is such a huge number, I had to make some rough calculations to put it in perspective. This amount of ice that melted is the equivalent of an iceberg ten feet deep with an area of 1,000 square miles which is about 31 miles square. During the first seven months of 2019, over 250 billion tons of ice have melted causing a rise in the water level of the oceans.

I can go on and summarize what is happening throughout the world relative to the declining environment. People worldwide, and even in large cities, are being subjected to water shortages including the depletion of the water reserved as insurance underground in our springs and wells. The over consumption of the natural resources has us using the equivalent of 1.7 earths. When will this stop and reverse its track? And global warming, now being called climate change because it doesn't sound as detrimental, is causing more severe storms, impacting the agricultural industry, expanding our deserts, and more. And unfortunately, of all the countries that committed to the Paris Agreement of 2015, a small percentage are actually meeting their goals.

So what can we do about this? One recommendation is to pray to God for help. Thirty years ago in 1989, then Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios of the Greek Orthodox Church declared that September 1 shall be the annual day of prayer for the Care of Creation. Upon the passing of Patriarch Demetrios in 1991, the new patriarch, His All Holiness Bartholomew has continued with this annual celebration of praying for the environment. Bartholomew has done even more by hosting to date nine environmental symposia throughout the world on various bodies of water including the Aegean Sea, Black Sea, Danube River, Adriatic Sea, Baltic Sea, Amazon River, Mississippi River, Arctic Ocean, and last year in 2018 a symposium on the Saronic Sea in Greece. He has also hosted three summits in Halki, an island just west of Constantinople (Istanbul), Turkey. Their focus was global responsibility and environmental sustainability, the environment in literature and the arts, and most recently to promote theological and environmental awareness.

Four years ago, Pope Francis announced his environmental encyclical, *Laudato Si, Care for Our Common Home*. This document is a great summary of the then current condition of our environment and what we can all do to mitigate its decline. And ever since 2015, the Roman Catholic Church has also declared September 1 as the annual day of prayer for the Care of Creation. In addition, the Chicago Archdiocese has formed an Encyclical Working Group dedicated to bring awareness and commitment to everyone of what each can do to help improve the environment. This is really important as I believe one of our biggest problems relative to the environment is the lack of awareness as to how critical of an issue we have before us. But for

even the people that are aware, another major problem is that too many don't care enough to do something about it.

For the past four years, a Greek Orthodox Church and a neighboring Roman Catholic Church have conducted an environmental religious service on September 1 for its parishioners to bring awareness of the deteriorating environment and pray for its improvement. These two churches have been alternating hosting the service which is then followed by a reception and a presentation by an environmental expert.

Bringing awareness of the environmental problem while praying to God for His help may be a great way to improve this situation. While I mention what these two Christian churches are doing, I recommend that everyone do something similar regardless of your religious affiliation. This pertains to other Christian denominations, Judaism, Islam and any other religion. Since there is only one God, we must all be praying to the same One even though He might be called by a different Name. So let's all pray on September 1, 2019 for the natural environment.