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Topic #2

In light of Genesis 1:24-27, the sixth day of creation, discuss how all living beings are connected and its impact on our responsibility for the planet.

How Does one get closer to God? Many of us agree that prayer, fasting, or worshipping together during the Divine Liturgy are ways to get closer to God, but what if I told you that we can learn an awful lot about God and ourselves based on what God has created. In the Book of Genesis it is written, *“And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds; the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to it’s kind.” And it was so... And God saw that it was good.”*

In this passage, God reveals two fundamental aspects about the nature of the universe. The first is that the world does not rely on us for its survival, and the second is that all living things in this world are connected in that they are all “good.” What exactly does it mean to be “good”? How often is it in our society that we casually label things good, that are really superficial. We say, “Oh, that was a good game the other night” or “Is the car running good?” I myself am guilty of calling my Yiayia’s loukoumades really good, but that’s beside the point. Within the context of the Bible something is “good” if it is able to glorify God and enter into a relationship with both the Creator and whatever He has created.

I remember when I was in elementary school we were each given a small cactus to look after for a school project. We had to keep it healthy and water it every day. I brought in a special, new pot for it and I was so proud of myself when I earned an “A.” However, when the class was over, I forgot about my cactus and neglected it, much like we sometimes do to our relationship with God. After a few months I looked on my windowsill where I had left my cactus and was surprised when I saw that it had sprouted a flower even though I hadn’t watered it in so long! This close connection between human beings and all of creation is a powerful reminder to be responsible stewards of the environment and our planet.

If I was able to learn such profound lessons from a little cactus as a young boy, imagine what we can learn as adults from this amazing planet we live on.

Our own Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew understands this, and he is even called the “Green Patriarch” because he stresses the importance of environmental salvation. He has said: *“The way we respond to the natural environment directly reflects the way we treat human beings. The willingness to exploit the environment is revealed in the willingness to permit avoidable human suffering. So the survival of the natural environment is also the survival of ourselves. When will we understand that a crime against nature is a crime against ourselves and a sin against God?”*

Patriarch Bartholomew identifies that our relationship with nature doesn’t just translate into our relationship with God, but our relationships with each other. The state of the environment mirrors with astounding acuteness the state of

ourselves as a humanity. This is not a new idea, but has existed since the beginning. It is written in Genesis: *"Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."*

Many people misinterpret this to mean that we are rulers over the Earth and that we can pollute or destroy it as we please. This mindset is prideful and moves us further from God. Instead, we should remember the parable of the talents in the Gospel of Matthew. God has given us this planet that is priceless in terms of talents or dollars. Are we going to be like the wicked servant, who hid his talents, and disregard the treasure that our master has given us? Or are we going to be like the other servants and multiply the treasure our master has given us, by nourishing it with our own love?

How does one get closer to God? Understand that getting closer to God starts with getting closer to God's creation and to each other. How do we get closer with each other? Know that we are all connected in that we are all "good." From the tiniest ant to the largest tree, we all have been put on this Earth to glorify God and share in His love. We are "good" simply because God gave us the ability to love something other than ourselves.