



September 1, 2024

09/004

To the Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America,

My Beloved Children in the Lord,

Joyous feast and happy New Year!

*Thou hast visited the earth and made it drunk; thou hast abundantly enriched it. The river of God is filled with waters; thou hast prepared their sustenance, for thus is the preparation thereof. – Psalm 64:9*

The world observes its civil New Year in the midst of the Northern Hemisphere's winter, in the cold and dark of early January. Indeed, according to the ancient Roman reckoning of time, that period of the year was so bleak that it was practically acalendrical: March was originally the first month of the Roman calendar, and December the tenth and last, with those gloomy days of deep winter, our January and February, lying outside of normal social time.

In the Church, on the other hand, we observe our New Year at the height of harvest, in the season of greatest abundance: "Spring is beautiful, but autumn is plentiful," to paraphrase a rustic Russian saying. This is reflected in the psalmody that we sing on this feast: "Thou shalt bless the crown of the year with thy goodness, and thy fields shall be filled with fatness" (Ps. 64:11).

"The river of God" – "thy fields." These sayings remind us that the natural world, with all its bounty and beauty, is the creation of God, and it belongs to him. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof, the world and all that dwell therein" (Ps. 23:1). Man is placed in this world as its steward, not its ultimate master or owner, and the creation around us is given to us not as a right, but as a gift. Moreover, though we are given temporal dominion over our environment, the natural world, like all things that come from God, finds its truest meaning when it is offered back to God. We are called to be not just steward, but sacrificer, priest, taking what is given and offering it back to the Giver.

In this act of sacrifice—the sacrament, the mystery—we encounter and receive an even greater gift, the Giver himself. Creation, the superfluous work of God's love, becomes the very means of encounter

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with God. In the greatest sacrament, the Eucharist, we offer up bread and wine—the bounty of God’s earth, the work of our hands in stewardship—and we receive back the Flesh and Blood of God himself.

Therefore, creation is holy, not because of some intrinsic quality, but because of its origin and its destiny: it comes from God and, when used properly, it is given back to God. Thus, as we celebrate the bounties of the natural world on this ecclesiastical New Year, properly ascribing thanks to God, we are also called to assess our stewardship over the natural world. We must ensure that we use all the good gifts of this world responsibly and moderately, not exploiting our stewardship or abusing our dominion.

I emphasize that this work of stewardship, though it has communal and social dimensions, is first and foremost the work of each human being, each Christian. Each of us is called to offer our environment, our work, our day-to-day, our spaces and places, our time, our very breath, back to God through virtue, generosity, thanksgiving, and prayer. We are, all of us and each of us, called to share our bounty, beautify our domain, and exercise prudent husbandry of the things entrusted to our care.

Thus, as we join in celebration of the New Year, reaping the harvest of the earth’s blessings, I pray that we always partake of nature’s extraordinary abundance with moderation and thanksgiving and generosity to others, properly exercising our role as priest and mediator—in and through Christ, the Great High Priest and true Mediator—offering up to God his own of his own, such that the very hills might be girded with joy and valleys cry aloud with the song of hymns (Ps 64:13).

To our great and everlasting God, who crowns the year with goodness and bounty, who by his power made the ages and yet rules forever, before and after and beyond all seasons and times, who is one in Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: to him be all glory, thanks, and adoration, now and ever and unto ages of ages.

Wishing you all a blessed New Year and many blessed years to come,  
Sincerely yours in Christ,

+Tikhon  
Archbishop of Washington  
Metropolitan of All America and Canada