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**Title:** Mankind's Royal Priesthood and Creation

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The first man Adam, like all men, was created in the image and likeness of God. He was called to live as a priest in Paradise. All of creation was given to him as a free gift. In return Adam was to offer creation back to God in thanksgiving and love. Unfortunately, Adam chose to eat the forbidden fruit and at that very moment he abandoned his priestly vocation, and distorted his image and likeness towards God. Adam, through his God gifted self-determination chose to be the first consumer and take God's creation and use it for his own selfish gratification.

The opposite of Adam is Noah. Noah acted as a priest when he built an altar out of obedience to God, and offered sacrifices which were pleasing to Him. The Lord was so delighted with Noah that he blessed him abundantly and promised him that He would never again curse creation. Noah's priestly sacrifices and blessings in thanksgiving to God for all that He had done was a partial reversal of the result of Adam's disobedience in Paradise.

By virtue of baptism all Orthodox Christians share in the royal priesthood of Jesus Christ. As royal priests we assemble facing the altar in our parishes to worship the Most Holy Trinity within the sacrifice of the Divine Liturgy. During the Divine Liturgy we take two fruits of creation, bread and wine, and we offer them back to God in love. In return God the Son blesses us by manifesting Himself perfectly into them, and they become Holy Communion. While the bread and wine truly become the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ, they also symbolically represent creation, and the need for all of creation to be perfected through Christ. While Paradise was distorted through Adam, it has been regained through Christ, and at the end of time creation will again be eternal and without death.

The vocation in life of every Orthodox Christian is to grow more into God's image and likeness by participating in His uncreated love and sharing this love with all. A natural result of this process of perfection will be that creation will be cared for because the more a person grows in the image and likeness of God, the more he realizes that creation is a gift to be utilized for spiritual growth. As Christians we must steep our lives in the image and likeness of God. We must elevate them and the natural world to the Divine. We must take our lives and all of creation and offer them back to God in Thanksgiving. The word Eucharist itself means Thanksgiving. In this Mystery par excellence of the Church we take wheat/bread and grapes/wine and offer them back to God and by so doing we actualize our royal priesthood and become partakers through grace of His Divine Nature.

To be royal priests of God's creation and Kingdom means we nurture one another and creation. It means we build up God's Kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven." The earth should reflect the Kingdom of Heaven, and where it does not it is due to our own fallen human nature and sinfulness. Other people, the animals, and everything that breathes and lives needs our love and care. We should all shudder to think of an earth which no longer produces wheat, wine, water, and oil for the Sacraments of God. Because of human environmental abuse people go hungry, soils are depleted and poisoned, water is unsafe to drink; and there is seemingly no end currently in sight to the man made destruction of this sacred planet which does not belong to us, the government, or any corporation. No one can own the natural world except God, and God alone. And as God did not create us or the world to die we must also not kill others or the created world which has been so graciously gifted to us. We are gifts to one another and the earth is a gift to all.

When our Saviour became a man He took flesh from His most pure Mother our Lady. This flesh came from the earth. The very first miracle Christ performed was to take the most fundamental element of creation, water, and turn it into wine. When Christ made a blind man see He took His own spittle and mixed it with dirt and anointed him. This clay was made from the earth. At the Mystical Supper Christ took bread and wine and transformed them into His own Body and Blood imbued with His Divinity. Christ was crucified for us on a tree so that we can be partakers of eternal life. God saves and sanctifies us through the elements of His creation. Because of this reality we must do all that we can to protect, sustain, and nurture the earth for the sacred gift that it is. By so doing we actualize the gift of Christ's royal priesthood not only in our lives and the lives of others, but throughout all of creation too. We are called not to be consumers of creation, rather as the modern Elder Cleopa of Romania would say, "Paradise is to consume us".