Reflection by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW

At the end of the Orthodox service for the 'Blessing of the Waters', which we observe on the first day of each month, every person in the congregation is sprinkled with water and takes home a small bottle to bless their house and family. As we conclude, what will each of us take home to touch our family and friends, while at the same time to transform our work and society?

One of the most powerful aspects of water is that it flows. And when it flows continuously, it remains purifying and life-giving. There would be no reason or meaning to gathering if we did not practically reach out to all those with whom we come into contact and on whom we could potentially have some impact.

As we have emphasised, water is the inviolable and non-negotiable right of every human being and every living thing. We must publicly declare our conviction that the water crisis is both moral and urgent; that withholding water from our brothers and sisters or exploiting water through abuse or waste, we are harming not only ourselves but future generations. We are both responsible for the sustainability of our water and accountable for the survival of our children.

Whether living in cities or continents – in Amsterdam, Africa, or Asia – our aspiration is to preserve and share clean water for every human being. Without water, there is despair; but with water, there is hope. We all need water in order to survive and thrive. In fact, the body can endure longer without food than it can without water. We are called to remember and to realise that the cycle of water and the cycle of life are one and the same.

This means that our connection to water should reflect our connection to other human beings. Our treatment of water should echo our respect for other people. Moreover, our relationship with the earth's water is not a commercial contract, but a spiritual covenant with all living creatures and the whole of creation. We must expand our concept of God's creation and compassion as relating exclusively to human beings. God's covenant is cosmic; and the philosophical shift that we are called to make is cosmological. The level of our greediness and

wastefulness is an ethical challenge that was unimaginable to previous cultures. Nature will be fruitful and plentiful when human beings respect the covenant between God and creation.

Such was the promise that God offered to Noah and his children in Genesis (9:12-17): God said to Noah, ‘This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and you and every living creature [...] a sign and a covenant for all generations to come [...] an everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.’ This, however, is far more than mere stewardship and sustainability. It is a pledge – a spiritual contract and societal assurance – that all of us owe to our own children for all generations to come.

Take this with you to your homes and communities, your places of work and interaction, as well as your cities and countries. May God bless you abundantly. And may God’s living water and spring of grace refresh, guide, and inspire you all the days of your life.