

ON CREATION

All things around us are droplets of the love of God

*The beauties of nature are the little loves
that lead us to the great Love that is Christ*

Take delight in all things that surround us. All things teach us and lead us to God. All things around us are droplets of the love of God — both things animate and inanimate, the plants and the animals, the birds and the mountains, the sea and the sunset and the starry sky. They are little loves through which we attain to the great Love that is Christ. Flowers, for example, have their own grace: they teach us with their fragrance and with their magnificence. They speak to us of the love of God. They scatter their fragrance and their beauty on sinners and on the righteous.

For a person to become a Christian he must have a poetic soul. He must become a poet. Christ does not wish insensitive souls in His company. A Christian, albeit only when he loves, is a poet and lives amid poetry. Poetic hearts embrace love and sense it deeply.

Make the most of beautiful moments. Beautiful moments predispose the soul to prayer; they make it refined, noble and poetic. Wake up in the morning to see the sun rising from out of the sea as a king robed in regal purple. When a lovely landscape, a picturesque chapel, or something beautiful inspires you, don't leave things at that, but go beyond this to give glory for all beautiful things so that you experience Him who alone is *comely in beauty*. All things are holy — the sea, swimming and eating. Take delight in them all. All things enrich us, all lead us to the great Love, all lead us to Christ.

Ps. 44:2
[45:2]

Observe all the things made by man — houses, buildings large or small, towns, villages, peoples and their civilizations. Ask questions to enrich your knowledge about each and everything; don't be indifferent. This helps you meditate more deeply on the wonders of God. All things become opportunities for us to be joined more closely with everything and everyone. They become occasions for thanksgiving and prayer to the Lord of All. Live in the midst of everything, nature and the universe. Nature is the secret Gospel. But when one does not possess inner grace, nature is of no benefit. Nature awakens us, but it cannot bring us into Paradise.

The spiritual man, the man who has the Spirit of God, is attentive

wherever he passes by; he is all eyes, all sense of smell. All his senses are alert, but they are alert in the Spirit of God. He is different. He sees everything and hears everything: he sees the birds, the stone, the butterfly... When he walks by somewhere, he senses each thing, a fragrance, for example. He lives amid everything — the butterflies, the bees and so on. Grace makes him attentive. He wishes to be together with all things.

Ah, what can I say! I experienced this when divine grace visited me on the Holy Mountain. I remember the nightingale bursting its throat in song among the trees with its wings stretched back to give its voice more power. So wonderful! If only I had a glass of water to give it to drink every so often, to quench its thirst... Why does the nightingale sing madly, why? But it too takes delight in its song. It senses what it is doing, and that's why it sings so passionately.

The birds in the forest inspired me greatly. Go to Kallisia one day and listen to the nightingales. Even if you have a heart of stone, you will be moved. How can you fail to sense that you are together with all things? Reflect deeply on their purpose. Their purpose is defined by their Maker. The teleology of creation displays the greatness of God and His providence. God's purposefulness is expressed differently in us, in mankind. We have freedom and reason.

One day I made a plan for this place here. I thought of placing a cistern in among the pine trees with a water tank holding two cubic metres of water which would release water automatically. Then the nightingales would come because they need water a lot and midges and flies...

Once when I was living in Kallisia I returned to the monastery after a period of illness and Maria the herdsman came to take me by donkey. On the way I asked her:

'How are all the beauties doing — the meadows, the colours, the butterflies, the fragrances and the nightingales?'

'There's nothing doing at all,' she replied.

'Really?' I said. 'Even though it's the month of May, yet there's nothing at all?'

'Not a thing!' she retorted.

As we progressed along the path we encountered all these things: flowers, fragrances and butterflies.

'What have you to say now, Maria?' I asked.

'I hadn't noticed!' she said.

We arrived at the plane trees and the nightingales were singing their heads off.

'You've been telling me lies, Maria!' I said.

‘No, not at all,’ she replied. ‘It’s just that I hadn’t noticed at all.’

To begin with I was also insensitive and didn’t notice. Then God gave me His grace and everything changed. This occurred after I had begun my obedience.

I remember the fossilized trees, the trunks, which we saw in Mytilene. They’ve been there for fifteen million years. They made a great impression on me! And that is prayer — to see the fossils and to glorify the greatness of God.

Prayer is to approach everything made by God with love

Prayer is to approach everything made by God with love and to live in harmony with everything, even with wild nature. That is what I desire and attempt to do. Listen and I’ll tell you something related to all this.

Some time ago someone gave me a parrot. For the first few days it was very unmanageable and wild. You couldn’t go near it. It was ready with its beak to peck your hand off. I wanted to tame it with the grace of God and with the Prayer. I repeated the words ‘Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me’ silently or out loud and gently touched its back with a stick while the parrot was in its cage. I did this carefully three times. Then in the evening of the same day I repeated the same thing. And the next day I did this again. After a few days I placed the stick gently on the bird’s head, once again while repeating, ‘Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me’. I was always very careful to avoid making the bird aggressive. I didn’t do this for very long at any one time. After a few more days I placed the stick on the bird’s head and slowly moved it down its back and tail. When I didn’t see any reaction, I started to place the stick under its neck and to stroke its chest very gently so as not to excite it, all the time repeating the prayer. After a while I took courage and set the stick aside and took a pencil and made the same motions. Finally, I laid aside the pencil and started to use my hand. The bird had now acquired familiarity with me and so I took it out of the cage and placed it on my shoulder. We went for a walk together up and down the corridor. And when I would sit down to eat, the bird would come and we would eat together. I would give it a little apple and it would come next to me and eat. Unfortunately, however, we lost it. A priest with lots of children came one day and the children opened the cage and the parrot flew away.

After some time I was given another parrot — the one we’ve got now. It was also wild to begin with, just like the first one. In the same way, with prayer and gentleness, I tamed this one. It started gradually to

say various words, to squawk out names, to come out of its cage, to sit on my shoulder and to eat with me. Its cage has a latch. When it comes out, I close the latch and the bird sits on top of the cage. When I want it to go back in, I make a sign for it to come down and go back in. Then it comes down, opens the latch and goes into the cage. It is a great egotist, however, and is always wanting attention. It wants you to talk sweetly to it and not ignore it. It's particularly jealous and doesn't want you to speak to anyone else, or love anyone else. Otherwise it gets very enraged. Now that we've become very good friends, it's learned not only words and names, but it says the prayer: 'Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.' It also says: 'O Virgin who brought forth God, Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with You,' 'God is good,' and it knows how to sing 'Lord have mercy' and other things.

What I want to do now is to tame an eagle. I've found him in the north of Evia. A short distance from the place where I go to rest, I found a spot which I've named 'the eyrie'. I didn't call it that without reason. It's very difficult to get up there. It's very rocky, and down below you see the Aegean Sea. When the atmosphere is right you can even make out Kav-sokalyvia on the Holy Mountain from there.

One day we saw an eagle there with a wingspan of two and a half metres. A great beast! It was encircling above us calmly without moving its wings at all. I made up a plan: just as I tamed the parrot, so I would tame the eagle. And I believe that with the help of God I'll become friends with the eagle. We'll do it in a holy way. Birds also like God's ways and to pray. They like it when you read. The eagle also likes meat.

My plan is to go up there with two companions very early in the morning. To begin with we will pray and then we will read out loud some of the psalms from Matins. Then we'll sing some hymns — the lauds and others. And at the same time we will burn a little incense. The singing of the psalms and the aroma of the incense will play an important role. Incense has a fragrance which is soothing. I'll also take a long piece of dry wood, a metre and a half long, and I'll strike it rhythmically with another piece of wood, just as they strike the *simantron* in monasteries as a call to prayer. And every so often I'll shout, 'Jooohn!! Jooohn!!' That's the name I'm going to give him. We'll also have some roast meat with us. We'll leave it on the rock little bit by little bit and we'll back off about two hundred metres. From that distance I'll see it and say the prayer, 'Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.' And in a short time the eagle will very certainly come down to eat the meat.

The next day we'll do the same thing. The eagle will encircle above

us, and as soon as we've finished our programme, he'll come down to eat the meat. After two or three times the eagle will be ours. Whenever we strike the *simantron*, he'll come to eat the meat. Then I'll bring him down whenever I want. I'll gradually tame him and then I'll be able to go and catch him. He may, of course, make mincemeat of me. He is a great monster of a beast with huge legs. If he were to sit on your shoulder, he would rip you up with his talons, even if he had no evil intent. But there is a way. I'll take along Saint Gerasimos's walking stick and I'll touch him gently on the back with it twice and say at the same time: 'Jooohn!! Jooohn!!' I've given him a fine name. The eagle is the symbol of Saint John the Theologian. The next day when he comes, as soon as he's eaten the meat, I'll stroke him on the back with the stick three times. The next day four. The day after, five. Then I'll proceed to his throat. Then I'll stroke him from head to tail. The next day from the beak to the chest. And so I'll proceed until we've become friends. Then I'll stroke his head, wings and back with my hand and do what I previously did with the stick. But great care is needed because he's highly dangerous. If he were to grab you, he would tear you to pieces with his talons. His talons are like iron. Even if you simply smell of meat he might make a grab at you. But the eagle is a very clever and active bird, a real king. If we do this, then we'll really see the grace and visitation of God.

Let me tell you something else.

A woman once came to me up there in north Evia with her goats and asked me if I could make a prayer for her herd because they weren't doing well. I stood up and the goats approached me on their own; she didn't bring them to me. I stretched out my arms and read a prayer. They were all close to me and lifted up their heads to look at me. A billy goat approached more closely, bowed, and kissed my hand. He wanted me to stroke him. I stroked him and he was pleased. They all pressed around me and looked up at me. They looked me in the face. I blessed them. I spoke and made a prayer.

We once had a dog. Whenever it saw me outside, it would come and kiss my hand. It covered me in saliva and then ran off in case I scolded it.

The person who has divine wisdom sees all things with love

All these things connected with nature help us greatly in our spiritual life when they are conjoined with the grace of God. When I sense the harmony of nature, I am brought to tears. Why should we be bored with life? Let us live life with the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Truth. The per-

son who has the Spirit of God, who has Divine Wisdom, sees all things with love of God and notices all things. The wisdom of God makes him grasp all things and delight in all things.

Listen and I'll recite my poem to you. It's by Lambros Porphyras. This captures my present state; I've got it constantly before me. It fits with my life.

*If only the pine trees that cover the hillside
would give me a pile of their numberless branches,
then finding a spot in a hollow beside them,
I'd build there my dwelling, a hut low and lonely.*

*If only 't were summer-time, then they could give me
a couch of their dry leaves, pine needles, to lie on,
and then I would join in the song of the pine trees,
their chorus at dawn-break of whispers and rustlings.*

*And nothing beyond this would I wish thereafter.
And when full of joy from this life I'd be parted,
again they would lend me a few of their branches
and make me a bower, a bed everlasting.**

* 'Pine Trees' in: Lambros Porphyras, *Τὰ Ποιήματα*, Athens 1993, p. 248.