

Message from Bartholomeos I, ecumenical patriarch

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His Holiness Bartholomeos I, ecumenical patriarch

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XIX International Ecumenical Conference

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XIX International Ecumenical Conference **on Orthodox spirituality**

Beloved organizers, dear Brother Enzo and members of the monastic community at Bose, distinguished speakers and participants,

It is with great joy that we address this warm message of greeting to the eminent gathering of the 19th ecumenical and international conference on Orthodox spirituality with its focus, this year, on "the Word of God in the Spiritual Life."

When we consider the spiritual struggle of the Christian faithful, we normally think about the difficult feats of fasting and prayer; or else we imagine the seemingly inaccessible virtues and passionately aggressive vices. Yet, none of these spiritual principles and elements makes sense or produce results without the fundamental principles espoused by and expounded in the Holy Scriptures. The Church Fathers and desert hermits were certainly aware of this truth and were careful to include and incorporate the Word of God in every aspect of their spiritual discipline and daily life. Their influential writings, just as the spiritual and liturgical literature of the early Church, are solidly based on the Bible. Even when the Bible is not explicitly mentioned, it is definitely taken for granted – like the air that all the saints and ascetics breathe. In the words of St. Mark the Monk in the 5th century: "He who is humble in thought and engaged in spiritual work, when he reads the Holy Scriptures, will apply everything to himself."

Therefore, the Word of God is not simply something inspirational or influential. It is definitive and normative for the spiritual life, serving as "a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path." (Psalm 118.105) It is a living Word, which we are called to hear and obey, to adhere and conform to – in the spiritual struggle and within the experience of the Church. In this regard, our model is the blessed Theotokos, who "kept all these things and pondered them in her heart." (Luke 2.19) When we ponder God's Word in our soul, then we "shall do whatever He tells us." (John 2.5)

Indeed, the Word of God is crucial in the spiritual struggle inasmuch as it paves the way for the softening and repentance of the heart. In the Egyptian desert, Abba Poemen once said: "The nature of water is soft, that of stone is hard; but if a bottle is hung above the stone, allowing the water to fall drop by drop, it wears away the stone. So it is with the word of God; it is soft and our hearts are hard, but those who hear the word of God often, open their hearts to revere the Lord."

Our fervent prayer for you as conference participants and for all our faithful is that we encounter the living Word of God so that – verse by verse, and drop by drop – it may transform our entire lives into living cells of the Body of Christ.

His Holiness
the Ecumenical Patriarch
Bartholomew

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