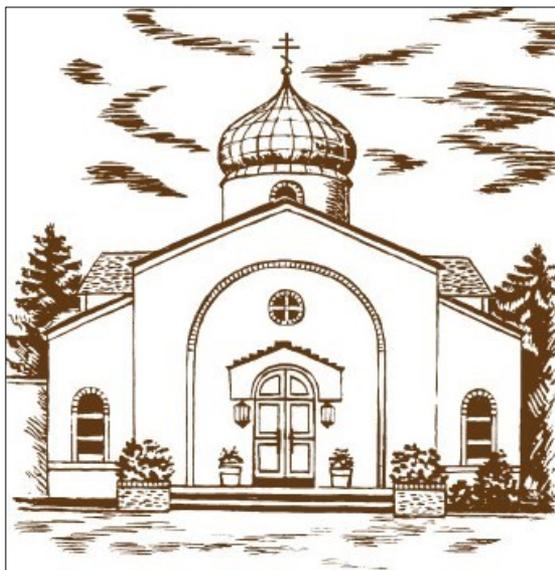


Holy Virgin Protection Russian
Orthodox Cathedral

<http://holyvirginprotection.org>

PARISH BULLETIN



AUGUST 2020

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Archpriest Tarasiy Maksimtsev

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Archpriest Valery Vovkovsky

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<http://www.russianorthodoxchurch.ws>

Diocese of Chicago and Mid-America

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Archbishop Peter

Archpriest Andre Papkov

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Protodeacon Alexander Kichakov

Deacon Nicholai Lochmatow

Schedule of Services

Divine Liturgy

Sundays and major holy days - 9 a.m.

Weekdays - 8 a.m.

All Night Vigil

Saturdays and Sunday evenings - 6 p.m.

Weekdays - 6:30 p.m.

Akathist to the Protection of the Theotokos

Wednesday evenings at 6:30 p.m. unless All Night Vigil is scheduled

Parish School on Saturdays

For information contact Natalie Gill - 312-203-6677

or Nadejda Evminenko - 224-616-0111

Parish Bookstore

Open after Liturgy on Sunday and major Holy Days.

PARISH NEWS

Due to the coronavirus the cathedral was closed with only clergy and a limited number of choir members attending. The services were broadcast via youtube. Thankfully, the limitations ordered by the governor are being lifted and more parishioners may attend the services. Please be aware of the rules governing church attendance and behave accordingly. Our parish website is constantly updated regarding attendance. If you have questions, please first read what is on the website, then ask the starosta or one of the clergy. Praying that this will all end soon and that we will be able to gather together for services and trapeza and all parish functions.

PARISH BOOKSTORE

Our Parish Bookstore has a wide variety of books and gifts!

We carry spiritual literature—the Bible, New Testament, Psalter, and a wide choice of spiritual reading.

We offer icons, gold and silver crosses, baptismal robes for infants and children, incense, prayer ropes, scarves, also honey, greeting cards and various gift items.

The bookstore is now online. See the parish website.

AMAZON SMILE PROGRAM

Many of us buy goods through Amazon.com. Amazon has a program for charitable organizations where it donates a percent of the cost of your purchases to the charitable organization you designate.

Please register at smile.amazon.com, and a percentage of your purchase will be donated to our parish. Our parish is under the name:

Russian Orthodox Holy Virgin Protection Cathedral in CHGO

SAINT SERAPHIM OF SAROV

August 1

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit!

“They will sing Pascha in the summer,” was once said in Sarov. Seventy years passed from the death of the man about whom these words were pronounced, and on July 19, 1903, all of Rus’ resounded with hymns of praise, glorifying God and His saint. Truly, all of Rus’ exalted then as on the Day of Holy Pascha—even more so.

Later terrible days came for Russia, but the memory of St. Seraphim neither died nor weakened. Russian people continue to come to him and glorify him, both in the suffering homeland and throughout the ends of the world where these people are scattered. Even other nations are becoming familiar with St. Seraphim; his Life is being translated into various languages, evoking not only admiration, but also, in many, the striving to apply in their own lives the lessons given to us by St. Seraphim’s life. Thus, despite the changes that have taken place in the world, the memory of St. Seraphim not only does not fade, but it remains a lamp that shines ever brighter to humanity.

It was the same during his earthly life. Cities were being destroyed, kingdoms were being established, Napoleon advanced upon Russia with twelve nations and then left in disgrace, Moscow burned and was again raised from the ashes, Decembrists organized revolts and were then sentenced; but was as if these events did not touch St. Seraphim.

He was wholly occupied with the acquisition of “the one thing needful,” worked on his “spiritual growth”. An “egoist, introverted,” “ignorant, not interested in anything other than what concerned him personally”—that is what many thinkers who do not wish to see even the slightest benefit in the podvig of self-perfection would say about him. So, monk Seraphim dies. It would seem that the image of this elder who so stubbornly fled the world should be erased from people’s memory. But an entire pilgrimage begins to his grave, people who come to him from all ends of Russia receive help, consolation, and edification; and the veneration of him begins to spread even among people of other nations.

In what lies the power of St. Seraphim? What is his podvig? He strove to realize the commandment of Christ: Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect (Mt. 5:48). He labored to restore in himself the first-created image of man, corrupted as a consequence of sin.

St. Seraphim reached his goal: he overcame sin and became a saint; he truly became the likeness of God. We cannot see the invisible God. But the Lord gave us to see Himself in those like unto Him, in His saints. And so, one of these likenesses was St. Seraphim. In him we see restored human nature, freed from slavery to sin. He is the incarnate personification of eternal victory over the transitory, sanctity over sin, good over evil.

St. Seraphim calls all by his example to follow the path shown by Christ. He calls us to struggle with sin and our inadequacies, being himself a beacon and lamp for all who seek salvation. St. Seraphim calls us to seek the higher good, spiritual fruits, about which the Apostle Paul said, But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts (Gal. 5:22–24).

The path to the Heavenly Kingdom is hard, for sin has taken over human nature and spoiled it. Each of us has our own personal sins. There are also societal sins of

which an entire nation is guilty. Thus, the entire Russian nation is guilty of the sin of abandoning the pious life and customs of its ancestors and seeking what is alien to it, not Orthodox; of believing the slander spread about God's anointed one, and allowing them to first tear off his crown, and then kill the pious Tsar along with his entire family—the Tsar who was the first to fall down before the glorified relics of St. Seraphim. St. Seraphim calls all to repentance and correction of life, both personal and societal. Although this path is hard, the God-pleaser will help us to walk it. St. Seraphim is a beacon and lamp on this path; he is also our aid. By the prayers of Thy saint, our father Seraphim, Lord grant repentance and victory over sin to us sinners, and lead us to Thy Heavenly Kingdom.

Amen.

Serbia, 1928

St. John (Maximovich) of Shanghai and San Francisco

<http://orthochristian.com/calendar/20200719.html>



HOMILY ON THE DAY OF THE HOLY PROPHET ELIAS

August 2

When we read the Bible, the Third and Fourth Books of Kings about the amazing acts of the holy Prophet Elias, our mind is astounded by them; we are amazed at many things: his extraordinary zeal for the glory of God and his total fearlessness in the work of cultivating faith amidst a pagan people (and such were the people of Israel at that time); our mind is amazed when we read of his extraordinary miracles; and we are most of all amazed when we read about the incredible power of his prayer, for you know that he commanded the elements with it—he forbade the rain to fall upon the Palestinian land for three and a half years, and then again by his prayer brought rain down to the earth.

He brought down fire from heaven, and it burned the sacrifice that had been drenched with water.

It is to Prophet Elias's prayer that I would like to direct your attention, for there is not sufficient time to speak of all the great things he did. However, I would like to talk not only about his prayer. We know that there were great ascetics of piety, great saints who also worked wondrous and magnificent miracles.

But I want the thought to reach your heart that not only does this kind of prayer, which works manifest miracles seen by everyone, not only the prayer of the Prophet Ellias, and the prayers of the apostles, prophets, and martyrs work miracles. I want you to understand that any prayer will work miracles.

What miracles does it work? Not those glorious and amazing miracles that the Prophet Elias wrought, no. It works miracles unknown to anyone other than the one in whose soul these miracles happen.

The kind of prayer that was made by St. Seraphim of Sarov, St. Sergius of Radonezh, Sts. Anthony and Theodosius of the Kiev-Caves, St. Varlaam of Khutyn, St. Nilus of Sora, and many other monastic saints works unseen miracles.

St. Seraphim and St. Sergius were like angels in the flesh even while still alive; their souls were filled with deep faith, pure love for God and people. They shone with faith and love.

How did they attain such brightness?

They attained it by their prayer—first of all by prayer. True, also by severe fasting and vigil.

Do you know that St. Seraphim of Sarov stood for a thousand days and nights on a rock, praying to God? This amazing prayer made him an angel in the flesh. From this prayer divine love came to dwell in his soul, and his heart shone with such love that he greeted every person who passed by him with these words filled with love: my joy!

Do you see? Prayer worked a miracle in St. Seraphim's soul; it worked miracles in the souls of all the other monastic saints, of which there is an enormous number. Prayer worked miracles of patience in the martyrs, and this unfathomable patience astounded the souls also of those who witnessed their torments. Often even the executioners who tortured them turned to Christ.

Thus, do you see that prayer that does not work obvious, astounding miracles works miracles in the hidden depths of human hearts.

It completely transforms these hearts, for the hearts of the monastic saints and martyrs are quite unlike the hearts of ordinary people—that mass of humanity whom Holy Scripture calls people of the earth, and I will dare to call “people of grass”, and it enflames the hearts of such people also.

Thus, know that in your prayer is the power of God, working miracles in your hearts. Know, that prayer is the most important of all the Christian's works. All his other works are small and insignificant, absolutely insignificant in comparison with the act and labor of prayer.

Just as every plant without water in dry soil withers, so also does the human soul wither if it is not fed with prayer. It also needs food and water, but a special water—that living water that Christ promised to the Samaritan woman when He talked with her; that water flowing in eternal life, about which he spoke in the temple in Jerusalem on the day of Mid-Pentecost.

This water is the water of God's grace, which is absolutely needful for every one of us. And we receive this living water, this spring of grace, through prayer.

But when I speak of prayer, I often get the reply, “I don't know how to pray. Teach me how to pray.”

How do I answer?

First of all I answer that prayer is the greatest and hardest of all human works. We know that there is no difficult work that can be learned easily. Long study is needed for all such work, or for any art.

If long study is needed for human works, then is it even more needed for this greatest of all works. Study, study, and study endlessly—and you will obtain it.

But how should you begin this study? Here is how: there are many prayers that have been compiled and written by great God-pleasers, by great holy hierarchs, monastic saints, and martyrs.

Pray these prayers; do not imitate the Baptists who disdain these prayers and compose their own. Their prayers are weak and trite, for their spirit is worthless in comparison with the spirit of the holy fathers.

Do not think up your own prayers; pray using those prayers the Holy Church has taught you. However, when reading these prayers, delve into every word, catch yourself in every moment of straying, in every distraction from the words of prayer.

If you will pray like this, the holy prayers of the great God-pleasers will illumine your souls.

But there is yet another prayer—the Jesus prayer, which is the most important and necessary prayer for all monastics.

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

This prayer truly works miracles, and is therefore considered extremely important, if not the most important of all.

Learn this prayer, and begin with it. Learn it like this: close the door of your room. If you want you can stand, or if you want you can sit on a chair, or kneel.

Lowering your head, look first of all to your heart, thinking and remembering which sin of the great multitude of your sins most torments your heart, which of them is the most hateful to God.

If it is fornication, or adultery, think about that sin; if it is greed, think about that before all; if it is mercilessness and cruelty or lack of love, concentrate your thought upon that first of all.

Standing, sitting, or on your knees, find the most serious of your sins, lower your head and beg the Lord Jesus first of all for forgiveness of this most important sin of yours... It is best to pray the Jesus prayer using your prayer rope, saying: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

During this time think about this most serious sin. Repeat this prayer no less than one hundred times, always concentrating your thought on the most serious and abominable of your sins. Beginning with this, make it a habit to remember all your other sins as well.

Praying the Jesus prayer, you will hold all the sins in your mind and ask the Lord for forgiveness not only of the most serious sin, but also for all your sins. This prayer will work a miracle in your soul. You will become ashamed; when you start confessing your onerous sin before God, you will feel the insistent desire to be free of it, to be loosed from this loathsome sin without fail.

Praying like this from day to day, you will more and more be freed from your main sin and from all your other sins, and your soul will be transformed.

You yourself will begin to notice how your relationship to your neighbors will change: you will notice that you are becoming more gentle, patient, meek, and humble.

You will treat people with great carefulness, you will take caution never to hurt or offend anyone. And the Jesus prayer will transform your heart and work this miracle—an unseen miracle of God’s grace in your heart.

This is what I wanted to tell you about prayer.

And if you want to cleanse your heart, if you want to stand without trembling before the Terrible Judgment of Christ, do as I advise you.

Pray, pray the Jesus prayer, and first of all repent and repent.

Repentant prayer should be your most important and constant prayer. However, according to the measure that it purifies your heart, you will learn to pray not only for yourself, but also for your neighbors both close and distant, and then for all mankind. Then the holiest, most God-pleasing prayer will come—prayer for those who hate and offend us.

Earlier I counseled you not to imitate the sectarians by making up your own prayers, and now I am telling you that there is a higher form of prayer—prayer without words, the cry of the soul to God, which opens the heavens and leads us to the most living communion with God.

May the Lord vouchsafe us all to attain such prayer!

But this will only come when we become true temples of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

St. Luke (Voino-Yasnetsky),
Archbishop of Crimea
Translation by OrthoChristian.com

<http://orthochristian.com/calendar/20200720.html>



PRINCES BORIS AND GLEB

Proto-martyrs and Passion-Bearers of Old Russia

August 6

Boris and Gleb were the younger and much beloved sons of Grand Prince Vladimir, the ruler of Kievan Rus, who in 988 brought his subjects to the waters of Holy Baptism. The two brothers were also baptized at which time they received the Christian names Romanus and David. The older of the two, Boris, was very gifted and learned to read and write. He shared with his brother his knowledge of the Scriptures and the lives of the Saints whom they both strove to emulate. Indeed, by the time they came of age to rule their respective patrimonies, the territories of Ryazan and Murom, they had already cultivated in their hearts Christian virtues of mercy, compassion and kindness, traits still rare in a land freshly converted from barbarous paganism.

Boris was particularly esteemed among the people and the soldiery. His popularity provoked bitter jealousy in his eldest brother Svyatopolk (known to history as "the Accursed") who scorned the laws of the newly adopted Christian religion, so dear to his younger brothers, in favor of satisfying his unbridled ambition. He saw Boris as a rival for the position of Grand Prince, and when Vladimir died Svyatopolk wasted no time in plotting his brother's murder.

Boris had been sent by his father to fend off an anticipated raid by the Pechenegs. He was returning to Kiev when he was met by emissaries sent by Svyatopolk, from whom he learned of his father's death and his brother's self-willed accession to the throne. The latter, knowing that the people would rather have Boris as ruler and desiring to forestall any opposition that this news might stir up, bade his messengers assure Boris of his fraternal goodwill and his intent to increase Boris' domain.

Boris was well aware of his brother's long-standing hatred for him and recognized in this message the kiss of Judas. The young prince knew that his life was threatened. His immediate concern, however, was not the adoption of some military strategy--whether offensive or defensive--but how to act in such circumstances as befits a Christian. Reflecting upon the words of the Gospel: "If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar," and "Love thine enemies," he firmly rejected the advice of his father's retainers who urged Boris to oust the unpopular Svyatopolk, pledging their support to such a plan, "Be it not for me," he replied, "to raise my hand against my brother. Now that my father has passed away, let him take the place of my father in my heart."

Knowing that armed resistance would only provoke needless bloodshed, Boris sent away his soldiers and remained alone where they had encamped on the bank of the Alta, together with a few servants, it was Saturday evening and he retired to his tent to recite the vigil service. As he read the Six Psalms, the cry of the Psalmist echoed in his heart: "O Lord, why are they multiplied that afflict me, Many rise up against me..." (Ps. 3:1). Informed that his murderers were approaching, the Prince turned to an icon of the Saviour and prayed beseechingly: "Lord Jesus Christ, Thou didst accept Thy Passion on account of our sins; grant me al so the strength to accept my passion. I receive it not from my enemies but from my brother, Lord, lay not this sin to his charge."

As the murderers burst into the tent, Boris' faithful servant George, a young Hungarian, placed himself between the prince and his attackers in an attempt to

save his master's life. The servant was killed at once, while the Prince, grievously wounded by the thrust of a lance, was bound up in the tent canvas and taken on a cart to Kiev. But he never reached the city. When Svyatopolk learned that his brother was still alive, he sent two Varangians to consummate the bloody deed, which was accomplished when one of them plunged his sword into Boris' heart.

Svyatopolk's next victim was Gleb. He sent word to the guileless prince that his father was very ill and was calling for him. Always obedient to his father, Gleb set off at once with a small retinue. Near Smolensk, where his route took him by boat down the river Smyadyn, he was met by emissaries from his brother Yaropolk bearing a letter of warning from their sister Predislava: "Do not come," she wrote. "Your father has died and Svyatopolk has killed your brother."

But the warning had come too late. The murderers hired by Svyatopolk caught up with Gleb on the river. He knew that he alone was the object of the pursuit and, like his brother, Gleb urged his company not to offer armed resistance, as they were outnumbered and all would perish. After a momentary weakness in which he begged his assassins to spare his young life, he calmly accepted his fate in the understanding that the voluntary suffering of the innocent is a direct imitation of Christ. Gleb was killed by his own cook who, terrified into compliance by Svyatopolk's henchmen, seized the head of the young prince and cut his throat. His body was thrown onto the shore and covered with brush.

Five years later, when Yaroslav finally succeeded in overthrowing the treacherous Svyatopolk, the bodies of the two royal martyrs, discovered to be incorrupt, were laid to rest together in the church of St. Basil in Vyshgorod, Yaroslav's residence near Kiev. Their tomb immediately became a place of pilgrimage, and the many miracles which took place before their relics persuaded Church authorities to consent to Yaroslav's request and canonize the two brother-princes.

Although Boris and Gleb were not martyred for their faith (they are properly called 'passion-bearers' rather than martyrs), their voluntary and meek sacrifice for the sake of averting the suffering of others and preserving the Christian ideal, had a profound effect on the subsequent development of Christianity in Russia. Whereas in Byzantine Christianity God was often depicted as Pantocrator--stern and all-powerful, in Russia the emphasis was on Christ as the sacrificial Lamb Who 'opened not his mouth before his shearer'. Russian piety came to be characterized by a tender humility and an acceptance of suffering following the example of Christ. In this century Russia's New Martyrs offer a supreme testimony to the enduring influence of this otherworldly orientation which that country first witnessed in the exploit of the two youthful brother princes and passion-bearers, Boris and Gleb.

8/6/2016

<http://orthochristian.com/95958.html>



SAINT PANTELEIMON AND OUR SPIRITUAL HEALTH

August 6

1. Today, my Christian brethren, our Holy Church celebrates the memory of the great martyr Saint Panteleimon, the healer. It would take a lot of time to speak of the entire life and brilliant miracles of this Saint. I will only tell you a few things, as much as anyone can say in a short sermon.

Saint Panteleimon, my beloved, is identified as a physician. We have saints from every profession of human life: from teachers and judges and cooks and gardeners, no honorable occupation prevents a person from being sanctified. And so our Saint, Holy Panteleimon, was a physician. We have a command within Holy Scripture that specifically says we should honor physicians, because God enlightens physicians to find the medicines of the earth for the sick to be healed. Sirach says: "Honor a physician with the honor due unto him for the uses which you may have of him, for the Lord has created him. For of the Most High comes healing, and he shall receive the honor of the king. The skill of the physician shall lift up his head, and in the sight of great men he shall be in admiration. The Lord has created medicines out of the earth; and he that is wise will not abhor them" (38:1-4). With medical wisdom, therefore, and especially the enlightenment of God, Saint Panteleimon healed many sick people, who could not be treated by other physicians. But what should make a strong impression on us is that the physician Panteleimon practiced his profession without asking for payment or reward. He was an Unmercenary. He would seek out sick people, especially those who were poor, in order to offer treatment free of charge. What great love, what great mercy! And although his first name was Panteleon, later, due to his great love and mercy, they called him Panteleimon, which means "all-merciful".

2. But while, my beloved, the Saint was a physician and not a priest, and he was very busy in his work because everyone ran to him for healing, still he always, all day and in every moment, felt the presence of God and lived according to His holy will. Within him, in his soul and heart, he had love for Christ. Who taught Saint Panteleimon about Christ? He was taught about Him from his spiritual father, the Holy Martyr Hermolaos, whom our Church celebrated yesterday. Saint Panteleimon was very much tied to his spiritual father, and his spiritual father was very much tied with him. And this is how it should be, because according to the Orthodox tradition the regeneration of the soul and its progress is associated with ones spiritual father, with their abba, or elder, as they are called in the ascetic texts. As for how high is the concept of the spiritual father, we read the following in the life of Saint Panteleimon:

When the Saint was brought before the pagan emperor Maximian and he questioned him about his faith and threatened him with tortures, Christ appeared to Saint Panteleimon to strengthen him. But according to the life, Christ appeared in the form of his spiritual father, Saint Hermolaos. And when they threw the Saint into boiling lead and into the sea, the Saint would see his spiritual father beside him in the boiling lead and in the sea.

Let us learn, my Christian brethren, from the life of this Saint what is love, who offered himself with much sacrifice to his hurting brethren, and the link he had with his spiritual father, to whom he owed his solid faith in Christ, for Whom, accompanied by his spiritual father, as we said, he achieved martyrdom.

3. But there is something else I wanted to tell you, my brethren, on the occasion of the celebration of today's feast. As we said, the Saint was a physician. Our pastoral theology is paralleled by the Church Fathers with medical science. See how this is done: God created man healthy, that is, adorned with the virtues. But misled by sin, he fell into sin. In our sacred books we say that by this humanity became sick. The nous became ill, for those who were misled and cut off from God. But God is love, He is PANTELEIMON, and does not want his creatures to be unhealthy, which is what they are when they are cut off from Him, the Source of Life and Health.

For this reason, God made a Hospital, and within this Hospital God placed physicians, who have medicines for healing, to heal the souls of people. This Hospital, my brethren, which we must enter into in order to be healed, because we are all sinners, is the CHURCH. The order and position of physicians belongs to us priests and bishops, who, of course, need to know empirically based on our own experience how the soul can be healed, and they must know the medicines for this therapy for each sickness of the soul.

This is an art, it is a divine science. The saints of our Church know this science well. And they, as people, bore within them the disobedience of Adam. But within the Church, this divine Hospital, they took, with the advice and guidance of their own spiritual physicians, the medicines for their healing and they became healthy. They took their medicine, because they were humble and felt their sinfulness within them, namely their sickness. This is how they acquired stable health, or rather, a stable path towards God. These are our saints, my brethren. Having gone through the stage of treatment, namely their asceticism and struggle for the purification of their souls, now they shine due to their health. Just look at their icons here in the church! Look at the beauty, look at the bright halos and brilliant faces. It is the glory they taste in heaven.

My Christians, the all-merciful Christ invites us to His Hospital, His Holy Church, that we may be healed. Do not say, as many do, "there is nothing wrong with me". We have many cancers within us - by this I mean our sinful passions. We must all take our "medicine", in order to find health of soul and rest in the glory of the Kingdom of God. A sick person who is hurting cannot pleasantly enjoy the beautiful sights and sounds. Therefore, when our soul is sick from the passions of the soul, we will not be able to endure the brilliance and joys of Paradise. These joys are for the pure, for the spiritually healthy.

4. I pray, my beloved, for your health, for your physical and spiritual health. May Saint Panteleimon, whom we celebrate today, help us achieve this health. Lastly, I offer you one prayer, that I found written in a liturgical book. In this prayer, the sinful person calls themselves "Pantlimona", which means "most unfortunate". But he takes courage and finds refuge in the all-merciful Christ, to Whom he confesses his sin and begs for a good end. The prayer says: "Grant me a good end to my life, Christ all-merciful, I the most unfortunate pray; in You I take courage in my heart without doubt, having sinned knowingly and unknowingly."

With many blessing,

† The Metropolitan of Gortynos and Megalopolis Jeremiah

<http://orthochristian.com/81236.html>

ON THE FEAST OF THE PROCESSION OF HONORABLE WOOD OF THE HONORABLE AND LIFE-GIVING CROSS OF THE LORD

August 14

On this day two feasts are celebrated: 1) the Procession, that is, bringing out of the Honorable Wood of the Honorable and Life-Giving Cross of the Lord, and 2) the celebration of the All-Merciful Savior Christ God and His Mother the Most Holy Theotokos, Mary. This is a minor feast. In Constantinople, during the time of the Greek emperors, on August 1 the Life-Giving Cross was carried out of the palace to the Church of the Hagia Sophia, and there was a blessing of the waters. This custom came to Russia from Greece. On this day after the Liturgy a small blessing of the waters is performed to bless the rivers, ponds, and lakes, and people process to these places from the church. The lesser blessing of the waters differs from the great, Theophany blessing of the waters in that hymns are chanted during the procession, and in that the prayers for the water blessing are shorter. Also, during the immersion of the cross into the water, "Save O Lord Thy people..." is sung, rather than "When Thou O Lord wast baptized in the Jordan."

The two feasts of the "Procession of the Honorable Wood of the Honorable and Life-Giving Cross of the Lord" and the celebration of the "All-Merciful Savior Christ God and His Mother the Most Holy Theotokos, Mary" are combined in some mentions, but not all. The two feasts are given equal honor. This gives cause to suppose that these two feasts are not distinct and are essentially one and the same feast, known by two different names. This, however, is a totally wrong assumption. That becomes clear and undoubted if we take a look at the essence and reason for instituting these two different feasts.

Let us take a look and the feast of the "Procession of the Honorable and Live-Giving Cross of the Lord." The word "procession" is not quite right and is an inexact translation of the Greek word προοδος, which means literally, "carrying before" the wood or a part of the original Cross of the Lord. There is a hint as to the content of this feast in its very name. In a Greek Horologion from 1838 is written the following about the origin of this feast: "Because of the illnesses that often occur in August, the custom took root long ago in Constantinople of carrying out the Honorable Wood of the Cross into the streets to sanctify the places and avoid illness. On the eve, July 31, the Wood was taken out of the royal treasury and placed upon the holy table of the Great church (Hagia Sophia). From this day until the Dormition of the Mother of God, lityas were served all over the city and the cross was offered to the people for veneration. This is that very procession (προοδος) of the Honorable Cross." Another custom was joined to this one--to sanctify the water in the church of the royal court in Constantinople on the first day of each month, with the exception of January, when the water was sanctified on the 6th, and September, in which it occurred on the 14th. These two customs lie at the foundation of the institution of the celebration on August 1 of the "Procession of the Honorable Wood of the Cross of the Lord" and the attending solemn sanctification of the water.

On August 1 [August 14 new style] is the feast of the All-Merciful Savior, Christ our God, and His Mother the Most Holy Theotokos, Mary, instituted in 1158 in Russia under Metropolitan Constantine of Kiev, and in Greece, under Patriarch Luke of Constantinople. The reason for instituting this feast in Russia was the victory of the Russian forces led by Prince Andrei Bogoliubsky over the Volga Bulgars on August 1, and in Greece, the victory on the same day of Emperor Manuel over the Moslem Arabs, or Saracens.

Every time the pious Russian prince Andrei Bogoliubsky campaigned against the enemy he took with him an icon of the Most Holy Theotokos and the Honorable Cross

of the Lord. He also had another pious custom closely connected with this. Before setting out on a bloody battle he would bring out the icon of the Mother of God with the Honorable Cross to his soldiers, and together with them he would fall to the ground and pray to the Mother of God with tears the following prayer:

--O Sovereign Lady, who gave birth to Christ our God! All who hope in Thee shall not perish; and I, Thy slave, have in Thee from God a wall and protection, and the Cross of Thy Son is a two-edged weapon against enemies. Pray to the Savior of the world Whom Thou didst carry in Thine arms, and may the power of the Cross be as fire scorching the face of the enemies, and may Thy all-powerful intercession help us defeat our enemies.

After this prayer, Prince Andrei and after him all the soldiers would kiss the holy icon of the Mother of God and the Honorable Cross of the Lord. Then with firm hope in God's help and the intercession of the Mother of God they would buoyantly attack their enemies.

That is how it was in August 1158. The forces of Prince Andrei Bogoliubsky, inspired by the prayers of their beloved leader and supported by heavenly aid, courageously attacked the Volga Bulgars and were soon completely victorious over them. The sight of their fallen comrades did not darken their joyful thoughts that prevailed after such a positive end to that bloody conflict. When the Russian soldiers returned from the field of battle to their camp, they were stricken by a wondrous vision: fiery rays were streaming from the Honorable Cross and the holy icon of the Mother of God, and they shone over the entire army. Then the Russian forces, made joyful by this miraculous sign, began to pursue their enemies with even greater courage: they razed five of their cities that were not willing to surrender, demanded tribute from the citizens (something common at that time) and then returned home triumphantly.

With this major event in the life of Rus' coincided another no less important event in Greece. In the same year of 1158, the Greek emperor Manuel was forced to advance with his forces against the Saracens, who intended to bring Greece under their dominion. If they were to succeed in this it would have catastrophic ramifications for the Greeks: besides losing their political independence, they would also have to suffer the loss of their Christian faith, which they would have had to replace with the Islam of their conquerors. On August 1, Emperor Manuel beheld a miracle from the Honorable Cross and the icon of the Mother of God, which he brought with him on the campaign, that was similar to the miracle described above--fiery rays were shining over his entire army. When they were victorious over the enemy after this, Emperor Manuel ascribed the victory entirely to the miraculous help of God.

In those days correspondence between the Greek emperor and the Russian prince never ceased. Therefore, Prince Andrei Bogoliubsky soon learned of the miraculous event in Greece, and the Greek Emperor Manuel also learned of the similar miracle in Russia. They both praised God for His wondrous care shown to both of them at the same time, and after taking counsel with their hierarchs and advisors, they decided to institute the feast of the Lord and His Most Holy Mother on August 1.

Thus, from this brief description of the reason and content of these two feasts celebrated on the 1st of August it can be clearly seen that they are different in character and instituted for entirely different reasons. One feast was instituted in connection with the spread of fatal epidemics, while the other was due to miraculous visions and victory over enemies. Therefore, in the "Lives" composed by Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow these two feasts are not combined as one, but rather one is called the "Procession of the Wood of the Honorable and Life-Giving Cross of the Lord," while the other is called the "Celebration of the All-Merciful Savior, Christ our God, and His Mother the Most Holy Theotokos, Mary.

Evgeny Poselyanin

<http://orthochristian.com/63450.html>

ON THE DORMITION FAST, AND THE CROSS OF CHRIST

August 14-28

Again, by God's mercy, we are entering the Dormition fast. This is the shortest and sweetest of the fasts. It begins with the blessing of honey, and then the blessing of the fruits. This fast is also the lightest, because the Mother of God takes care that the yoke of Christ would be light for us. She takes care for our bodies as well as our souls.

This fast begins with the blessing of honey, so that we would know not only of the sweetness that the Lord provides for our bodies, but also of spiritual sweetness; so that the sweetness that comes from the Cross of Christ would be revealed to us throughout the fast. Just as once in the Old Testament the wood was lowered into the bitter waters of Marah and they became sweet and pleasant, so let it be with all our lives—let our bitterness be changed to sweetness from our touching the Cross of Christ.

We begin the fast with the worship of Christ's Cross because the Dormition fast is a contemplation of the mystery of death and the mystery of life, earthly and heavenly; so that this mystery would become sweet for us, so that it would be more deeply revealed to us during this fast. August 1 according to the old calendar, on which the Dormition fast begins, is considered the day of the Baptism of Rus'. Baptism is an immersion in the water of the cross, the grace of Christ, and so the mystery of the Cross is revealed to people and they are ready to offer up everything to the Lord—both their life and their death, that they may always be with Him. You know that martyrs are always depicted on icons with crosses. And the life of every person is also completed by the cross. Over our graves will stand crosses, if we are found worthy of this mercy. May God grant that the cross would grow out of our whole lives; that this would be the tree of life, which we also nourish by participating in what Christ did.

The entire Dormition fast is a fast of the cross. At the beginning of the Dormition fast is the Cross, and in the center of it is the Cross, the Transfiguration of the Lord, with His light announcing His impending departure in Jerusalem. And the feast of the Icon of the Savior Made Without Hands, which is as if the completion of this path of ours, is also a feast of the Cross—for the Lord stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem (Lk. 9:51), and His most pure face shines to us on the background of the Cross. The Church prepares us with the Cross to receive the mystery of the departure of the Mother of God, for her Dormition is a revelation of the victory of the Cross of Christ, which is inseparable from His Resurrection.

Yes, the more love there is the more sorrow there is, as the holy fathers say. But on the feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God we recall the words of a great ascetic, whom his disciples unexpectedly found in prayer with a transfigured countenance. At their persistent questioning about what had happened to him, he replied, "I was in the place where the Mother of God and the beloved disciple are standing at the Cross of the Lord. I would like to remain there in thought always." Where the Cross of Christ and His Resurrection is, there is the beauty of all virtues, the flourishing of a person's soul and body. The joy of soul that God gives us is not like that which the world gives us. And bodily purity,

which partakes in the Body of Christ and the Mother of God, knows that it is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19).

We have prayed throughout the course of the fast so that the Lord would preserve us from the two greatest calamities that threaten the human race today, and especially the Russian people—the sin of despondency and the sin of impurity, unchasteness. Both of these sins are equally serious. These are the most terrible sins, because, as we know, the sin of despondency is the gloom of all sins taken together. And the sin of impurity, when it reaches the scale that we see today, should naturally remind us about the first end of the world, when the Lord put an end to the physical existence of the human race, saying, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years (Gen. 6:3).[1]

Let us overcome all despondency, because Christ has conquered all. And the meaning of our life consists in only one thing: that we through the sorrows of the cross would enter into this victory—in the steps of the martyrs and everyone who has learned the mystery of the Cross. Furthermore there is no reason to be despondent, because the Mother of God intercedes mightily for all of us before the Lord.

So that we would not despond, so that we would have the courage to withstand all corruption, the Church suggests today that we think about what took place at the Lord's Cross, about the words that the Lord spoke when He beheld His Mother and the disciple whom He loved standing by the Cross: "Woman, this is thy son." The Lord addresses His Mother in her bitterest, most sorrowful moment.

Why is it the bitterest? Because she is giving up to God the Father her Son, born of her flesh. And the prophecy spoken by Simeon the God-receiver that her own soul would be pierced with a lance was now being fulfilled. She gives her Son up to God the Father, and what is left for her on earth? In His place she receives another son. Could such a replacement, if we can call it that, console her? The Lord gives her His beloved disciple as He departs this earthly life. In the person of the apostle John the Theologian, as we know, the Church sees all Christians—and finally, the whole human race.

In the person of the apostle John the Theologian, God gives His Most Pure Mother all mankind in place of Himself, her Son. In giving birth to the Son of God, her virginal motherhood becomes, at the Cross, motherhood of the whole human race. This is a mystery of life; through the grace of the Cross, in place of the Only-Begotten Son, comes all mankind. The whole race of man, as St. Irenaus of Lyons says, is called to become the only-begotten son of God by Christ's gift of it. These are terrible, unfathomable words, but on the Cross the Lord truly works our salvation. And the grace of His redemption, which pours out upon the Mother of God and on all people, makes all people in their new birth, in the most profound and realest sense, brothers and sisters, and children of the Mother of God.

In this new birth is revealed the mystery of virginity. Every human mother has a limited number of children born according to the flesh. But the grace of the Ever-Virgin Mother of God works the ineffable. Through the grace of the Ever-Virgin, her motherhood encompasses all people. The Mother of God has a virginal motherhood. It is virginal because it is bound up with her divine Son. And for this reason, it has encompassed all people.

Let us contemplate today and all the days of our lives the mystery of motherhood and virginity, which is being subjected to unprecedented mockery and profanation in today's world. There is no higher virtue, says St. Seraphim of Sarov, than the podvig of virginity. This is even truer in this era of all-around corruption.

Nevertheless, any virginity bears the seal of divinity on itself—of what surpasses all human nature. It is only fruitful when it is the expression of love for the Lord and the giving over to Him of all your life. Virginity that is not based upon this, even if it apparently has love for purity, remains simply barren. It is the same for any true Christian motherhood—it is virginal if it offers up to God its highest gift, not limiting itself to human relationships, but before all giving itself joyfully to the Creator.

Let us never forget that the word by which the Lord entrusts His disciple to His Mother was pronounced from the heights of the Cross. And let us remember the words spoken by the Lord on the Cross to His beloved disciple: "This is Thy Mother." The Lord gives His beloved Mother to His beloved disciple. This is an act of perfect love, and it extends not only to death, to her departure from here, or to John's death. This is an act of perfect love that will never end. So also will this act of love, our adoption by the Mother of God at the Cross of the Lord, endure forever.

At the Cross is also revealed the mystery of virginity. Virginity is the mystery of the future age, the holy fathers tell us. Here, on earth, when someone carries out the podvig of virginity, we see only abstinence or deprivation. But even here it is participation in the abundant life of the future age, when it is carried out for the sake of Christ. It is partaking of the purity and love that the Lord Himself has. Virginity in Christ is always connected with obedience to the Lord, that is, with love for Him. According to the measure of our maturity in obedience to all of God's commandments, we learn chastity and purity. On the contrary, disobedience to even one commandment corrupts a person. And bodily defilement is an injury to the whole person—the soul, body, and entire personality. That is why this sin is so terrible, and why before the antichrist comes, before the Second Coming of Christ, satan is manifesting his vile evil to the extreme degree.

Virginity—and here is the essence of the matter—does not consist in only the mortification of the flesh, but in the acquisition of the ability to become a loving person, in learning this from the Lord, from the Mother of God, and from the beloved disciple of Christ. Virginity is not a life that exalts itself over marriage, or has contempt for the flesh. To the contrary, before Christ's sacrifice on the cross, where the Lord offers Himself up for the salvation of all, in his love for the Lord a person recognizes the insignificance of his own offering and is filled with true humility. Christian virginity has the Cross as its beginning. On the Cross the Lord reveals to His closest disciples the hidden mysteries of life to the end of the ages. Therefore God's revelation speaks of one hundred forty thousand virgins, chosen by the Lord, to whom all the mysteries of life are entrusted. They are the beloved friends of the Lord unto the ages of ages.

But we see that by the Cross of Christ stand not only the Mother of God and not only the beloved disciple, the virgin St. John the Theologian, but also two Marys: Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Cleopa. Mary Magdalene was a sinner out of whom the Lord cast seven demons; that is, the totality of sins.

And the totality of sins, as we see, consists in the corruption of body and soul. This sinner was one of those for whom the Lord carried out His entire path to the Cross; for whose sake he came to earth, in order to turn her and those like her to His way; so that she would also become a virgin, as we sing on Great Wednesday: “The woman who had fallen into many sins, perceiving Thy divinity, O Lord, fulfilled the part of a myrrh-bearer; and with lamentations she brought sweet-smelling oil of myrrh to The before Thy burial.”[2] And the corrupted harlot, as the Church testifies, become an immaculate virgin—as a gift of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Standing there also is Maria the mother of Cleopa. She was also chosen by the Lord to stand at the foot of the Cross. We know nothing about her. She is distinguished by some especial purity, some especial holiness, and neither does she have any particularly terrible sins. She as if represents all Marys, all women, and all people—every human soul, the average person, so to say, who quite unnoticeably lives a modest life, and tries according to his or her strength to fulfill at least some virtue. And the Lord’s gaze is always turned not only to His Most Pure Mother, not only to His beloved disciple, the virgin John the Theologian, not only to the great sinner whom He had cleansed from the worst sins. The Lord sees also Maria the Mother of Cleopa.

If the Lord’s sufferings on the Cross is suffering for all, then any person, the most unknown and modest can stand; and all are called to stand at the foot of His Cross. For the Church of God consists not only of those who loved Christ from their youth and preserved their purity, or those who were exclusively cleansed of their terrible sins like Mary Magdalene or St. Mary of Egypt and brought to Christ through repentance, but also the apparently unknown, unnoticed people. But it is needful that each of us would see in ourselves all our impurity, for the sake of which the Lord was incarnate and accepted suffering; all the multitude of sins behind which stand seven demons.

Perfect purity, says St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov), is given to the one who sees his impurity and laments it with his whole heart, praying to the Lord to be granted purity. We must pray also for this to the Mother of God. Each one of us must partake of the purity that she and the beloved disciple of Christ has. Through the grace of the Cross the Lord entrusts all people to the Mother of God, so that she as a Mother would participate in bringing all people to His Cross and to His likeness through His Cross, and through our own cross; by uniting all our lives and deaths with His life and death.

The infinite light of the Divinity radiates from the Cross of Christ and fills with itself the virginity and motherhood of the Mother of God, the mystery of her Dormition, the life and death of every person who loves Christ; that is, who seeks Him through the fulfillment of His holy commandments. For in them is life eternal (Jn. 12:50), the Resurrection of Christ, and the Pascha of the Mother of God.

Archpriest Alexander Shargunov
Translation by Nun Cornelia (Rees)
8/14/2017

<http://orthochristian.com/105753.html>



The Holy Transfiguration of Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ

August 19

SERMON BY ARCHBISHOP SERAPHIM (IVANOV, + 1987)
OF CHICAGO AND DETROIT ON THE TRANSFIGURATION

On August 6/19, the Orthodox Church celebrates one of the Great 12 Feast Days—that of the Transfiguration of the Lord on Mount Tabor, which is in what is now the territory of Israel.

Our Lord Jesus Christ transfigured Himself only before His closest disciples: Peter, James and John, 40 days before His crucifixion, which took place on March 30 according to the old calendar. Consequently, the Transfiguration occurred in late February, during what is now Great Lent. That is why the Holy Fathers, in ancient days, moved this feast day to another date. On September 14/27, we celebrate the Elevation of the Cross of the Lord, when we once again remember the sufferings of Christ the Savior on the Cross.

The Holy Fathers, then, counted back 40 days from that holiday and established August 6 as the Transfiguration of the Lord, a celebration of the transfigured flesh of mankind. The God-Man revealed Himself to his disciples in the way that He was to become after His Resurrection from the dead, and the way the bodies of the righteous will appear after the final, universal resurrection.

We know from the Holy Gospel that the Body of the Risen Lord shone, was able to immediately travel great distances, walk through closed doors, and become instantly invisible. Yet He also possessed the characteristics of our present bodies: the Risen Christ ate earthly food—bread, baked fish and honey, and before all the Apostles, He walked great distances just as we do, with Luke and Cleopus, to Emmaus, blessed and broke bread, etc.

This is all very difficult to perceive for the human mind which lives in a three-dimensional world. But what is impossible for man is possible for God, as Holy Scripture teaches us.

We Christians, even today, are faced with a great challenge—which we face with the aid of the Church Mysteries, of fasting and prayer—and that is to be transfigured here on earth, in our souls and bodies, which really happens to the saints of God, the righteous and simply good Christians.

They bear witness that this holy effort will yield such wondrous spiritual fruits, such joy and satisfaction, that they are incomparable to any joys and consolations on earth, which are so eagerly sought by most of mankind.

May the Lord grant all of us the chance to begin the transformation of our souls and bodies, so that we could taste at least a crumb of this joy before even reaching Heaven.

The Lord wishes to help us in this holy matter. He stands at the doorway to our hearts and knocks in order to enter our souls and help transfigure us.

This is well described by the renowned poem of Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich:

I knock and wait at the door of your inn,
Open the door and let Me in.
I'm naked, weak, the lowest of low.
My road is hard. Far must I go.
Penniless beggar through the world I roam,
Knock and wait at many a home.
Who'll hear My voice? Who'll take My load,
And bid Me enter his abode?
To such a one I'll come and call him Mine,
Break bread with him and share the wine.
You're weak, exhausted from labors and strain.
With Me your strength you will regain.
With My hand I shall dry your tears of pain
And you will never cry again.
I shall console you, your pain I'll feel,
And share with you your evening meal.
I knock and wait at the door of your inn.
Open the door and let me in.

Poem translated by Kosara Gavrilovic.

Archbishop Seraphim (Ivanov)

Official website of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

<https://orthochristian.com/73122.html>

The Dormition of Our Most Holy Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary

August 28

THE INCORRUPTIBLE FLOWER OF PARADISE
A Discourse on the Great Feast of Dormition

Quickly, as always, alas, happens, flew by the blessed, radiant, and serene, although sometimes interspersed with autumn showers, days of the Dormition fast. Behind us remains the imperishable radiance and unwaning light of the feast of the Transfiguration. And now—the Dormition—the Russian autumn Pascha as is known this glorious day. It is remarkable that our people the Dormition of Our Sovereign Lady the Theotokos consider an especial celebration. Otherwise why are the main and greatest monastic lavras and monasteries named in honor of the Dormition? The Pochaev-Dormition Lavra, the inheritance of the Mother of God on earth; the Kiev Caves-Dormition Lavra; the main church of the Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra is in honor of the Dormition of the Theotokos; the Pskov Caves-Dormition Monastery, where these days are so celebratory and beautiful that to there throng practically half of all of Russia to help the monks and laborers of the habitations to lay out of living flowers a road on which the clergy bear the ancient wonder-working icon of the Most Holy Virgin Mary. Moreover, in any parish church, dear friends, if you desire to actively express in an outward manner your love to the Heavenly Queen, you can participate in this feast. I will prompt you with in precisely what manner you can do so.

In view of the Dormition the parish is usually adorned with white lilies and roses. Lilies flank the very icon of the Dormition, in vases sweetly-smelling of a delicate aroma, creating a distinctive atmosphere. In the center of the church lies the shroud with the image of the Theotokos, having only just committed her blameless soul into the hands of Jesus Christ, to her appearing as is proper to the Son of God, having placed Himself during the course of His earthly life in full obedience to His mother, until He departed out into public preaching. So, according to your means, to your desire and dispensation bringing to the church one, two, three lilies or roses, you will feel that in your heart are incorruptible lovely flowers of paradise uncovering themselves, regardless of earthly withering, for the Mother of God will none from among her benefactors, those who honor her virginity and her heavenly glory, abandon without consolation, without succor, without recompense. If you happen to have chance to be in some Russian monastery—in the Tolga Convent on the banks of the beautiful Volga, or in the aforementioned Pskov Caves Monastery—I submit that you take part in the careful placing of the path. In Pechory a few days ahead of time they commence this holy work, and of course, with pure hands, and firstly—with pure thoughts. If someone among us would like to quit smoking, but in no way can manage to part with this evil passion, embedded under

his skin as a poisonous maggot, if you have grown weary of your own irritability or you do battle with despondency, if you desire to attain to those qualities with which the Queen of Heaven herself shines... But she, you will recall, exuded all grace—her lips anointed with myrrh and understanding, her heart never bewildered with thoughts of enmity. Friendly, smiling, quiet and laconic, she was able to every person coming to her comfort according to his age: with babes she was gentle like a mother; to the elderly reverential; youths she could render chaste but by her external appearance, for the ambiance of virginity hovers over her; spouses she inured to the abstemious life with mutual care one for another; for the apostles she was a teacher, thanks to whose instructions they were confounded neither from any persecution nor Hebraic or pagan malice, but with great audacity glorified the risen Lord and proclaimed the glad tidings of His rising from the dead.

So, taking part in this amiable earthly work, in this hustle and bustle to decorate the monasteries, laying down the path of living flowers, you inwardly pray: “Mother of God, holy Lady Theotokos, I want to be thy pure son ... grant me the grace to be thy pure daughter ... help me to turn again back home, to my household, to my dwelling, thus changed that I might not darken my mind with earthly vanities, that my mouth might not wallow in censure and idle talk, that my heart might learn at last to preserve that blessed peace, that tranquility and serenity which penetrate here, in thy habitation. Mother of God, I a bit will labor and adorn this path along which will proceed the clergy, bearing up in their hands the icon of the Dormition, and thou help me because I am tortured by blood pressure and it’s movements whether high or low, ischemia, palpitations plague me, and migraines, and gout...” Every one of us, dear friends, as is well known, has his own set of frailties, his own medical card. To the doctor it’s far, the medicine expensive. We, of course, will not wholly cancel the therapy prescribed to us by the medic. But in the days of the Dormition we deeply believe that the Mother of God will extend to us her invisible right hand, touching with her gentle, immaculate fingers the ailing body and wounded soul, and we will acquire the strength and fortitude to which attained those people having touched with faith then the bed of the Theotokos, in Jerusalem, in the first century at the Nativity of Christ.

According to Tradition, the Heavenly Queen reposed at the age of seventy plus some years. I would like, dear friends, to remind you that a few days and hours before the Lord called His Most Pure Mother to the heavenly habitations, on the Mount of Olives under the olive shade, where formerly her Son and God conversed with sublime, sacred conversations with teaching on the Heavenly Kingdom for the apostles, the Mother of God on bended knee, irrigating her face with tears, prayed to the Lord Jesus Christ to release her soul from her body and to extricate her from the sight of the impure spirits. Such was the humility more honorable than the seraphim and more glorious beyond compare than the cherubim of her whose purity exceeds that of the angels and astonished the heavenly moral perfections.

Such was her humility, her modest self-esteem, that she supplicated the Creator to ban the fallen spirits from access to her all-chaste soul. The Queen of Heaven knew that the ascent from earth to heaven is the final exam and trial which you and I shall invariably undergo—one sooner, another later, but we are all behooved once to die and then to appear at the judgment seat of Christ. This is why the feast of the Dormition is so important for every one of us.

If we give ourselves the work of not being late to the All-Night Vigil and as candles spreading forth light and warmth will pray at the shroud of the Theotokos, beholding her light-bearing face, contemplating its beauty amongst the lilies and roses, and to proceed to the Divine Mysteries at Dormition Liturgy, and having partaken we preserve the festive mood of our hearts, allowing no kind of earthly rancor, vain curiosity, intemperance in food or drink, discussion of others' shortcomings to kidnap from out of our hearts the pearls of Divine grace, then the Heavenly Queen, undoubtedly will intercede for us at the hour of our personal departure. Read the Canon at the Departure of the Soul (which can be found in large prayer books), and you will see that on behalf of the departing these words are pronounced: "O Heavenly Queen, I tremble and know not where to place my gaze: evil spirits terrify me and try to drag me to the bottom of hell, but do thou, as a meek dove, extend over me thy blessed wings. Receive me, as thy child, from all sides assaulted, stung by demonic cackling and laughter, protect me from these ravenous dogs and birds, but send to me a guardian angel to bear up my soul to the gates of the Heavenly Jerusalem, that by thine intercession I might be vouchsafed to behold Christ the Savior and enjoy His face, that the dark powers might be afflicted and find in me nary a defect or dark side." So here, dear friends, it behooves us to pray beforehand. He who is warned, the same is armed. He who has glorified the Dormition of the Theotokos himself will be glorified by the Virgin Mary and not put to shame in his hour of departure.

And if, God forbid, one of us should become hardened, lose his faith, begin to befoul his mouth with unclean profanity and hate for the Queen of Heaven, and corrupt himself with sins of the flesh and remain impenitent, is it not of such wretches that it is said: The death of sinners is wicked?

This is why the feast of the Dormition serves for us, dear friends, as the best preparation towards our own repose and moreover gives hope that God, by the intercession of the Theotokos, will add to us hour upon hour, day upon day, month upon month, year upon year, of all of our sins having repented, to glorify the name of the Lord in acts of repentance, and acts of faith and love.

Returning to the historical canvas of the feast of the Dormition, we recall that to the Virgin Mary appeared in the Garden of Gethsemane the Achan-gel Gabriel, who from her tender years, from youth, from her infancy veil led spiritually the Divine Maiden Mary and by his presence marked the milestones of her life. Namely from his hands, according to Tradition, sojourning in the quietude of the Jerusalem Temple, the Queen of Heaven

aforetime ate daily immaterial heavenly bread. The Archangel Gabriel announced, as you remember, to the immaculate Virgin Mary of the riches of heavenly providence—about that, in the case of her humble consent, the Spirit of the Lord would descend upon the Virgin and weave under her heart in her immaculate womb the splendid Fruit—the Holy Son of God, in the Person of Whom is miraculously united humanity and Divinity. Here, just before her Dormition, the Archangel Gabriel appears to the Theotokos Mary, already having labored in the endorsement of Christ’s Church on earth, already having visited Athos, when fell the idols and the demons in terror fled from this lot of the Theotokos. And bestow did the archangel the light-bearing paradisaical branch which became a sure sign of notification of her approaching blessed repose.

Tradition testifies: he who does not believe or wants to verify, refer to, please, the detailed narrative of the feast of the Dormition from the holy hierarch Dimitry of Rostov—perhaps in Russian, perhaps in Church Slavonic, perhaps in English, or what have you—and see that this branch was placed in Zion’s upper room, by the bier upon which lied the All-Pure Virgin with her luminescent face, having managed to bestow her blessing upon the apostles, by the unseen power of God gathered in the Zion’s upper room at the hour of her decease. There occurred something incredible, the impossible: the rooftop of this building as if opened itself, and in Heavenly glory the risen Christ, surrounded by archangels and angels, appeared here, having stepped foot onto the stone tiles of the room, and into His hands received as a pure, immaculate dove the soul of the Most Holy Theotokos. Look at the icon of the Dormition and you will see: the Queen of Heaven lying lengthwise with her virginal and immaculate body, and over her in a mandorla, that is, surrounded by heavenly powers, the Son of God, and in His hands a child, swaddled in pure linen sheets. What is this child? It is the soul of the Most Holy Theotokos, never once by word, or deed, or even thought absenting itself from the Heavenly Father.

On this, dear friends, we, probably, should complete our contemplation, because we are all children of God. To Divine love all ages yield surrender. And the best of all enter into the feast of the Dormition under the temple arches with the soul of a childlike believer, gentle, joyful, friendly with all, having completely forgotten inconsequential and unnecessary offenses, having dissipated suspiciousness, having shaken off from your feet the dust of despondency, with visible fervent faith, with trembling love and confidence in the heavenly assistance of the Theotokos drawing near to her icon, to hear the words of the Dormition troparion: “In falling asleep Thou didst not forsake the world, O Theotokos.”

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