

THE DORMITION OF OUR MOST HOLY LADY THE MOTHER OF GOD AND EVER-VIRGIN MARY

The Dormition (Falling Asleep) of the Theotokos is one of the Great Feasts of the Orthodox Church, celebrated on August 15/28. This feast, which is also sometimes called the Assumption, commemorates the death, resurrection and glorification of Christ's mother. It proclaims that Mary has been «assumed» by God into the Heavenly Kingdom of Christ in the fullness of her spiritual and bodily existence.

According to St. Theophan the Recluse: «Mary hath chosen that good part (Luke 10:42). The Dormition of the Mother of God represents a good end to such a choice. The Saviour Himself received her soul in His arms at her Dormition. Many saints were made worthy of the same. In various ways and degrees, all those who choose that good part meet with this. At the time this choice is made, the saints foresaw this end through hope, and even felt it to a certain degree; but then come labours, struggle and forc-



ing oneself, shrouding the chosen path. The good end of that good part remains as a guiding star. It is as a far-away shining light for a traveller who is overtaken by darkness. Hope is the stimulator of energy and the maintainer of patience and constancy in what was begun, while hope itself is strong through faith. People make their choice according to faith, and through hope they are firm in their choice; while through patience they attain that good end.»

Theotokos died like all humanity, «falling asleep,» so to speak, as the name of the feast indicates. She died as all people die, not «voluntarily» as her Son, but by the necessity of her mortal human nature which is indivisibly bound up with the corruption of this world.

The Apostles were miraculously summoned to this event, and all were present except Thomas when Theotokos passed from this life. She was then buried.

Thomas arrived a few days later, and desiring to see her one more time, convinced the others to open her tomb. Upon doing so, the Apostles discovered that her body was no longer present. This event is seen as a first fruits of the resurrection of the faithful that will occur at the Second Coming of Christ. The event is normally called the Dormition, though there are many Orthodox parishes in English-speaking countries with the name Assumption. In Greek, Dormition is Koimisis—falling asleep in death—from which the word «cemetery» derives.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST IS ONE OF THE GREAT FEASTS OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

The Transfiguration of Christ is one of the Great Feasts of the Orthodox Church, celebrated on August 6/19. Jesus had gone with his disciples Peter, James, and John to Mount Tabor. Christ's appearance was changed while they watched into a glorious radiant figure. There appeared Elijah and Moses, speaking with Jesus. The disciples were amazed and terribly afraid.

This event shows forth the divinity of Christ, so that the disciples would understand after his Ascension that He was truly the radiant splendour of the Father, and that his Passion was voluntary (Mark 9:2-9). It also shows the possibility of our own theosis.

Accounts of the Transfiguration are found in the Bible: Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-9, Luke 9:28-36, and II Peter 1:16-19.

According to St. Theophan the Recluse: «On the Transfiguration a voice from heaven uttered only hear ye Him (Matt. 17:5). Why is this so? Because the fruit of obedience was being shown to them.



It was as if the Heavenly Father were saying: Do you want to attain this? Hear what He will suggest and command you. If you go on His path, you will undoubtedly enter into the realm of light, which will embrace you not from without, but will come forth from within, and always keep you in a state in which all of your bones will utter: it is good for us to be this way. You will be filled with the light of joy, the light of good will, the light of knowledge; all sorrows will pass by, the dissonance of the passions will disappear, falsehood and delusion will disperse. On the earth you will become heavenly; from among the earthly-born, you will become Godly-born; from amidst the perishable you will become eternally blessed. Then all will be yours, because you yourselves will become Christ's. He who loves Christ the Lord is beloved of the heavenly Father, and Both come to him and make their abode with him. This is the light of the Transfiguration!»

FEAST OF THE UNIVERSAL EXALTATION OF THE PRECIOUS AND LIFE-GIVING CROSS

The Feast of the Universal Exaltation of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross is celebrated each year on September 14/27. The Feast commemorates the finding of the True Cross of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by Saint Helen, the mother of the Emperor Constantine.

In the twentieth year of his reign (326), the Emperor Constantine sent his mother Saint Helen to Jerusalem to venerate the holy places and to find the site of the Holy Sepulchre and of the Cross. Relying upon the oral tradition of the faithful, Saint Helen found the precious Cross together with the crosses of the two thieves crucified with our Lord. However, Helen had no way of determining which was the Cross of Christ.

With the healing of a dying woman who touched one of the crosses, Patriarch Macarius of Jerusalem identified the True Cross of Christ. Saint Helen and her court venerated the Precious and Life-Giving Cross along with many others who came to see this great instrument of Redemption.

The Patriarch mounted the ambo (pulpit) and lifted the Cross with both hands so that all of the people gath-

ered could see it. The crowd responded with «Lord have mercy.»

This became the occasion of the institution in all of the Churches of the Exaltation of the Precious Cross, not only in memory of the event of the finding of the Cross, but also to celebrate how an instrument of shame was used to overcome death and bring salvation and eternal life.

The Feast is an opportunity outside of the observances of Holy Week to celebrate the full significance of the victory of the Cross over the powers of the world, and the triumph of the wisdom of God through the Cross over the wisdom of this world. This Feast also gives the Church an opportunity to relish the full glory of the Cross as a source of light, hope and victory for Christ's people. It is also a time to celebrate the universality of the work of redemption accomplished through the Cross: the entire universe is seen through the light of the Cross, the new Tree of Life which provides nourishment for those who have been redeemed in Christ.

According to St. Theophan the Recluse: «The honourable cross is brought out for veneration in the middle of

Great Lent in order to inspire those who toil in fasting to patiently bear the yoke they have taken to the end. Why is this done in September? Is it accidental? But there are no accidents for the Providential Wisdom that arranges all things. This is why: [in Russia], at least, in September the harvest is taken from the field. And so that some of the Christians might not feel too satisfied and say: «Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry!» and so that others might not fall in spirit because of scarcity, the elevated cross is brought before all. It reminds the former that the support of well being is not possessions, but their bearing of the cross in a Christian, inner way, should God's goodness bring external plenitude; and it inspires the latter to possess their souls in patience, through the certainty that they will go from the cross directly to heaven. Therefore, may some endure, knowing, that they are travelling a smooth path to the heavenly kingdom; and may the others enjoy external comforts with fear, not sealing the entrance to heaven against themselves.»

«It is not possible to correct yourself rightly if you do not recognize the evil hidden in your heart and the calamities that proceed from it. An unrecognized disease remains untreated. The beginning of health is to know your disease, and the beginning of blessedness is to know your misfortune and wretchedness. For who having recognized his illness does not seek healing, and who knowing his misfortune does not seek deliverance from it?»

SAYINGS OF THE HOLY FATHERS

more to offer a nourishing word to refresh a heart that is going to live forever

than to satisfy with earthly bread the stomach of a body that is going to die.»

St. Gregory the Great

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«EVERY virtue is a good thing, but most of all gentleness and meekness. This showeth us men; this maketh us to differ from wild beasts; this fitteth us to vie with Angels. Wherefore Christ continually expendeth many words about this virtue, bidding us be meek and gentle. Nor doth He merely expend words about it, but also teacheth it by His actions; at one time buffeted and bearing it, at another reproached and plotted against; yet again coming to those who plotted against Him. For those men who had called Him a demoniac, and a Samaritan and who had often desired to kill Him, and had cast stones at Him, the same surrounded and asked Him, «Art thou the Christ?» Yet not even in this case did He reject them after so many and so great plots against Him, but answered them with great gentleness.»

St. John Chrysostom

«Be eager to have companions on your way toward God. Any of you going to the market, or perhaps to the public baths, will invite someone you see has nothing else to do to come along. It is so natural we make it a habit. So, if you are going toward God take care not to go to Him alone. It is written, 'Let him who hears say, Come!' Those who have received in their hearts a word of heavenly love respond with a word of encouragement to their neighbors. They may have no bread to give as an alms to another who is in need, but one who has a tongue has something greater with which to make an offering. It is worth

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St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

