



A Humble Sermon on the Dormition of the Most Holy *Theotokos*

1. Prayer

*Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,
Radiant children of the Church and the Theotokos:*

Overcome by a sacred yearning to extol the Immaculate Mother of God, let us begin our venture with this holy prayer of our Church:

*“Set a rampart about my mind, O my Savior;
for I make bold to sing the praises of the rampart of the world,
Thy most pure Mother....
Endue me with a tongue, ready speech,
and thoughts that are without shame:
for every gift of enlightenment is sent down from Thee,
O guiding Light, Who dwelt within her ever-virgin womb.”*

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2. Not mourning, but joy

My Christian brethren,

This auspicious and chosen day of the holy and life-bearing Translation of the *Theotokos*, the Queen of all, “adorned with Divine glory,” once again summons the Godly-minded assembly of the Orthodox to a universal feast and celebration.

Let no room be given to mourning and tears, *“for joyous and not mournful is the present feast.”*

To the brilliant lamp of the immaterial fire, to the true and living ark of God, to the queenly child of God, to the tabernacle of the glory of God, and to the animate and living heaven of the King of all, are due gladsome songs and honors befitting the Mother of God.

The Virgin of holy birth reposed according to the laws of nature, but she was taken up and translated in a manner above nature to the bosom of her Son and God, to the heavenly Holy of Holies not made by hands, *“wherein are the pure sound of those celebrating and the voice of unutterable rejoicing.”*

Her most immaculate, life-bearing, light-bearing, God-bearing, luminous, Divine, Divinely-glorified, most sacred body, being united with her illuminated and most holy soul that is more radiant than the sun, passes over from this mortal life to the Divine one that knows no end; she passes through death to life: she, who gave birth to the enhyposstatic Life.

Her Dormition is life-bearing. The death of the pure child of God became the passport to an *“everlasting and superior life.”* The bounds of nature are decisively overcome in the dead, but living, Mary. Before the strange-sounding wonder, even *“the order of incorporeal Angels that walks the heavens”* trembles and exults.

“Laying aside,” then, *“all of life’s cares,”* let us hasten to encircle, with piety and holy yearning, the Divinely-glorified body of our Lady the *Theotokos*, and chant hymns of departure.

Radiant is the feast and beyond understanding are the mysteries into which the pious are initiated by the passage of the Most Blessed Maiden from corruption to incorruption.

If all of the feasts of the Saints resemble the stars in the sky, as St. John of Golden Discourse says—*“all of the feasts of the martyrs are wondrous, and resemble the brilliance of the stars”*—, then the present feast of the Mother of God indisputably resembles the brightly-glowing and silvery full moon, which dispels the dark of night and illumines the world.

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3. Let us, all together, sing praise

My beloved brethren in Christ:

Let us all together, then, without exception, *“with one mouth and one heart,”* sing praises and divine hymns, and *“let us sing unto the Mother of our God, let us sing,”* ye Patriarchs and Hierarchs, Priests and Deacons and monks, kings and rulers and all of the judges of the earth, men and women, young men and virgins, and elders with the younger.

Today, all of the choirs of the nine venerable, heavenly, and bodiless Orders invisibly surround the sacred bed of the Ever-Virgin.

First of all, the upper rank of the Thrones, the Cherubim, and the Seraphim. Next, the middle rank of Authorities, Powers, and Dominions. And finally, the lower rank of the Principalities, the Archangels, and the Angels.

And all of these Holy and Bodiless Hosts, with joy and shouts of gladness, accompany the Most Glorious Mary to the heavenly tabernacles, chanting melodious hymns.

But what am I saying? Even He Himself, the Supreme King of kings and Lord of lords, God the Word, the Only-begotten of God, Who became the Son according to the flesh of the Virgin, is invisibly present at the gladdening funeral of His beloved Mother.

He receives her luminous soul in His immaculate hands and, after three days, resurrects her life-bearing body.

Hence, in this way, He elevates her whole body to Heaven and introduces her into the Holy of Holies not made by hands, that she may eternally be glorified and reign together with her Son, having the second place after the Holy Trinity, and being god after God and the second glory and beauty of Heaven after the inconceivable glory and beauty of the three-sunned Divinity.

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4. Divine and unprecedented ascent

Radiant children of the Panagia:

Let us raise our minds higher and let us behold, with the eyes of our soul, the sacred procession making the Divine and unprecedented ascent. Let us listen to the lower-ranking Angelic Powers as they say to the upper-ranking Archangels: “Behold, the Queen of all and child of God is nigh. Lift up the gates, and receive her above the world.”

Let us all marvel at the choirs of the Righteous from ages past, who hasten to receive her with inexpressible joy, “clapping their hands” and chanting hymns befitting the Mother of God:

“Who is the one ascending in white, appearing as the daybreak, beautiful as the moon, exquisite as the sun. How beautiful! How delightful! Thou flower of the field, lily of the valley, the King has introduced thee into His treasury, where the Dominions attend upon thee, the Principalities bless, the Thrones hymn, the Cherubim are astonished, and, rejoicing, the Seraphim glorify.”

The most venerable treasure of all treasures, the jewel of virginity, passes through the gates of the much-desired Paradise. And she who is more spacious and honorable than the heavens is introduced into the heavenly treasury, while hearing the Divine and exhortative words of her Son and God:



“Come, O my blessed Mother, to your rest, in joy inexpressible, in everlasting light, wherein is the true light, the resplendent Kingdom, and the never-ending choir of the Angels. There, where are the streams of unending delight, the meadows of incorruption, the springs of eternal life, the channels of Divine light, the rivers of perpetual illumination. There, where lies the place of all good things, the ultimate end, beyond which there is nothing whatsoever. There, the Father is worshipped, the Son is glorified, the Holy Spirit is extolled, the single nature of the one Divinity in Trinity. Come, O modest one, to be glorified with thy Son and God. Thou gavest me of thine own; come and enjoy with me of mine. Come, O Mother, to thy Son. Reign together with Him Who took flesh of thee and was impoverished with thee.

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5. Model of inner life

Blessed Christians:

Indescribable is the glory of our Lady the *Theotokos*!

In this life she was “*the purest temple of the Savior, the most honorable bridal chamber and Virgin, the sacred treasure of the glory of God.*”

Her entire life constituted a sublime model of a very deep inner life and activity of the heart.

She lived in chastity, humility, and submission. She worked, unnoticed in simplicity, silence, and prayer.

She never called attention to herself. She never wanted to display herself as the Mother of the Lord, the great and Divine Teacher, Who was astonishing the land of Palestine with his astounding miracles. She lived unpretentiously and humbly, shunning the praise and commendation of the world.

She worked profoundly, cultivating her inner world in an essential way within the atmosphere of the Grace of the Holy Spirit, Which overshadowed her after her eternal and imperishable utterance that opened the gates of Paradise to us, the human race; for this was the saving “yes” in God’s plan for our regeneration: “*Behold, the handmaiden of the Lord. Be it unto me according to Thy word!*”

The inwardness, introversion, and the attentive practice of the “*mystery of piety,*” according to our Savior’s counsel: “*But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father in secret,*” constituted the

true and unfading glory of the all-sacred child of God, Mary; for “*all of the glory of the King’s daughter is within.*”

The genuine and unadulterated “glory” is found “*within.*” The real “ornament,” the God-pleasing decoration, as the Apostle Peter says, is not, of course, “*the outward adorning of plaiting the hair and of wearing of gold or of putting on of apparel.*”

But what is opulent and important in God’s eyes? “*The hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, of a meek and quiet soul.*” In other words, the hidden and unassuming person of the heart, who has as his adornment the incorruptible adornment of a meek, patient, and quiet spirit.

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6. *City of God*

My pious brethren:

Our Spotless Lady was a “city of God.”

Thus did the Psalmist and Prophet-King David foresee her: “*the rushings of the river gladden the city of God.*”

The holy Damascene says that these “*rushings*” are the blessed waves of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Cities in ancient times were usually built in proximity to rivers. This position safeguarded life in such cities because, in this way, the inhabitants had access to abundant water for all of their needs. The river was a source of great joy for the people and a blessing for the city. Contrarily, a city without a river could not easily survive.

Thus, the city of antiquity was also to become a model of the *Theotokos*.

The holy David says that the “*rushings,*” or the rising, of the river nearby the city made it joyful and happy: the waves of the gifts of the Holy Spirit made the most pure *Theotokos* “*full of Grace.*”

The Virgin was imbued with the first wave of the Divine gifts before the Annunciation; the second, after the Annunciation; and the third, during Pentecost.

These three holy “*rushings*” of the Divine Comforter showed the Bride of God and Maiden to be a city and dwelling-place of God, about whom many wondrous things have been spoken on earth and in Heaven: “*Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God.*”

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7. *Overshadowed mountain*

Feast-loving Children of the *Theotokos*:

Our sweetest Mother was the prophetic mountain overshadowed by the dense forest of Divine Grace that covered her: “*God shall come from Teman, and the Holy One from the mountain overshadowed by the forest.*”

The *Theotokos* was covered by the holy virtues. Not a trace of her most holy figure remained morally or spiritually exposed. The Holy Spirit had entirely covered her with the veil of sanctity.

All of the virtues that man can attain by the breath and Grace of the Holy Spirit were gathered together under the veil of the Undeclared Mary. That, moreover, is why the Church calls her the *Panagia*, or “All-Holy.”

Owing to the dense forest, the Prophet’s high mountain was also inaccessible and virgin.

But the *Theotokos*, too, being entirely covered by the virtues, achieved the inaccessibility of her person; there being no void in her person, evil could not penetrate her in any form—in thought, fantasy, or action—whatsoever.

In this way, the Mother of our Lord proved to be the sole Virgin in essence and in truth. She was, and continues to be, the unique sublime and virgin forest, which adorns human nature.

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8. Lifelong effort

Beloved brethren in Christ:

The Mother of God’s enrichment and perfection was not attained automatically and instantaneously, since the incorrupt Maiden gained perfection and all-holiness through a voluntary, conscious, and lifelong effort.

In this manner, she preserved and increased the spiritual gifts with which she was enriched during the descent of the Holy Spirit.

This course of the *Theotokos* towards perfection is prototyped in the *Song of Songs*, with the invitation of the Bridegroom to the Bride: “*Rise up, come hither, my dove.*”

That is to say: Rise higher and higher! Ascend the steps of holiness! Fly towards perfection! Come near me, made pure, incorrupt, and perfected like the pure white dove!

The blessed and Most Pure Bride of the King of all, being the dwelling-place and sanctuary of the glory of God, experienced in her life this continual “flight” upwards, to the summits, to the Bridegroom, by means of humility, silence, and a lack of ostentation.

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9. The *Panagia* and the Church

Pious children of the Church:

Saint John of Damascus calls the All-Blessed *Theotokos* a “most sacred statue of the Holy Spirit” and a “river filled with the fragrances of the Spirit.”

And indeed, all of the wondrous and strange-sounding things that happened to our *Panagia* came about by the Grace and sanctifying presence of the Divine Comforter.

The same thing, however, also happens with the Church.

The Holy Fathers arrive at an identification of the *Panagia* with the Church, since the work begun by the Mother of God in the incarnation of the Word is being continued by the Church.

The Queen of all and *Theotokos* is the personification of the Church, and the Church is the extension of the *Panagia*.

“*I call the Ever-Virgin Mary the holy Church,*” writes St. Cyrill of Alexandria. And St. John of Damascus addresses the *Theotokos*, saying: “*Rejoice, heaven-like Church.*”

The *Panagia* was certainly a vessel of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But the soul of the Theanthropic Body of the Church is also the Holy Spirit, since the presence of Pentecost in the Church is continuous and uninterrupted, as the Divine Chrysostomos says: “*We are always able to celebrate Pentecost.*”

Moreover, the Birthgiver of God was a Temple of the Holy Trinity. But the Church, too, according to St. Gregory the Theologian, is an “*image of the Holy Trinity.*”

The Holy Spirit, furthermore, made the *Panagia* wholly Mystery. But in the Church, too, the Divine Comforter accomplishes all of the Sacred Mysteries.

The Most Pure Mary, as the “*treasurer and dispenser of the wealth of Divinity,*” alone so remains for both “*Angels and man,*” according to St. Gregory Palamas. But what is more, as St. Irenæos tell us, “*only within the Church is it possible for one to draw near the source of the Holy Spirit.*”

Indeed, within the mysteriological realm of the Church and through the intercessions of the Mother of God, man becomes God-bearing, spirit-bearing, tastes of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, becomes a familiar of God, and has the boldness to pray to the Comforter, as St. Symeon the New Theologian, that great devotee of the Divine Beauty, exclaimed with unrivalled lyricism:

Come, true light.

Come, eternal life.

Come, hidden mystery.

Come, unnameable treasure.

Come, reality beyond any speech.

Come, person beyond all comprehension.

Come, unceasing exultation.

Come, impenetrable light.

Come, unfailing hope of the saved.

Come, lifter up of the fallen.

Come, resurrection of the dead.

Come, Almighty, for Thou dost unceasingly create, transfigure, and change all things by Thy will alone.

Come, invisible one that none can touch or feel.

Come, for Thy Name fills our hearts with desire and is always on our lips; but Who Thou art and what Thy nature is, we can not say or know.

Come, unique one in one.

Come, for Thou Thyself art the desire within me.

Come, my breath and my life.

Come, comfort of my lowly soul.

Come, my joy, my glory, mine unending delight.

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10. We must acquire the Holy Spirit

Blessed children of the Panagia:

Everything I have related until now in all brevity helps us to explore more profoundly the following great truths:

Firstly, that our *Panagia* is the model of inner life and activity of the heart.

Secondly, in order for us, personally, to experience her holy virtues in our lives, we must acquire the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, this can be accomplished only within the Church, which is the extension of the *Panagia*.

The Spotless Maiden was purified by the Holy Spirit and offered Christ to us. The Church was given life during Pentecost by the Comforter and offers us to Christ. The Church is Christ, Who calls us, at every Liturgy, to unite with Him: "Come, eat..." "Taste and see..."

The *Theotokos* is the "mystical" and "noetic" Paradise, in which is planted the "Divine plant," Christ, "by the eating of which we shall live, and not die as did Adam."

All of those living in the earthly Paradise, which is the Church, "that Heaven on earth," enjoy the blessings of Mary, the child of God, and participate in the life and joy of Christ.

One who consciously experiences his union with Christ in the Holy Spirit, through the intercessions of the All Pure one within the Orthodox Church, will have a foretaste of the joy and blessedness of eternal life, of the heavenly Jerusalem, and the Church of the first-born.

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11. Let us pray to the Theotokos

Brethren and children in Christ:

Let us not cease, while struggling towards purification, enlightenment, and our deification, to repeat with fervent longing the beauty prayer from the Small Compline:

O Spotless Bride of God and Lady, abhor me not, the sinner.... And be thou ever with me, as Thou art merciful and compassionate and the lover of good: being a fervent protectress and help in this life, to defend me from the assaults of adversaries and guide me unto salvation; and in the hour of my departure, to care for my wretched soul and drive far from it the dark countenances of evil demons; and in the terrible day of judgment, to deliver me from eternal torment, and show me forth as an heir of the unspeakable glory of thy Son and our God.

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May we all be vouchsafed, through the intercession and aid of our Mistress and Lady *Theotokos*, the eternal delight of Paradise and the unspeakable glory of Christ our Savior, but also of His Most Pure Mother, whom it is truly meet and right to bless and magnify unto the ages, because she gave birth without corruption to God the Word and was raised above even the first rank of the Bodiless Powers, the Seraphim, the Cherubim, and the Thrones, thus becoming a sundropped throne and seat of our Lord and King of all, Jesus Christ.

Homily delivered on 15 August, 1986

Your humble intercessor before the Lord,
†*Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili*