

## The Blessed Womb of the *Theotokos* Flows with “Rivers of Living Water”\*

From the *polyarchy* of  
the passions to the *monarchy* of  
the *nous* through its subjection to the heart.

“COME, ye Faithful!” It is the Feast of the Mother of God! Come with longing, you pious children of the Church. Draw nigh once more, you who love the *Theotokos*. Assemble with reverence, you devotees and friends of the Ever-Virgin.

Let us fall down before the life-bearing tomb of the Mother who knew not man. Let us embrace it with fervent love and reverence. Let us touch it with the noetic lips of our heart, with our eyes and foreheads. Let us kiss the sepulcher of our common Nourisher and Mother. Let us chant funeral anthems with solemnity, and also with fervor. Let us draw lavish gifts of healings. Let us seek from this ever-flowing well-spring of Light and Life the healing of our diseased nature, the illumination of the *nous*, and the vivification of our hearts.

Come, O ye Faithful, let us draw nigh to the tomb of the Mother of God, and let us embrace it, touching it sincerely with the lips and eyes and foreheads of the heart; let us draw abundant gifts of healing Grace from this ever-flowing fountain.<sup>1</sup>

Today, Mary, who received God into herself, who caused the Life of all to dawn, is translated, through death, to the true Life. Today, the “*Temple of Him Who is Life itself*,”<sup>2</sup> “*who gave birth*



*to the enhypostatic Life,” the very Life-receiving Spring, passes from earth “to eternal rest and the heavenly inheritance.” “The Virgin, the only Theotokos, is conveyed to her appointed dwelling-place in Heaven.”*<sup>3</sup>

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**CAN IT BE** that our funeral anthems for the Mother of Life will prompt her Grace, the Grace of the Mother of God, to cure our spiritual deadness and barrenness? How are we to interpret her “greatness” in a manner befitting the Mother of God, so that our hearts may be vivified and made into fountains of living water?

Our Lord and God, Who is Life itself, made this promise, one of the greatest and most crucial in the New Testament: ***“He that believeth on Me, ...out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”***<sup>4</sup>

“By ‘belly,’ in this context,” in the interpretation of St. John Chrysostomos, *“Christ means the heart, just as elsewhere He says: ‘and Thy Law in the midst of my belly.’”*<sup>5</sup>

The “belly” of the soul, according to our Tradition, is a “*pure heart,*”<sup>6</sup> which is not only a “*tablet of the Divine Law,*”<sup>7</sup> but also provides hospitality to the Divine Comforter and becomes a temple and throne of the Holy Trinity.

***“But this spake He [Christ] of the Spirit, Which they that believe on Him should receive.”***<sup>8</sup>

Those who believe and who labor for the depuration of their “*hearts*” not only receive an “*anhypostatic*” illumination of the Divine Light, but also acquire, as the Saints say, the “*hypostatic Light*” of the Comforter, ***“which is both personal and enhypostatic [καί καθ’ ὑπόστασιν καί ἐνυπόστατον], because it abides in those who are illumined.”***<sup>9</sup>

“*In those who believe,*” says St. Cyril of Alexandria, “*we are confident that they do not merely receive illumination from the Spirit, but that the Spirit Himself resides and indwells in them; hence, we are with good reason called temples of God.*”<sup>10</sup>

When the Holy Spirit takes up His abode in the “belly” of the soul, that is, in a “*pure heart*,” He transforms it into an inexhaustible and ever-flowing fountain brimming over with His holy gifts.

***“For the Grace of the Spirit, when it has entered into the mind and has been established, springs up more than any fountain and does not fail, become empty, or stagnate.”***<sup>11</sup>

The word “*water*” is an image of the Holy Spirit: we are Baptized “*by one Spirit*,”<sup>12</sup> we are made to drink “*into one Spirit*,”<sup>13</sup> and we receive “*the gift of the Holy Spirit*,”<sup>14</sup> which becomes in us “*a well of water springing up into everlasting life*.”<sup>15</sup>

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**IT IS WELL** known that the immaculate “belly” of the Theotokos was “*blessed*”<sup>16</sup> and all-blessed, since it “*held without travail*” the “*Foundation*”<sup>17</sup> of the earth and of all creation, that is, the Maker, Who provides for and gives life to things in Heaven and things on earth.

From her womb flowed “*rivers of living water*,”<sup>18</sup> an abundance of blessings and gifts of the Spirit, inexhaustible streams and rivers of sanctification and salvation.

Nevertheless, as the Saints assure us, the Queen of Heaven did not “*pass her life in negligence*,” but practiced “*a multifarious and most strenuous asceticism*,” a “*very ascetical life*,”<sup>19</sup> and for this reason she received from her Son so many “*glories*,” so many “*dignities*,” and so many “*honors befitting the Mother of God*,” when she fell asleep, was resurrected, and was translated to the Heavenly realm.

Consequently, every pious Christian should cultivate practical virtue, which constitutes the vehicle and the means of ascent to theoretical virtue, in order to conceive “*in the womb*,” to travail, and to give birth to the “*spirit of salvation*,”<sup>20</sup> so that his “*heart*” might thereby become in actuality a “*throne of Grace*.”

***“Blessed is he,”*** says St. Symeon the New Theologian, “***who***

*has seen the Light of the world, that is, Christ, take form within himself, for he will be reckoned a mother of Christ, having Christ as an infant within him.”<sup>21</sup>*

The Holy Fathers say that it is in the “belly” of the soul, that is, “in the heart,” that “we receive the Grace of the Spirit,”<sup>22</sup> and that “the Grace of the Holy Spirit has its seat in the heart.”<sup>23</sup>

It is towards the heart, therefore, that all neptic labor must be directed, and it is towards this “seat” that practical virtue, which comprehends all of the virtues, must aim.

You should always gather your mind and your thoughts in the heart; it is to the heart that you must always look; it is to the heart that you must always be attentive, saying this inward prayer that is sweeter than honey: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.’<sup>24</sup>

Persistence in this salutary work of the heart will produce a wondrous, supernatural, and salvific result: the “polyarchy and mob rule” of the passions in us will be transformed into a “monarchy” and “empire” in Christ:

‘If you subordinate your mind to your heart,’ ‘if you are united to yourself by the Holy Spirit through the return of the mind to the heart and through the noetic prayer that acts in the heart,’ then you properly and truly become a ‘throne of the Grace of the Holy Spirit,’ Who ‘unifies your body and your soul; He brings peace to the civil war between the three parts of the soul; He makes you monarch and emperor of the passions that vex you.’<sup>25</sup>

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**AS WE CHANT** funeral anthems to the All-Pure Mother of God with solemnity and fervor, let us pray that her Grace might deem us worthy of the true Life, “and that, like a bird, she might overshadow us fragile sparrows with the wings of her Grace and her rich mercy”<sup>26</sup> and that she might warm and give life to our infertile hearts.

And “let us make our memory and our heart a treasury and

*dwelling-place of the virtues of the Theotokos,”*<sup>27</sup> so that from the “belly” of our soul, “*from the depths of our hearts,”* “*living and springing water*”<sup>28</sup> may gush forth, that “*water*” about which St. Ignatios the God-bearer once said: “*There is in me no fire of love for material things, but only water, living and speaking in me.*”<sup>29</sup>

\*Source: Άγιος Κυπριανός, No. 321 (July-August 2004), pp. 57-59.

## Notes

1. St. John of Damascus, Canon on the Dormition of the *Theotokos*, Ode 9, *Troparion* 2.
2. St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite, *Ἑορτοδρόμιον*, p. 690.
3. St. John of Damascus, *ibid.*, Ode 1, *Troparion* 1.
4. St. John 7:38.
5. St. John Chrysostomos, “Homily 51 on the Gospel According to St. John,” *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LIX, col. 283. Psalm 39:9 (*Septuaginta*).
6. St. Gregory of Nyssa, “Homily 14 on the Song of Songs,” *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XLIV, col. 1076A.
7. *Ibid.*
8. St. John 7:39.
9. St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite, *Ἑορτοδρόμιον* [*Commentary on the Great Feasts*], pp. 643-644.
10. St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, Book.V, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXXIII, col. 757B.
11. St. John Chrysostomos, “Homily 51 on the Gospel According to St. John,” col. 284.
12. I Corinthians 12:13.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Acts 2:38.
15. St. John 4:14.
16. St. Luke 11:27.
17. St. Joseph the Hymnographer, Canon of the *Akathistos* Hymn, Ode 4, *Troparion* 3.
18. See note 4.
19. St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite, *Ἑορτοδρόμιον*, pp. 697, 698.
20. Cf. Isaiah 26:18.
21. St. Symeon the New Theologian, “Discourse 57,” §5 (in the translation by Dionysios Zagoraios) (*Ethical Discourse* 10, §48). Cf. St. Luke

8:21, Galatians 4:9.

22. St. John Chrysostomos, “Homily 17 on the Gospel According to St. Matthew,” *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LVII, cols. 255-256.

23. St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite, *Νέα Κλίμαξ* [*The New Ladder*], p. 75.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 347.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 348.

26. See note 19.

27. St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite, *Ἐορτοδρόμιον*, p. 678.

28. St. Kallistos Xanthopoulos, *Chapters on Prayer*, §§5, 6, in *Φιλοκαλία*, Vol. IV, p. 296.

29. *Ibid.* See also St. Ignatios the God-bearer, *Epistle to the Romans* VII.2, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. V, col. 693A.