

# A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

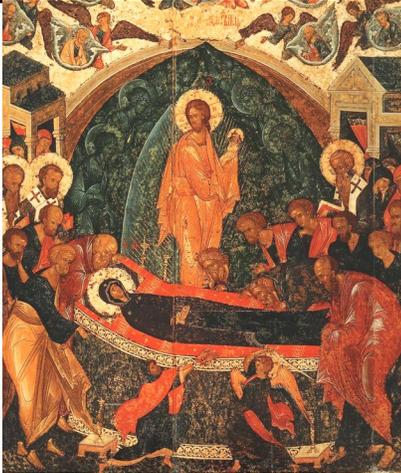


*Glory be to Jesus Christ!      Glory be Forever!*

Volume 9 Issue 425

10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost-Feast of the Holy Dormition

Sunday, August 16, 2020



*"Your glorious Dormition caused the Heavens to rejoice, along with the ranks of the Angels, while the whole earth is glad..."* (Stikhera from the Praises of the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos)

The Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary was a poor girl from Nazareth, from unassuming parents. She

did not have anything that would bespeak of glory. Her nativity passed by unnoticed [by the world]. Humble was her entrance into the world, and humble was her life.

But while her entrance was humble, her exit was glorious, and righteous. For she passed throughout her whole life in purity, humility, and utter obedience to the will of God. Which other woman has a calling that could be reckoned with hers? Every [woman] gives birth to mortals, but she was made worthy to become the Mother of the Son of God. As St. Kosmas Aitolos preached: "There were thousands of thousands of women in the world, but none could be found to fill the side of Adam, except our Lady the Theotokos."

When The Most Holy Theotokos gave up her spirit to her Son and God, *(continued p. 3)*

**\*\*\*10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost \*\*\***

**\*The Holy Image of Christ's Face\***

Epistle: Philippians 2:5-11

Gospel: Luke 10:38-42; 11:27-28

St. George Orthodox Christian Church is a community of believers who strive to live a life according to the Gospel of Christ and teachings of the Church.

We worship God in Trinity - Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

We are dedicated to living out Christ's commandment to, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, ad with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.*

## *The Beauty of Nature as a stimulus for Spiritual Enquiry*

The way of life in large cities has degenerated in recent years. Pollution of the atmosphere, accumulation of garbage, electromagnetic and noise pollution, lack of greenery, the ecological crisis, the commute between home and places of work, traffic congestion as well as the alienation and isolation of people, despite the flourishing social networks, have all contributed to the heavy atmosphere.

Permanent residents have left city centers and

are seeking a clear glade where they can breathe. This is apparent from the unheard-of construction activity in the areas surrounding these large cities, as well as the crowds at ports and airports at holiday times.

Yet these attempts to escape don't always guarantee the longed-for spiritual rest and inner peace. Holidays without spiritual awareness and nourishment by grace leave a huge inner void which usually can't be filled, despite desperate

efforts to do so.

Questions arise such as: can people be refreshed not only bodily but also spiritually by taking a holiday? Does the frantic pace of life contribute to the fact that we miss opportunities that could be a source of inspiration and spiritual improvement? Can contact with nature be of assistance in this direction?

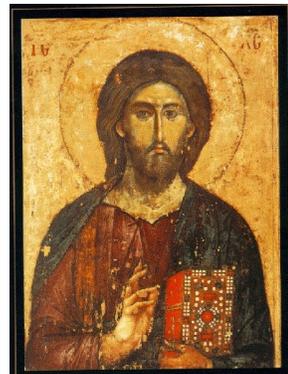
People are linked directly to the natural environment not only for nourishment and

*(continued p.2)*

We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

If you have any questions about the church or would like to speak with our pastor, please call Fr. Matthew at 607-280-1586

Glory be to Jesus Christ.  
Glory be Forever.





*Troparion to St. George*

As the deliverer  
of captives  
and defender  
of the poor,  
healer of the infirm  
and champion of kings,  
victorious great  
martyr George  
intercede with Christ  
our God  
for our souls  
salvation.

### **News and Notes**

We welcome all who are worshiping with us today. Because of COVID-19, our social hour has been canceled until we receive further instructions from the Department of Health.

### **Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)**

We ask that you keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Olga, Lillian, Meg, Larissa, Stephen, Louise, Marcia, George, Lorraine, Evan, Ryan, Kathleen, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Bonnalee, Vicky, Corella, Gail, Mike, Ron, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

### **Words of Wisdom on the Dormition**

“The Most Holy Mother of God prays for us ceaselessly. She is always visiting us. Whenever we turn to her in our heart, she is there. After the Lord, she is the greatest protection for mankind. How many churches there are in the world that are dedicated to the Most Holy Mother of

God! How many healing springs where people are cured of their ailments have sprung up in places where the Most Holy Theotokos appeared and blessed those springs to heal both the sick and the healthy! She is constantly, by our side, and all too often we forget her.” (*Elder Thaddeus of Serbia, 20<sup>th</sup> century*)

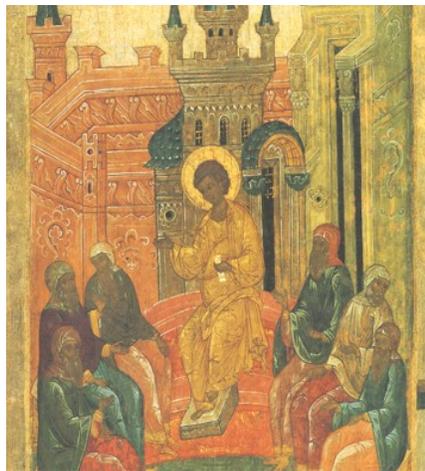
“We say that our dead have ‘fallen asleep’ or ‘passed away.’ What does this mean? This means that for the true Christian there is no death. Death was conquered by Christ on the cross. But there is a translation, a rearrangement of his condition, i.e. his soul is in another place, in another age, in another world beyond the grave, eternal, without end, that is what is meant by “falling asleep”. It is as if it were a temporary dream after which, by the voice of the Lord and the wonderful trumpet of the Archangel, all the dead shall live and come forth each to his place: either to the resurrection of life or to the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:29). This is what the Christian means by translation. We should be ready for this day. (*St. John of Kronstadt, 19<sup>th</sup> century*)

### **The Beauty of Nature as a Stimulus for Spiritual Enquiry (cont'd from p. 1)**

maintenance of life but also to create civilization. The Ionian philosophers claimed that there were four elements in nature: ‘everlasting fire’, air, water and earth. According to Heraclitus, conflict between these elements results in a continuous recycling and ‘most beautiful harmony’. To this quartet, Aristotle added a fifth, the ether, which was established as quintessence. It was believed that this element was to be found in the upper reaches of the heavens and was unbegotten, imperishable, ageless, everlasting and unalterable. Through their vision and insight the philosophers reached high levels in their quest and, in a way prepared the world for acceptance of the Christian revelation.

The beauty of the creation can contribute to spiritual enrichment. Of course, much depends on how we view nature: as casual and idle visitors or a sensitive inquirers? In Church hymnography, for example, the beauty of nature is described in a poetic and vivid manner and is associated with the quality of life. The

natural environment exists for our sake and leads to the Creator: ‘The heavens tell the glory of God and the firmament declares the work of His



hands’ (Ps. 18, 1). The Nobel -prize winning poet Odysseas Elytis talks of the ‘Maker of the clouds and waves Who sleeps among us’ (The Passions, Reading 2, 6).

But for an ascent to be made from the tangible beauty of creation to the Creator and Maker of all things, in order for people made ‘in the image

of God’ to become aware, certain spiritual senses need to be exercised. Internal purification of the excess weight and the fog of the corrosive passions. In this way, material creation, which is an expression of the providential action of God towards His most perfect creation, can become a source of inspiration.

Hymnographers who have a pure heart associate the beauty of the creation with the effulgence of the Creator. As lovers of God’s beauty, the sacred poets introduce us to the mystical path of knowledge of God. The beauty and harmony of created things, though they are not to be compared to divine brilliance, contribute to the cleansing of the senses and draw us towards our most-merciful God.

The coloring of plants, the natural alternations between mountains and plains, the shapes of rivers and lakes, the riches of the forests, the sea, the sun the stars, with the harmony of their motion, even a drop of water on  
*(continued on p.4, column 2)*

the earth and Heaven were astonished. The burial of her sacred body had a unique grandeur. The Apostles were brought from the ends of the earth to Gethsemane upon the clouds. Myrrh-bearing women and the faithful people followed. An impious Judean tried to defile the sacred body, but was repulsed...

The earth, with her most chosen children gathered to bury the King's Mother. But what were the honors of the earth before the honors of Heaven? As she ascended to the Kingdom on high, she was given an exceptional reception. The leaders of the Angels knelt to venerate. The Son received the Mother. And she stood and continues to remain at His right hand, interceding on behalf of sinners.

Humble was her entrance, glorious, all-glorious, was her exit. Are these a phantasy, are these a myth? No, a thousand times, no. Our holy Church confirms this, who ordained that today the Dormition of the Most-Holy Theotokos be celebrated. Today, most-beautiful hymns are chanted, with which the greatness of the Holy Theotokos is praised, and especially, the event of her repose, of her Dormition.

Many, my beloved, are the lessons of this feast. We will limit ourselves to one thing only, one lesson, which is contained in the word which the Church uses to characterize the event of the repose of the Virgin. Her repose is not called "death", but "dormition". Why?

In the language of the Holy Scriptures, death does not mean the disappearance of the human existence. No. At death there is a separation. The soul is separated from the body. The soul leaves towards the things above, towards the heavenly world of the spirits. This path is not fantastical, but is a reality, which is confirmed by the word of God. Then, what does the soul meet, how many tollhouses does it pass through, what censures does it undergo, we do not know in detail. The words of holy people, who saw the souls of the reposed pass towards the verdant meadows of Paradise, or towards the dark places of hell, shine some light on this, but this light is dim, and unable to satisfy people's curiosity. To man, through the Scriptures, it has been revealed that the soul that leaves the body does not die (see Luke 12:20, 16:23-26, 23:42-43). This is a fact and the Christian cannot de-

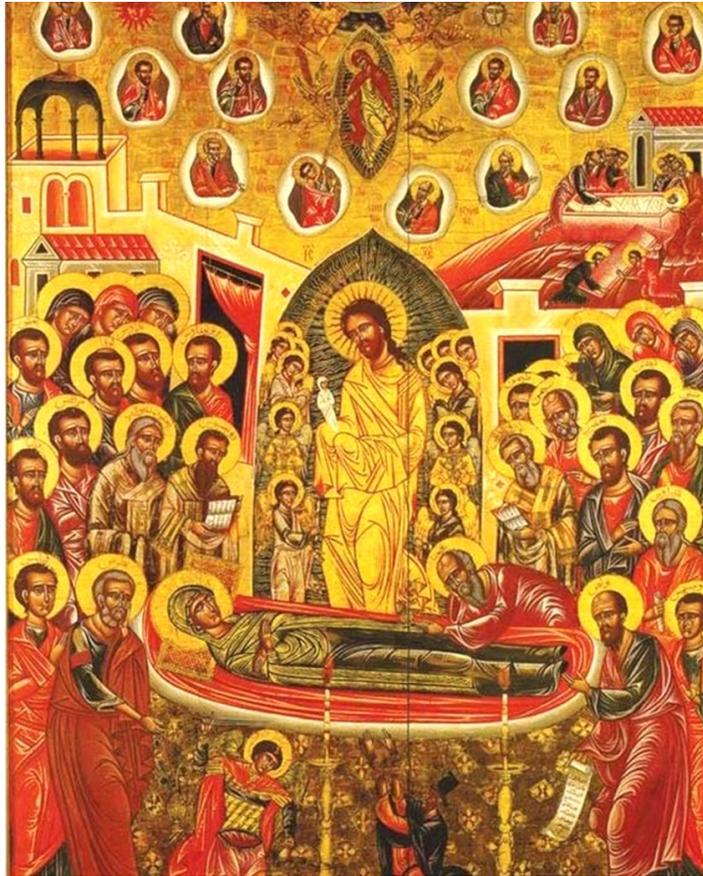
ny this.

But while the soul of person, which has finished this station of life, ascends as a spirit to the other world, the body, as physical creation is given away to corruption, to temporary corruption. For from this corrupted body, during the universal Resurrection [at the Last Judgment], there will come a renewed and incorrupt body, which will be united with the soul and they will live together unto the ages of ages.

Yes! The body will be raised. In anticipation of the Resurrection, death according to the Scriptures is called "dormition". The Prophet David "slept" (Acts 13:36).

The Protomartyr Stephen "slept" (Acts 7:60). The Apostle Paul, when he speaks of those who have left for the other life, does not say that they "died", but he calls them "those who are sleep". "I do not want you to be ignorant, my brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you might not grieve as the others do who have no hope." (I Thess. 4:13). Our Lord Jesus Himself called death "sleep". When He entered the house of Jairus and saw them weeping for the dead girl, He told them: "Do not weep. She has not died, but is only sleeping." (Luke 8:52, Mark 5:39) And regarding Lazarus He said that he had "fallen asleep" (John 11:11-15). And He proceeded to resurrect him, with such ease as if he were waking him from sleep.

Dormition! This word of the Scriptures should be sufficient to teach, console and



strengthen Christians, at least those who hasten to churches to celebrate and feast at the "glorious", "all-sacred", and "dormition transcending death", of the Most-Holy Theotokos. Do you hear this, O you who celebrate? Mary has not died, but has fallen asleep! Her body was buried, placed within the grave, but as the Church chants: "the grave and death could not hold her, for as the Mother of Life, she has proceeded to Life, Who dwelt within the womb of the Ever-Virgin (Kontakion of the Feast) The Theotokos, shining forth with all the light of the virtues, "as arrayed in gold," (Psalm 44:10) has proceeded towards the Heavens. "Who", cry out the Angels, "is this that appears like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, majestic as the stars in procession?" (Song of Songs 6:10)

*(continued p.4)*

*(Homily on the Dormition, cont'd from p.3)*

The Holy Theotokos from the height of her glory, is heard to say to all Christians who are tempted here: "Faithful children of the heavenly Father, have strength. What do you fear? Death? But death is the gateway to the new life. Here on high where I am there is a new life, which no one on earth could even begin to imagine. This life is preordained for those who will live with faith and virtue. Here there is no partiality. My Son is the just Judge. When I was below on the earth, I heard voices that blessed me, for I was made worthy to become His Mother, and He said that, in the cycle of blessedness, it would not be me alone who gives Him birth, but for all those who hear Him and keep His word. For Christ is born spiritually in every soul who believes in Him and worships Him as the only Savior. 'Yea of a truth, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it.' (Luke 11:28) Therefore, I invite you all to the glory of Heaven."

As the Church chants, truly glorious was the Dormition of the Most-Holy Theotokos. Glorious was also the dormition of all the Righteous, who faithfully completed their missions. Each of them, as they left from this world, could say like the Psalm: "In peace I will lie down and sleep, and I awoke, for You, O Lord, have made me to dwell in hope." (Psalm 4:9) The antithesis occurs with those who did not love God and their neighbor, and did not fulfill their holy duties, and did not complete their mission, but were conquered by evils and passions, and trampled upon divine gifts, walling themselves off and making themselves unworthy of their holy calling, betraying the faith. Their dormition was not radiant, but dark, not glorious, but inglorious. Not radiant Angels, but dark demons were their fellow travelers during the exodus of their souls to the other world. For mourning and cutting are heard during the exodus of the unrepentant sinner. Who would not weep?

O Christians! The Holy Theotokos had a glorious dormition. But we also must have a glorious dormition. Glorious through faith and virtue. May we receive even one laurel leaf from that glory! May the Lord, through the intercessions of the Most-Holy Theotokos, who proceeds to the Heavens, grant us an end like this. May the prayer of the Church be fulfilled for each of us: "For a Christian ending to our life: painless, blameless, peaceful, and a good defense before the Awesome Judgment Seat of

*The Beauty of Nature as a Stimulus, cont'd from p.2)*

Christ. (Homily delivered by Metropolitan Augustine a flower can all lead to a hymn of praise to the Creator.

The month of August, in particular, is thought of as a time of rest, holidays and summer lazing. For the Orthodox, however, it's also a month of spiritual enquiry with the great feasts of the Transfiguration and the Dormition of the Mother of God. And when rest for the body is combined with spiritual nourishment and the proper appreciation of the beauty of creation, this is a genuine blessing for us. Holidays can easily become opportunities for visits to religious sites, for unique emotional experiences, and opportunities to get in touch with our Christian cultural tradition. In this way, people who are stressed and anxious can begin to acquire a 'delicate and poetic soul' as Saint Porphyrios so aptly put it.

The saint continues: 'Put beautiful moments to use. These incline the soul towards prayer. They make it refined, noble and poetic. Wake up in the morning and watch the royal sun emerge in a purple glow from the sea. If some view enchants you, a chapel, something beautiful, don't dwell on that alone but go further, go on to praise the only beautiful One for all the beautiful things. Everything's holy: the sea, swimming, the food. Enjoy them. They all enrich us, they all bring us to the great Love, they all lead us to Christ...Nature is the Gospel's secret!'. But if we're to view the beauty of nature in this way, we need faith at least as great as a

grain of mustard and also spiritual exercise of the senses.

In *The Little Mariner*, Odysseas Elytis notes: 'When we discover the mystical relationships between notions and we walk further into the depths, we'll come out into another kind of clearing, which is Poetry. And poetry is always one, as the sky is. The question is, where you see the sky from'. Poetry, and particularly Church poetry, is a glade where we can give ear to the mystical utterances of the Spirit and see the world surrounding us in a terms of praise, gratitude and elevation, so that we may be taken up into the beauty of the Creator's beauty. It calls upon us to see the natural environment not so much from the point of view of profit, of unreasoning exploitation, of hyper-consumption of material goods, but more from the aspect of self-criticism, of repentance and spiritual enquiry. Then we'll respect it, protect it and discover through the beauty of nature the cohesive and providential action of the Creator, Who 'made everything in wisdom'

