

Sermon on the Dormition

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

When we hear someone speak about the Ark of the Covenant from the Old Testament, often times we think of modern depictions, of movies, or books and especially the Biblical accounts that present us with a fearful, awesome, and even wrathful picture. We recall that above this wooden box, which was covered with pure gold, God spoke with Moses above the mercy seat in between the two cherubim which were on top of the Ark. The Ark would often go in front of the people of Israel in battles, terrifying and destroying enemies, but also assuring the Israelites of God's blessing, of His power, and of their victory. Those who tampered with the ark became ill or even died.

How then might we, who are grass and made of earthen clay, begin to discourse and contemplate the living Ark of God, the Most Holy Theotokos, who was the fulfillment and the awesome reality of which the Ark of the Old Testament was merely a shadow? Isn't it interesting that this feast falls, not coincidentally, at a time when many people are on a vacation or are too busy for the Church, since they are readying themselves for seemingly more important things, such as the coming school year? Why is this? This present awesome and glorious mystery is something which is not a subject for speculation, for human logic, or for vain tampering. It is a tremendous mystery that is hidden and is only revealed when it humbly received from within the light of the depths of the Church's tradition. This feast is immensely joyful and life-giving for those who with child like faith and without argument seek to enter into its festivities. Contrastingly, for those who are outside subject to the

Law of the Old Covenant and are without the grace of the NT it is a dark mountain which is incomprehensible and even fearful. But for those who have prepared themselves with fasting and prayer and by being present at today's festivities, the tomb of the Mother of God is joy, it is life and it is a light-covered Mountain for our spiritual ascent today.

How could her tomb be anything else than an inexhaustible fountain of life? When she herself was the spring which poured forth the living life giving water which is Christ Himself? How could her body know corruption, having borne within it the Son of God who shone with unbearable light on Mount Tabor? She is that bush which Moses saw which burned with the immaterial and inconceivable fire of the God-head without being consumed. She is the new Eve, the mother of the eternal life which was Christ our God. Her soul and body were full of grace, so filled with the life of God and of holiness it was not possible for them to be consigned to darkness, death and decay. She is the living paradise who had within herself the Tree of life and she is the window through which shines into this world the ineffable light of the Triune God.

Today she, like the Ark of the Old Covenant, goes before us as a banner of victory, a wall of defense and forerunner of the fulfillment of all of God's promises to all mankind. Having now crossed the frontier which separates us from the age to come, (through her bodily ascent to heaven) she has become the highest of all creation, and the realization of the end for which humanity was created. She is the fulfillment of all beauty and virtue and is a universal advocate for all before the throne of God now and at the second coming.

What then does this feast seek to reveal to us today? How can we grasp something of its immense depth and profundity? Simply put, this feast is a reminder for us all that when we, through God's grace, live a life of holiness, as our foremost example, the Theotokos did, and when we like her keep Christ's word in our hearts and do His will, we will according to the word of the Lord Himself, "never see death". When we, by keeping to the narrow way, become filled with God's own Life, our death will not be a death but a translation to a new and better life, we will go from life to life and, if we can become like the Saints, even to a small degree, our death will even become a source of joy and life for those who come after us.

This narrow way that the Church exhorts us to lead, as we all know, is the call to a life of repentance. This repentance is not feigned or morose and depressed but rather, it is an attitude in our hearts which is always willing and ready to change for the sake of following God and His commandments and for the good of others....it is an attitude which always is ready to ask for forgiveness, to humble oneself and to accept words of instruction or even criticism from others. The repentance which brings life and holiness is one which never lets go of the hem of Christ's garments but clings to Him in prayer and hope, ceaselessly crying out "I am thine save me" and "only say the word, O Lord, and my soul shall be healed". A life of repentance never abandons Christ the physician, though it may fall every hour, but constantly turns back to the Lord in prayer and humbles itself amid its sins, sorrows and misfortunes, never willing to leave the only One who has the power to forgive and heal it, to bring about its restoration and establishment in every good thing.

O, my brethren in Christ, let us consider this awesome wonder! The Ark of the Old Testament went before the people of Israel as they were coming out of the desert into the promised land being led by Joshua and today, the Theotokos, the living Ark, goes before us into the Promised Land of Heaven as our forerunner and prototype, as we are lead by Jesus Christ, whom Joshua dimly prefigured of old. Then, the Ark parted the waters of the Jordan so that the people could pass through into the promised land, but now, the Theotokos, through her intercessions, parts the often tumultuous waters of our lives so that we can safely pass through and enter into the Kingdom on high.

In the Old Testament, the book of Second Maccabees tells us that the Ark disappeared and was hidden, being taken up into a high mountain by the Prophet Jeremiah, not to be seen or found by anyone, it is said, until God gathered all His people in the final times....And now too, the Living life giving Ark of the New Covenant has been taken from among us, ascending bodily into heaven after her death so that she might be the first fruits of the creation through whom we can receive every good thing, being our Supreme and ever-present Advocate after God and our invincible Protectress who is terrifying to our enemies. Let us joyful come forth today to venerate the life-giving tomb of the Mother of God and through her prayers and with the help of all the Saints, let us strive to imitate the Mother of God through our life of humble repentance through (by) which, we like the thief, may steal paradise, unworthy though we may be, so that together we might glorify Almighty God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, to Whom belongs worship and glory forever. Amen.