**Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos**

On August 15-th we celebrated one of the Twelve Great Feasts, the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos. We are celebrating this feast in the principle temple of our Church. Along with the entire Church, we rejoice in an event that has been passed down to us by the Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church the blessed repose of the Most Holy Theotokos, her Dormition, which has become a feast day.

According to the legend, the Mother of God departure from the earth after the Archangel Gabriel appeared before her and announced her near assumption into Heaven; and he left a palm branch as a symbol of it. And it miraculously happened so that by the day of the assumption of the Virgin Mary, all the Apostles had gathered in Jerusalem, where she lived at the time.

After two o’clock, a dazzling light began to shine in the house, where Mary and the disciples of Jesus were staying. The ceiling disappeared in its radiation, and Christ appeared in the room surrounded by angels. Then the Holy Virgin stood up from her deathbed, and bowed to Him. She handed her soul over to her Son and God without any bodily suffering, as though in a pleasant dream, the legend tells.

The Mother of God was buried in the garden of Gethsemane, but three days later, when the apostles opened the grave, they only found grave wrappings in it, as not only the soul, but the body of Mary had been taken to Heaven by God. That same evening she appeared before the apostles and said: “Rejoice! I am with you forever”. As with the Nativity of the Virgin and the feast of her entrance to the temple, there are no biblical or historical sources for this feast. The Tradition of the Church is that Mary 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 Feast of the Dormition is itself a mini-Pascha, for it is to this resurrected Body of Christ, in which the power of death is shattered once and for all, that the most holy Theotokos united herself, so that she, too, shares in her Son’s victory over death.

Certainly, she gave birth to the Giver of Life in the flesh; and for that reason, she is indeed the‘Mother of Life’.

But the Theotokos was not an empty vessel for the Son of God. She, like every human being, has a will and a heart:  life and death were set before her, and she chose life; she chose to live for her Lord and Creator, and to make every act and breath an act of life.

How do we choose life? The Fathers of the Church clearly present the path to us.

First, through baptism: in this sacred mystery, the old man within us is buried with Christ, and we rise to new life in Him; and we are united to the risen Body of Christ, the Church.

Second, through true repentance and confession of sins. With the help of our spiritual father, we can open our wounded hearts to the life of God. In fact, for the Fathers of the Church, the mystery of confession is a second baptism. Every time we avail ourselves of the Lord’s mercy we are given new life; and so gradually but surely, through ascetical struggle and repentance, our hearts are healed and filled with the life of Christ.

And third, in the Divine Liturgy, we partake of that one Resurrected Body which has trampled down sin and death, and unite ourselves to it. The Eucharist is the life-giving Banquet of heaven, and, as we pray in the Liturgy, the bread and wine become the ‘life-creating Mysteries of Christ’ and  also the ‘medicine of immortality’.

So as we celebrate this Feast of the Dormition we celebrate the *feast of life*, not only of the Virgin Mary, but of all human beings; for, in the Theotokos, human nature has reached its goal of sharing in the life of God.

It is true that Mary was granted privileges that cannot be ours; however, her vocation is the vocation of every human being. It is for that reason that her icon is painted in the apse of Orthodox churches: we are heading to where she is.

Let us pray that we may all be faithful to that vocation, that we may all, in every thought, word and deed, choose life and not death.