



My Beloved Ones,

While we prepare ourselves for a Thanksgiving celebration that will be very different due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, on the 21st of November, the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple helps us focus on what it means to be truly thankful.

The Virgin Mary's father, Joachim was descended from King David, and her mother, Anna, was of the priestly tribe of Aaron. However, despite their piety, they were unable to bear children. In such fallen times, those who were could not conceive were shunned. Joachim, for example, was turned away from the Temple, his offering rejected. This caused the couple great shame, and Joachim went to the desert to renew his prayers. Eventually, both Joachim and Anna were visited by angels, who announced that God had heard their cries, and that they would conceive a child who would be spoken of in the entire world. Out of gratitude, when the Theotokos was three years old, her parents brought her into the Temple, where she resided until she was betrothed to Joseph at the age of 12.

Some might wonder, why would those who prayed so deeply for a child, be so willing to give that child up? The answer of course, is that Joachim and Anna recognized that this child was not theirs, but that she was a gift given to them from God. Joachim and Anna, in all their belief, understood that God had graced their faith, by allowing them to become part of something greater than themselves.

This Thanksgiving will be very emotional since we cannot see many of our family members. However, just as Joachim and Anna's hearts were greatly saddened, they used their grief to inspire prayer. We too should follow their examples by making Thanksgiving a daily occurrence, with prayer, Liturgical attendance, and scriptural study. As the Psalmist says, it is good to *"...declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night". (Psalm 92:2)*

Joachim and Anna also understood that everything they had, including their only child, had been given to them by God. If we are also able to focus on what we God has given to us—like our health and our loved ones—and not just that we miss them during this pandemic, then Thanksgiving can become not only a day, but a common exchange, through which we give praise to God, for that which we are blessed to receive.

Truly, it is my fervent hope that this Thanksgiving inspire in all of us more gratitude, strengthening ourselves and our loved ones, especially during these troubled days. In doing so, we may carry these feelings of thankfulness through the remainder of the Fast, through the Nativity and the New Year, and indeed, each day of the rest of our lives.

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