

My Beloved Ones,

This week, we are fortunate to be able to celebrate the great Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God with all our fellow brothers and sisters in Sunday Liturgy. Beyond blessing those fortunate enough to be named in honor of the Theotokos (Panagiotis, Despina, and of course, Maria), this day is a special feast for all Orthodox Christians because it reveals a great mystery in our lives: that is, our response to the end of our earthly lives.

Living as we do in a fallen world, and one presently subject to a pandemic, we are perhaps too aware of the fragility of human life. Therefore, some might read the words above and wonder, why do we celebrate those saints who have fallen asleep in the Lord? Though the simple answer is that these holy men and women have longed for union with their Creator in the Kingdom of Heaven, let us consider our Theotokos.

She consented to become the vessel of our Lord's Incarnation in the flesh, but she also experienced the pain of witnessing her Son's death on the Cross. Despite her faith in God at that moment, she could not fail to be moved by the sight of the Son whom she born, raised and loved, nailed to a Cross. Even after witnessing His miraculous Three-Day Resurrection & being present at the Ascension, Jesus was still both Her God, and her Son.

Therefore, when Holy Tradition describes the visit of the angel who prepared the Theotokos to expect her Dormition, we read that, *"On hearing this, she went up with haste to the Mount of Olives, where she prayed continuously. Giving thanks to God, she returned to her house and prepared whatever was necessary for her burial."* Imagine that: when Her Dormition was foretold to her, she did not weep, or mourn, she felt great joy, and turned to God in unceasing prayer.

Truly, her behavior is a model for us all, but especially in this case. Where we imperfect human beings have been disobedient to our Lord's Commandments, we can at least imitate her in our thoughts concerning the passage from this life to the next. We need not fear death, as long as we live righteously, loving God, & our neighbor as ourselves, may we instead think of our future in His everlasting Kingdom as a joyful beginning, rather than a sad ending.

To all those who celebrate today, I wish you a sincere Χρόνια πολλά! May our Panagia continue to intercede to Her Son, so that we will all be counted worthy to greet her in God's Kingdom.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta

