
THE ALEUTIAN

Volume 1, Issue 1

Saint Peter the Aleut Orthodox Church, Louisiana USA

October 2009

UPCOMING POINTS OF INTEREST

- ❖ *Bishop Andrei will be visiting October 14-19*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- ❖ *Father Mark was awarded the purple skufia and purple kamilavka on September 13th at Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker Orthodox Church in Elmwood, New Jersey.*

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 On the Dormition of the Theotokos
- 2 Reflections on the Rich Man
- 3 When Receiving Communion

On the Dormition of the Theotokos

By Macrina Calhoun

Dormition means ‘falling asleep in death’, from the Greek of Holy Scripture *coemetērium* =cemetery, a place of sleeping.

It is my understanding of tradition that the Apostles were miraculously transported to her side at this time, except for Thomas, who arrived three days later. Thomas wanted to see her grave and say goodbye. Arriving they found the grave

empty and only a fragrant odor remained.

Tradition speaks in this manner: The angel Gabriel, three days before her death, announces to Mary that it’s time for her to die. Miraculously, the Apostles appear at her home in Jerusalem, and gather around her dying bed. Jesus comes and takes her soul to heaven, and the Apostles lead a procession to lay her body in a tomb at Gethsemane. An angry Jewish mob tries to burn her body, but is repulsed by intervening angels. Three days later Jesus takes Mary’s body to Paradise and reunites her soul with her body. After that, Jesus gives Mary and the Apostles a guided tour of heaven and hell. The Apostles are then returned to earth as the story ends, but not before seeing “our Lord Jesus Christ and Mary sitting at the right hand of God.”

Many variations on this basic story have been found, preserved in various languages—Armenian, Georgian, Greek, Syriac, Coptic, Slavonic and Latin—all written sometime between the years 400 and 750 A.D.

In all honesty I do not know for certain what happened, however, I believe the tradition is to pass along some translucent semblance (light in imagery) as we see depicted in the icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos, in which is related the gathering around the bier, in dedication to life, death and resurrection as the Church does. This is a unity which is not through doctrine or theological rationalism, but through gathering at the bier of the Tabernacle. In this way it seems to me to go along with Orthodox Apostolic teaching and Holy Scripture. As the Theotokos is spoken of by the Fathers in reference to the Ark of the Covenant, as well as the Ladder, which appeared to Jacob in the Old Testament, all of which represents such mysteries of God which are beyond our

understanding. I would say no less of the Theotokos, in that she too is such a mystery of God having been overshadowed by the Holy Spirit bringing about the Incarnation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Through the prayers of the Theotokos, Lord forgive us our sins of division.

This event in the life of the Theotokos calls to mind First Chronicles 15, which doesn't mention the Theotokos but speaks of how David assembled all Israel and Jerusalem to bring the Ark of the Lord to the place which he had prepared for it. It talks about how the Levites then bore the Ark of God on their shoulders with poles as Moses had ordained and then how David commands all of the music and rejoicing. Then is described how the Ark is brought into the tabernacle which David had pitched for it and they offered sacrifices and peace offerings to God, and then David turns around and blesses the people in the name of the Lord. One might ask, why these scriptures? But look at Psalm 133(132), "Arise, O Lord, into thy rest; thou and the ark of thine holiness. Thy priests shall clothe themselves with righteousness; and thy saints shall exult. For the sake of thy servant David turn not away the face of thine anointed. The Lord swore in truth to David, and he will not annul it, saying, Of the fruit of thy body will I set a king upon thy throne. If thy children will deep keep my covenant, and these my testimonies which I shall teach them, their children also shall sit upon thy throne forever. For the Lord has elected Zion, has chosen her for a habitation for himself."

In fulfillment of this, according to tradition, Mary lived the rest of her life with John whose home was in Zion in Jerusalem. Such has always been part of ancient liturgical text and tradition, as far back as one can look.

Whether the Lord received her soul and then her body, I did not witness. Whether her body and soul were united, I did not see. Such things will likely remain a mystery to us. Just as no one knows what happened to the ark of the tabernacle in the Old Testament. Only God in His great wisdom knows such things.

Reflections on the Rich Man

By Thomas Johnson

Mark 10:17-31

It is tempting to judge the wealthy man in this parable - after all, it is obvious to us that he "ought" to have followed Jesus. However, in this sense Jesus' remark would seem quite sarcastic: He said the one thing He knew the man would not do. In this sense, our salvation would appear hopeless, as the apostles noted: "Then who can be saved?" After all, which one of us is capable of doing all that could possibly be asked of us whether or not God Himself asks for it? Jesus knew that there were none, "With man it is impossible." Anyone who says otherwise is simply not yet aware of his limitations. In this sense, the rich man did genuinely the only thing that he could do, he went away sorrowful. Granted, it might have been better if he stayed with Jesus; the sorrow was the virtue of him coming to a more truthful self-awareness. He did not argue, nor did he suddenly denounce Jesus. His flaw, which Jesus indicates with His answer, is that it is not the man but God who saves.

"Most members of any church could easily say in earnest 'which commandment have I broken?'"

We are easily tricked by his question: what can "I" do? Because God had not inspired him, the only thing that "he" could do was to be sorrowful for his sin. And as the disciples noted, it is the same for all of us, because we are all the same worthless, powerless "I." It is a caution against exalting and pretending to follow the law, as no one can do this fully unless the Holy Spirit is present in him. In a peaceful and prosperous environment we easily keep all the external commandments but have inner lusts and passions. But Jesus quickly made his sin external by asking him to do the one thing he

could not do; he visibly disobeyed God. Now that the man was sorrowful and aware of his sin, he could have asked "Lord save me," and it would have easily been done *to* him rather than *by* him. But it is important not to judge the man as "proud" because he is not so by our standards. Most members of the any church could easily say in earnest 'which commandment have I broken?' Yet in every case it only remains for Jesus to invent another commandment for us to break. And how innocent-seeming a mistake is it not to realize that it is not "Lord, what must I do" but "Lord, will you" that saves us.

When Receiving Communion (Part 1)

By Father Mark Templet



It is the most fearful responsibility of the pastor to ensure that he lives up to his fearful duties. At ordination to the priesthood, when the man receives Holy Communion the bishop tells him to take great care with it because he will give account of it before the Lord God. These words regarding the Holy Communion must ring in his ears all the days of his life. The priest's great responsibility is twofold: 1) he must ensure that no one who is not in good standing with the Church is able to receive Holy Communion, 2) to protect the souls of those he is charged with from receiving in an unworthy manner. These responsibilities are two sides of the same coin; fulfilling one means that he fulfills the other.

During his prayers in the altar during the Divine Liturgy the priest makes the following oath, "[F]or I will not speak of the mystery to Thine enemies; nor will I give Thee a kiss as did Judas..." The priest is

making the solemn promise that he will not allow the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ to fall into the hands of the enemies of Christ. In other words, if during the course of his serving the enemies of Christ were to burst into the church and take the Holy Things, they had better do it over the priest's dead body (in fact they should do it over all of the Faithfull's dead bodies). The priest must prevent those in heresy and who are not prepared from receiving Holy Communion. If the priest gives communion to heretics he has committed a grave sin; he has betrayed the Lord Jesus Christ. The most fearful words ever spoken by Our Savior were of His betrayer, "[W]oe to the man by who the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born" (Mark 14:21). The gravity of this responsibility is quite grave indeed.

"The priest must prevent those in heresy and who are not prepared from receiving Holy Communion."

Equally grave is the responsibility of the laity in receiving Holy Communion. The Apostle Paul explains, "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you and many sleep" (1 Cor. 11:28-30). In Orthodoxy there are two extreme views that have been prevalent at different times. Still today there are those who believe that they should not receive Holy Communion very often out of a sense of unworthiness. There is also the opposite view that sees Holy Communion as simply a matter of course; just part of being "in the club". The reality is that neither of these views is healthy. But what is the reality that we should understand in Holy Communion? What do we need to know and be aware of with regards to such an important Holy Mystery?

To be continued...