

Beloved sisters and brothers: Christ is among us!

On this day we continue our celebration of the dormition and assumption of the Mother of God. Her feast of falling asleep in death and in three days being taken up to heaven by her Son and our God is so great that we cannot confine it to one day alone. Rather we rejoice over the Theotokos' death and resurrection for nine days. We dedicate such time to Mary because of who she is and what she did: she is the Mother of God through whom the Son of God took our human flesh and lived and dwelled among us. It is Mary's "yes" to God that makes her the supreme example of humble obedience to God. And it is because of her

I had nearly forgotten Jacob's ladder. Is it not evident to every one that it prefigured thee, and is not the type easily recognised? just as Jacob saw the ladder bringing together heaven and earth, and on it angels coming down and going up, and the truly strong and invulnerable God [162] wrestling mystically with himself, so art thou placed between us, and art become the ladder of God's intercourse with us, of Him who took upon Himself our weakness, uniting us to Himself, and enabling man to see God. Thou hast brought together what was parted. Hence angels descended to Him, ministering to Him as their God and Lord, and men, adopting the life of angels, are carried up to heaven.

If God vouchsafes it to all His servants--and we know that He does--what an immense difference there is between His servants and His Mother. What, then, shall we call this mystery of thine? Death? Thy blessed soul is naturally parted from thy blissful and undefiled body, and the body is delivered to the grave, yet it does not endure in death, nor is it the prey of corruption. The body of her, whose virginity remained unspotted in child-birth, was preserved in its incorruption, and was taken to a better, diviner place, where death is not, but eternal life. Just as the glorious sun may be hidden momentarily by the opaque moon, it shows still though covered, and its rays illumine the darkness [165] since light belongs to its essence. It has in itself a perpetual source of light, or rather it is the source of light as God created it. So art thou the perennial source of true light, the treasury of life itself, the richness of grace, the cause and medium of all our goods. And if for a time thou art hidden by the death of the body, without speaking, thou art our light, life-giving ambrosia, true happiness, a sea of grace, a fountain of healing and of perpetual blessing. Thou art as a fruitful tree in the forest, and thy fruit is sweet in the mouth of the faithful. Therefore I will not call thy sacred transformation death, but rest or going home, and it is more truly a going home. Putting off corporeal things, thou dwellest in a happier state.

Then they reached the most sacred Gethsemane, and once more there were embracings and prayers and panegyrics, hymns and tears, poured forth by sorrowful and loving hearts. They mingled a flood of weeping and sweating.* And thus the immaculate (panagion) [191] body was laid in the tomb. Then it was assumed after three days to the heavenly mansions. The bosom of the earth was no fitting receptacle for the Lord's dwelling-place, the living source of cleansing water, the corn of heavenly bread, the sacred vine of divine wine, the evergreen and fruitful olive-branch of God's mercy. And just as the all holy body of God's Son, which was taken from her, rose from the dead on the third day, it followed that she should be snatched from the tomb, that the mother should be united to her Son; and as He had come down to her, so she

should be raised up to Him, into the more perfect dwelling-place, heaven itself. It was meet that she, who had sheltered God the Word in her own womb, should inhabit the tabernacles of her Son. And as our Lord said it behoved Him to be concerned with His Father's business, so it behoved His mother that she should dwell in the courts of her Son, in the house of the Lord, and in the courts of the house of our God. If all those who rejoice dwell in Him, where must the cause itself of joy abide? It was fitting that the body of her, who preserved her virginity unsullied in her [192] motherhood, should be kept from corruption even after death. She who nursed her Creator as an infant at her breast, had a right to be in the divine tabernacles. The place of the bride whom the Father had espoused, was in the heavenly courts. It was fitting that she who saw her Son die on the cross, and received in her heart the sword of pain which she had not felt in childbirth, should gaze upon Him seated next to the Father. The Mother of God had a right to the possession of her Son, and as handmaid and Mother of God to the worship of all creation. The inheritance of the parents ever passes to the children. Now, as a wise man said, the sources of sacred waters are above. The Son made all creation serve His Mother.