

## ***Orthopraxis***

### **Holy Transfiguration, August 6th, Blessing of Fruit**

It is the custom to bring to the church, on this day, the first fruits of fruit-bearing trees. In the East and more southern climates they bring grapes; in Russia it was customary to bring apples. There is a special prayer for each. In the prayer for the blessing of grapes, the fruit of the vine, the priest asks for the Lord to bless them so that they may be to us for rejoicing, and that He may accept the gift of these fruits unto the cleansing of our sins. This prayer is understandable when we understand it in a spiritual way. Grapes are used to make the wine which is used for Holy Communion. When the priest blesses the other first-fruits, like apples, he prays that the Lord may receive our gifts to His eternal treasury and grant us an abundance of worldly gifts.

### **The Dormition of the Mother of God, August 15th, Blessing of Fragrant Herbs and Flowers**

The Dormition has several other names. The Falling Asleep, Repose, and in this country many call it the Assumption. The Church looks especially colorful and is fragrant with herbs and flowers as more and more people come forth and put their bouquets on special tables in the church. The flowers may be dried and used in an arrangement in the icon corner, they can be burned in the home incense burner as incense, or they can be added to sachets. As for the herbs (parsley, mint, basil, dill, etc.), they can also be dried. Bunch them together and hang them upside down in your kitchen and use them for cooking or for teas. Some people make a wreath.

We must remember that not in the long distant past, blessed flowers and herbs were always used as home incense. A bit was thrown on the warm coal stove where they freshened the air. They were also used as additives to vaporizers. Our ancestors were very knowledgeable about which herbs and flowers were to be used for what. In the blessing prayer we ask God to bless the fragrant herbs and colorful flowers that they may always remind us of His healing power.

Customs and traditions give added joy to the parish family just as they do to our personal families. How bland either one becomes when these customs are neglected and lost.

## ***From the Fathers***

### **St. John Maximovitch**

There is no intellect or words to express the greatness of Her Who was born in the sinful human race but became “more honorable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim.” “Seeing the grace of the secret mysteries of God made manifest and clearly fulfilled in the Virgin, I rejoice; and I know not how to understand the strange and secret manner whereby the Undeclared has been revealed as alone chosen above all creation, visible and spiritual. Therefore, wishing to praise Her, I am struck dumb with amazement in both mind and speech. Yet still I dare to proclaim and magnify Her: She is indeed the heavenly Tabernacle” (Ikos of the Entry into the Temple). “Every tongue is at a loss to praise Thee as is due; even a spirit from the world above is filled with dizziness, when it seeks to sing Thy praises, O Theotokos. But since Thou art good, accept our faith. Thou knowest well our love inspired by God, for Thou art the Protector of Christians, and we magnify Thee” (Irmos of the 9th Canticle, Service of the Theophany).

## ***Focus on the Faith***

### **The Fast of the Dormition of the Holy Theotokos**

For the first fourteen days of August during each year, the Holy Orthodox Church enters into a strict fast period in honor of the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary. The eminent Orthodox theologian, Father Sergei Bulgakov, beautifully expresses the high regard which the Orthodox Christians have for the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of

God, for her special role in the salvation of mankind, when he affirms, “The warm veneration of the Theotokos is the soul of Orthodox Piety.” St. John of Damascus, one of the great Orthodox fathers, pointed out that when the Blessed Virgin Mary became the Mother of God and gave birth to Christ, the Redeemer of Mankind, she became the mother of mankind. We call the Virgin Mary “Theotokos”, from the Greek, which means “The Birth-Giver or the Bearer of God.” This is the highest title that can be bestowed upon any member of the human race.

The Theotokos, the Virgin Mary, was “blessed among women,” and she was chosen “to bear the Savior of our souls.” We, therefore, as Orthodox Christians, consider her to be the Queen of all the saints and the angels.

Knowing that she holds such a high place in the Kingdom of Heaven and that she is eternally present at the throne of God interceding for mankind, we, as good Orthodox Christians, must pray for her love, guidance, and protection. We must never forget to ask for her intercessions in times of sickness and danger, and we must constantly thank her for her care and her prayers on our behalf.

Every year the Orthodox Church sets aside the first fifteen days of August in honor of the Virgin Mary. The fasting period is climaxed on August 15th, when the Church gathers to celebrate the Great Feast of the Dormition (Falling-Asleep) of the Theotokos. During this fourteen day fast period, it is traditional that the Paraklesis Service, that is, special supplication services be held in honor of the Mother of God.

The word “paraklesis” has two different meanings: the first is “consolation,” from which the Holy Spirit is called the “Paraclete,” or “Consoler”; the second is “supplication” or “petition”. The Service of the Paraklesis to the Theotokos consists of hymns of supplication to obtain consolation and courage. It should be recited in times of temptation, discouragement or sickness. It is used more particularly during the two weeks before the Dormition, or Assumption, of the Theotokos, from August 1 to August 14. The theme of these Paraklesis Services centers around the petition: “O Most Holy Theotokos, save us.”

If you have a problem or if something is burdening your soul, if you feel spiritually uneasy and if you are not at peace with yourself and with those around you, then, you should come to the Church during the first fifteen days of August and ask for the intercessions of the Mother of God. Even if you are fortunate enough to be one of those very few who are at peace with themselves and with God, then those blessed ones should come to these services and thank God and His Blessed Mother for the blessings that they have bestowed upon you and your family.

Since these Paraklesis Services to the Theotokos are primarily petition for the welfare of the living, let the whole Church pray for you during the first fifteen days of August and especially on the Great Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos on August 15th. Don’t let temptations, apathy, or anything else cause you to miss this great blessing and inspiration that the Church can bestow upon you. Let the peace and holiness that only the Mother of God can give you enter into your life. “Let us lay aside all earthly cares,” and let us truly, during these fifteen days, participate in the fasting and prayer life of the Church so that we can “taste and see that the Lord is good” and so that we may fully experience the spiritual blessings that the Church offers to us at this holy time. “Blessed is he whom He shall find watching.” Come and pray to the Theotokos with us and with the Church and by her prayers and intercessions, may our souls be saved!  
MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS, SAVE US!

### ***Upcoming Events***

**August 20 – Rummage Sale:** Please bring your gently used items.

**August 21 – Church picnic at Wildwood Park in Saratoga**

This is a potluck BBQ with salads, desserts, drinks. Kids (and adults) can run around, play games. The park is on 4<sup>th</sup> St. in Saratoga. We are missing our master grill, Kevin Becker, so we need some folks to go early and start the grill.

**All of August:** Preparation of food for the Annual Festival on October 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. Please sign up on the poster in the Hall. If you cook, maybe you could donate some of the ingredients needed.