

Celebrating Our Faith

Byzantine Catholic Worship: Our Church, Its Customs and Rich Heritage

The Holy Transfiguration of Our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ

IN THE SIXTH DAY OF AUGUST, our Church celebrates the feast of the glorious Transfiguration of our Lord and Saviour. The purpose of this feast is to mark that magnificent event in the life of Jesus Christ, the Transfiguration, which some of the holy Fathers call the Second Theophany. The significance of this event is evident from the fact that three evangelists — Matthew, Mark and Luke — recorded it in their Gospels.



THE EVENT OF THE TRANSFIGURATION

The scene is set: the public career of Christ is now nearing its end, soon to be followed by His suffering and death. Although the Apostles believed that Jesus was the Messiah sent by God and although they expressed this faith through the lips of St. Peter, nevertheless, their faith was not yet confirmed. Hence, Christ wished to strengthen it by an extraordinary revelation. Therefore, several days after predicting His own passion and death, Jesus took Peter, James and John with Him, and went up to Mount Tabor; there in prayer, He revealed to them a ray of His Divinity.

Why did Jesus Christ show His glory only to the aforementioned disciples? According to the opinion of St. John Damascene, Christ took Peter with Him so that “he who publicly acknowledged Christ’s Divinity, might hear the confirmation of His profession also from the Heavenly Father.” The Lord took James up to Mt. Tabor because he was to be the first bishop of Jerusalem and the first of the Apostles to give up his life for Christ. Finally, the Saviour also made St. John a witness of His Transfiguration, for John was His beloved disciple and a virgin. Having understood Christ’s divinity on Mt. Tabor, John later wrote in his Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1)



This feast falls during the time when the fruits of the earth reach maturity. From the earliest times in the Eastern Church, on this day fruit is blessed in thanksgiving to God for the first-fruits of the earth. This custom was adopted by the Christian Church from the Old Testament which prescribed that fruit be brought to the Temple of the Lord. In the Book of Exodus, we read: “You shall carry the first-fruits of the corn of your ground to the house of the Lord, your God.” (Exodus 23:19) In the Book of Leviticus we read: “When you enter into the land which I give you, and you will reap your harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the first-fruits of your harvest unto the priest.” (Leviticus 23: 10)

Reflections on Summer: "Majestic August"

By Rev. George C. Powell

AUGUST is the last full month of summer, the elderly matriarch in a seasonal family of other months. It is a month of endings, of putting finishing touches on a summer in full bloom. School-age children become restive. The activities that seemed so attractive in February have become dull and predictable. Some parents have become even more restrictive and long for the school routine to be all over again. They are delighted that soon the teachers will take over.



But to the produce gardener, August signals the slow conclusion of another attempt to harvest vegetables worthy of the ‘homegrown’ label. He gets much joy and pleasure in reaping the backyard bounty of zucchini, tomatoes, yellow squash and early corn, onions and radishes. When picking, canning and freezing are completed, only a delightful eating remains. But while enjoying the pleasures of his own labour during the cold winter months, he will begin to plan, consult, and diagram for next year.

August is deceptive because there is no finality. There is only continuation. As one garden is being laid to rest another is already taking shape. For even as a bright-red sun sits briefly on a leafy-green hilltop, the beginnings of autumn are present everywhere. Anyone who rises soon after the sun and stays outdoors when it has set, suddenly feels a slight chill in the morning and evening air. This is an early warning of the cold months to come. But those engrossed and excited by bird dogs, wood smoke, and fresh cider begin an impatient countdown to full-blown autumn. It isn’t far away. Even as August is previewing autumn, its hot, humid days and cool nights remind us that, before we pass from the brighter days of October to the early darkness of November, the ‘Indian Summer’ of September is yet to come. This is August’s gift to us. This is August’s way of atoning for a month-long deception.

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AUGUST IN OUR RITE

For us, as Byzantine Rite Catholics, August holds a special place in our hearts, for it is the month when we celebrate two important events: The Holy Transfiguration of Our Lord, on August 6 and the Dormition of Our Most Holy Lady, the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary on August 15.

The Feast of the Transfiguration was introduced into the Church in the 3rd or 4th century, for St. Ephrem the Syrian (310-378) composed a sermon about it as an ancient feast. On this day, fruits are blessed. It is a pious custom whereby we express our gratitude to God for the crops of the fields.

The Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God commemorates the happy passing into eternal life of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It was introduced sometime during the 2nd or 3rd century and in the 5th century spread to the whole Church. Following the Divine Liturgy, the priest blesses flowers and herbs which are brought to the church by the faithful, who then take them home, using them in various ways as a blessed item.

Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God

"In giving birth you retained your virginity, in falling asleep you did not abandon the world, O Mother of God. You passed into life, for you are the Mother of Life, and by your prayers you deliver our souls from death."



~ Troparion of the feast

THE VERY ANCIENT, universal and profound veneration of the Most Holy Mother of God left a special mark, above all, in our Liturgical Year, which is not only rich in the variety of feasts honouring Mary, but begins and ends with her feasts. The Liturgical Year opens with the Nativity of the Mother of God (September 8) and closes with her Dormition ('falling asleep') on August 15. And although the feast of the Dormition reminds us of the sad occasion of death, nevertheless, it belongs to the joyful feasts. The services of the feast are filled hymns of joy and gladness. On this day the holy Church rejoices because the Most Holy Mother of God was transferred body and soul from this earthly life to join her Son in eternal glory; because of her Dormition we have a powerful intercessor and protectress in heaven.

The day of the falling asleep of the Most Holy Mother of God is called the Dormition in our Church, for her body did not know corruption after death, but together with her soul was taken up into heaven; hence, another name for the feast is "the Assumption" used by the Latin Rite. We have no historical data to indicate how long the Mother of God remained on earth after the Ascension of Christ into heaven, nor when, where, or how she died, for the Gospels say nothing of this. The foundation for the feast of the Dormition is to be found in a sacred tradition of the Church dating from apostolic times, apocryphal writings, the constant faith of the People of God, and the unanimous opinion of the holy Father and Doctors of the Church of the first thousand years of Christianity.

From the beginning of the sixth century, it was believed by many that the tomb of the Most Holy Mother of God was to be found in the Church of the Dormition in Gethsemane, while the Church on Mount Sion was regarded as the site of her dormition. However, to this day historians cannot prove anything certain concerning the place of her death and burial. Some believe that she died in Jerusalem, others claim that she died in Ephesus where St. John was believed to have taken her. Even today, a house in Ephesus is pointed out as the one where the Mother of God allegedly lived.



The whole tradition and faith of the Church of the first centuries regarding Mary's wonderful Dormition and Assumption of her body and soul into heaven is reflected in the Kontakion of the feast:

"The tomb and death could not hold the Mother of God, unceasing in her intercession and unfailing hope of patronage, for, as the Mother of Life, she was transferred to life by Him Who had dwelt in her ever-Virgin womb."

Divine Liturgy 101: Our Blue Missal

Prayers after Holy Communion

THE BLUE MISSAL (or prayer book) that we use for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom is a wonderful source of prayer and meditation. But did you know that included on pages 80 – 87 are special prayers (printed in Ukrainian and English) that can be privately said after receiving Holy Communion? In fact, there are six different ones for various occasions and seasons during the liturgical year. Each is a prayer of thanksgiving (*the word "eucharist" comes from the Greek word for "thanksgiving"*) and all are meant to show our gratefulness with heartfelt warmth and feeling. And despite the fact that it instructs us to do so *immediately, after having worthily partaken of the life-giving Mystical Gifts*, it can be used in your final prayers (as suggested by Fr. Stepan) before you exit the church, and at your own pace.

Here is the one in English found on pages 85-87:

Lord Jesus Christ our God, may Your holy Body bring me everlasting life and Your precious Blood forgiveness of my sins. May this thanksgiving bring me joy, health and gladness. At Your awesome second coming make me, though a sinner, worthy to stand at the right hand of Your glory, through the intercession of Your immaculate Mother and all the saints. Amen.

So, if you haven't already come across this section of the missal, this is the perfect time to do so — and don't forget to include "Glory be to You, O God" three times as indicated before you begin.

МОЛИТВИ ПО СВЯТИМ ПРИЧАСТЮ

Коли гідно запричаститися животворних таїнствених дарів, заспівай зараз же з радості, щиро дякуй і тепло з душі говори Богові:

Слава Тобі, Боже. Слава Тобі, Боже. Слава Тобі, Боже.

Тоді оцю подичну молитву:

Дякую Тобі, Господи Боже мій, що Ти не відкинув мене грішного, але сподобив мене бути причасником Твоїх святощів. Дякую Тобі, що Ти сподобив мене недостойного причаститися Твоїх пречистих і небесних дарів. Алле, Владико чоловіколюбче, Ти, що ради нас умер і воскрес, і дарував нам ці страшні і животворні таїнства на благодіяння й освячення душ і тіл наших, дай, щоб вони були й мені на зцілення душі і тіла, на прогнання всього супротивного, на просвічення очей мого серця, на мир моїх душевних сил, на віру непостыдну, на любов нелицемірну, на сповнення мудрости, на додержування Твоїх заповідей, на збільшення Твоїї божественної благодаті і на присвоєння Твого царства; щоб я, охоронюваний ними в Твоїй святості, завжди пам'ятав про Твою благо-

PRAYERS AFTER HOLY COMMUNION

Immediately, after having worthily partaken of the life-giving Mystical Gifts, raise your voice in acclamation. Be very grateful and recite the prayers to God with heartfelt fervor.

Glory be to You, O God. Glory be to You, O God. Glory be to You, O God.

Then recite this Prayer of Thanksgiving:

I thank You, O Lord my God, that You did not reject me, a sinner, but deemed me worthy to be a partaker of Your Holy Mysteries. I thank You that, despite my unworthiness, You made me worthy to receive Your most pure and heavenly Gifts. O Master, lover of mankind, You died and rose for our sake and favored us with these, Your awesome and life-giving Mysteries for the benefit and sanctification of our souls and bodies. Grant that They may be for the healing of my soul and body and for the rout of every adversary, for the enlightenment of the eyes of my heart, for the peace of my spiritual powers, for an undaunted faith, for an unfeigned love, for the fullness of wisdom, for the keeping of Your commandments, for growth in Your divine grace, and for belonging to Your kingdom, in order that, preserved by Them in Your holiness, I may always remember