

## The Theotokos as an Initiator into the Mystery of God’s Compassion

*Your Eminence, Bishop Photii of Triaditza,  
Beloved fellow Priests and Deacons,  
Revered Brothers and Sisters—Fathers and Mothers—  
And Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ:*

**T**oday, the Grace of the Holy Spirit has gathered us together: “Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord”!<sup>1</sup>

Today, the great-voiced Prophet Isaiah exhorts us, for the second time in the month of August, to make a mystical and sacred ascent up the noetic mountain: the holy and living Mountain of God, the Most Blessed Mother of Christ our Savior, the All-Pure Theotokos.

A few days ago, we were vouchsafed to ascend Mount Tabor, where, in the Uncreated Light, amidst the pervasive effulgence of the Divine Transfiguration, we were initiated into the mystery of man’s deification.

We were shown that to arrive at a vision of God, we must climb the sacred ladder of *praxis* and *theoria*: that is, by cleansing our *nous* and heart through *praxis*—viz., the comprehensive virtues of humility, love, and purity, with unceasing prayer and constant communion of the Immaculate Mysteries—we enter all the more into *theoria*, into the experience of the illumination of our *nous* and heart. We are given a sense of our deification: that is, that the illumination of the Holy Spirit is dwelling and remains enhypostatically in our hearts, and that our being has become a temple of the Holy Trinity.



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*Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ:*

**S**ince by means of the glorious Transfiguration we were initiated into this great Mystery of our deification in the Uncreated Light of the Holy

<sup>1</sup> Prophet Isaiah 6:3.

Trinity, the divinely-trodden Mount Tabor leaps with joy and glorifies the Lord, calling upon the other Mountain—the most holy and all-radiant mountain of the Theotokos—to leap together with it, on this day, and to join it in glorification of the Name of our Savior.

In this spiritual celebration, the entire Church of Christ participates in joy and gladness, thereby allegorically fulfilling the word of the sacred Psalmist: “Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet, how will we respond to the invitation of the Prophet to ascend this second and Light-filled Mountain of the Theotokos? And what is the purpose of this ascent?

Just as on Mount Tabor, so also on the Mount of the Mother of God, we must undertake our ascent with the sacred ladder of “purity,” of “dispassionate and Divine yearning, and of spiritual and unending love” for the Immaculate Mother of God.<sup>3</sup>

When we have ascended, we will be vouchsafed, under the luminous Protection of the Mother of God, to be initiated into the great Mystery of God’s Compassion.

We will be shown that we will only arrive at the “likeness of God” and at deification when the heart of our *praxis* is compassion—when we become merciful, just as our Heavenly Father is merciful: “Be ye therefore merciful,” says Christ, “as your Father also is merciful.”<sup>4</sup> That is, become compassionate and empathetic in the sorrows and tribulations of your brother, for God is “full of pity and of tender mercy.”<sup>5</sup>

On this most holy Mountain, the Theotokos reminds us that it does not suffice for us to be merely free from animosity; rather, we must be clothed in the garment of sympathy: “put on,” the Mother of God instructs us, “hearts of mercies.”<sup>6</sup>

“Do you perceive the exactitude of the word,” asks the Divine Chrysostomos, “and that we are told to be constantly merciful? For it is not simply said: ‘be merciful,’ but ‘put on.’ Thus, just as our garment is always with us, so must charitableness also be. And it is not simply said ‘charitableness,’ but ‘tender mercy,’ that we might imitate natural loving tenderness.”<sup>7</sup>

The faithful who love the Theotokos ever hasten to the Mother of God that she might grant them this holy garment of a merciful and charitable heart. They call upon her as an abyss and wellspring of compassion; they magnify her immeasurable and ineffable sympathy; they run to the sweet

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<sup>2</sup> Psalm 88:13.

<sup>3</sup> St. Gregory Palamas

<sup>4</sup> St. Luke 6:36.

<sup>5</sup> St. James 5:11.

<sup>6</sup> Colossians 3:12.

<sup>7</sup> St. John Chrysostomos.

river and depths of her tender mercy; and they enumerate her boundless compassions towards them.<sup>8</sup>

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*Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ:*

**O**ur Holy Orthodox Church daily addresses a great and lofty salutation to the Immaculate Mother of God: “Rejoice, thou through whom we are clothed in glory.”<sup>9</sup>

But just what is this glory? It is our Lord Himself, Whom we “put on” at our Holy Baptism: “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ,”<sup>10</sup> the Divine Paul assures us.

Our raiment is radiant and royal; it is the glorious King Himself, our Merciful God, with Whom we are so united, through sacred Baptism and the Divine Eucharist, that “we live not, but Christ liveth in us.”<sup>11</sup>

Our garment, then, is Christ: that is, compassion. Thus, the center of *praxis* in Christian life is compassion. This truth, so forgotten yet so salvific, is conveyed today from the all-luminous Mountain of the Theotokos.

“Without virginity,” the St. John Chrysostomos says again, “we are able to see the Kingdom of Heaven. Without charitableness, however, it is impossible; for charitableness contains everything and is of utmost necessity. Thus, it has quite rightly been characterized as the heart of virtue.”<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, the Heavenly-minded Holy Apostles speak to us in greater detail about the way in which compassion should be expressed, lest it be reduced to a mere formal act of almsgiving to our brother.

By means of compassion to our neighbor, we become “tenderhearted,”<sup>13</sup> “affectionate,”<sup>14</sup> and “sympathetic,”<sup>15</sup> empathizing with and sharing in the sorrows and joys of our brother; we “love each other as brethren,”<sup>16</sup> become “courteous,”<sup>17</sup> that is, attentive and noble, affable and sweet; we become “kind,”<sup>18</sup> that is, good, helpful, and beneficial; in a word, we become “followers of God,” “walking in love.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *cf. Troparia* from the Great Supplicatory Canon to the Theotokos.

<sup>9</sup> Salutations to the Theotokos, Oikos H.

<sup>10</sup> Galatians 3:27.

<sup>11</sup> Galatians 2:20.

<sup>12</sup> St. John Chrysostomos.

<sup>13</sup> Ephesians 4:32; I St. Peter 3:8.

<sup>14</sup> Romans 12:10.

<sup>15</sup> I St. Peter 3:8.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Ephesians 4:32.

<sup>19</sup> *cf.* Ephesians 5:1-2.

*Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ:*

**T**he message of today's Feast of the Theotokos, interpreted for us by the All-Pure Mother of God, is that we must intensively cultivate compassion in a world filled with confusion and materialism.

By means of compassion, we bear witness to and make manifest our Christ and God, Who was Crucified and Resurrected as the innermost mystery of our being and as the sole Hope of the world.

We must urgently rediscover our spiritual identity; that is, we must go beyond "religious individualism" and return to the heart of the ecclesiastical way of existence, which is a merciful way of life. Only through our brother and together with our brother will we meet Life—Christ our Savior—and participate in the Marriage of the Lamb.

In our journey in Christ towards the Last Times, the Mystery of the Eucharist must be indissolubly bound up with the Mystery of our Brother. In our Tradition, the Eucharistic Supper is inconceivable without sacrificial service; that is, love and union with God is inconceivable without compassion for our brother.

Hence, by means of compassion, we need to remain in a state of constant vigilance and prayer, fleeing from the deadly danger of unhealthy introversion.

Whereas our environment, which is rapidly being de-Christianized, would impel us to close ourselves off in a type of "sect," Christian compassion, as a merciful way of life, cultivates genuine sociability, within the boundaries of sacrificial love and ministry to one's brother.

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*Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

**T**abor and Hermon, in the Name of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, through the Theotokos, rejoice!

The whole Church, "adorned in Divine glory" and rejoicing "with joy unspeakable and full of glory,"<sup>20</sup> obeys today the prophetic calling and ascends the Mountain of the Lord, the Immaculate Mother of God, and is initiated into the great Mystery of Compassion.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," "made of a woman," "that whosoever believeth in Him should have everlasting life."<sup>21</sup>

From the moment that the Theotokos "lent" flesh, without knowing man, to the Son of God, she became a preternatural wellspring, from which

<sup>20</sup> cf. I St. Peter 1:8.

<sup>21</sup> cf. St. John 3:16; Galatians 4:4.

perpetually flow rivers of mercy, compassion, sympathy, and clemency.

Through her, we were united to the Abyss of Mercy; by means of her, we are drenched with the Living Water of Mercy; and, through her, let us continually revive the merciful way of life, because *the world will be saved only by compassion in Christ*.

To our Savior, and to His Father, Who is without beginning, and to the All-Holy Spirit, are due glory, worship, and thanksgiving, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen!

Sofia, Bulgaria  
August 15, 2011

*†Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi*

Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos



