

Address on the Feast of Our Most Holy Lady - 2 (Archbishop Theofylaktos of Ochrid)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



This is today's feast, the event we're celebrating today, the escorting of the maiden to the Temple and her introduction into the Holy of Holies. What a strange event! What an astonishing thing it is that we hear! A little girl living in the fathomless and unseen depths of God. Even if she had no more than stepped into the courtyard, this alone would have shown her closeness to the Lord, because when God said He would not allow anyone to enter into His courtyard, He meant those who had created a rift with him. Even if they had no more than seen the Holy of Holies, that in itself would have been an indication of their boldness towards God. Even if the priest entered only once a year, that would still have far surpassed the humble position of a woman.



Yet now, Mary crossed the courtyard, passed beyond the second curtain and entered the Holy of Holies, appointed to remain constantly with God as a pledge of the future commitment of Divine Grace to human nature. In this, the Mother of God reveals herself to us prophetically and opens the way for the whole of the human

race to ascend to and enter the heavenly and true Holy of Holies. It seems that she has abrogated the Law of Moses, which, because it was unable to justify us and cleanse us of our sins, was, in effect, an obstacle to all of us as regards participation in any form of sanctity.

Of course, it was Christ Who, with Divine Grace, would justify all of us and, “when He had, by His death on the cross torn down the wall separating us and causing hatred”, would open for all of us the gates, which had previously been shut. When He had sanctified us and cleansed us with water and the Holy Spirit, He received us into the Holy of Holies. This is why He now receives the Virgin in the Temple. And what happens today to the Mother of God is, as it were, a guarantee from God of His future reconciliation with the whole of the human race.

A little child is offered because of her uprightness and lack of guile. “For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven” and “the Lord helps the innocent and looks upon the upright with goodwill”. We are speaking of woman, from whom, because of Eve, came sin, so that “where there was an excess of sin, the grace of God would be even more abundant”. And, although the woman was cast out of paradise, her nature would enter into the Holy of Holies. What did the procession symbolize? The grace of God extended throughout the world, and was not restricted to any particular place, as it would have been, according to the narrow interpretation of the Law.

What is the significance of the presence of the young girls? Members of God’s “new heaven”, who were simulating the Virgin, alongside whom they walked. Is there any symbolism in the candles they are carrying? They are the light of life, which shines so that God may be glorified; the light of knowledge, which is lit and held by strong hands, not that which seems to be held by exhausted hands from which all strength has fled, as David says: “and even the light of my eyes has abandoned me”. This is why the Holy Spirit will avoid deceit and will not dwell in a body charged with many sins [...].

Are you celibate? Guard your celibacy, which guides you and elevates you, so that “your foot shall not slip nor shall your light be extinguished”. Nor “will death come upon you, entering your house by the window”. Nor will you desecrate the sanctity of incorruptibility, which acknowledges no recall. For who shall reclaim their celibacy, even if they fast away their flesh and even if they refrain from sinful thoughts.

Are you bound by the ties of marriage? Make sure you do not blame marriage for any estrangement between you and God. Do not make stupid excuses. Joachim and Ann were married, but they were still close to God. And the strangest thing of all is that, even when they had a child, they still held firm to the same outlook. They

offered their daughter to God, and, in doing so, became the forebears of God, as a reparation. Take note of this and act properly within your marriage: “Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s and to God that which is God’s”. Love your spouse as if he or she were your own flesh: “no-one has ever hated their own flesh”. And do not cast your eyes outside your own house. “Drink from your own well”, because the wells of others are very narrow and, according to the Law, “bring sorrow to the flesh”. “Bring your children up in a manner and with advice which are inspired by the Lord. [...]

And so, may we always celebrate this feast, may be worthy of coming into the perfect Entry, into the Holy of Holies: celibate souls, cleansed of any evil, with our souls holding bright lights burning the oil of charity. May we enter “where Christ entered before us and for our sake”, our aid the Mother of God herself in both our intentions and actions. It is she who has made us worthy to receive her numerous favours and who now sanctifies us with her feast and enables us to sense the beauty of the All-Holy and Eternal Trinity, of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the only God, to Whom belong all glory, honour and worship, now and for ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

How easily the last words of Archbishop Theofylaktos roll off our tongues. Many of us who are Orthodox say them at least once a day. And how easy it is to forget that once they were a death warrant and, indeed, still are in some parts of the world today. “Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the only God, to Whom belong all glory, honour and worship, now and for ever and unto the ages of ages”. People were martyred for saying this in the first three centuries after Christ’s birth. “The only God”, they proclaimed, rather than “Yes, I believe in a god who is one of many and it’s all good”. Reports have been gradually filtering into the press lately of the numbers of new martyrs who have suffered at the hands of extremists in various parts of the world. In the last century, it was mostly Communists who killed Christians. Now it is others. May the Mother of God, the feast of whose Entry into the Temple we celebrate today, intercede for their salvation and our protection. WJL.