

His Eminence
The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend
Bishop THOMAS



Archbishop of New York and
Metropolitan of
All North America

Diocese of Oakland, Charleston,
and the Mid-Atlantic

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE
OF NORTH AMERICA

August 2020

Beloved brother Hierarchs, Reverend Clergy, God-fearing Monastics,
and all my Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ our True God:

I greet you as we celebrate these most joyous feasts, the Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos! These feasts coincide with the holy fast of the Dormition, and appropriately so, since we are accustomed to preparing for great feasts of the Church through the necessary and salvific ascetical practice of fasting.

Both feasts allude to the goal of the Christian life on earth - union with Christ and the triumph over death. The achievement of these goals comes through our participation in the ascetical practices of the Church (fasting, prayer, and almsgiving) and our movement along the spiritual path of purification, illumination, and theosis. In a homily on the Transfiguration, Saint Gregory Palamas indicates the manner in which we are to participate in this divine transformation:

That same Inscrutable Light shone and was mysteriously manifest to the Apostles and the foremost of the Prophets at that moment, when [the Lord] was praying. This shows that what brought forth this blessed sight was prayer, and that the radiance occurred and was manifest by uniting the mind with God, and that it is granted to all who, with constant exercise in efforts of virtue and prayer, strive with their mind towards God. True beauty, essentially, can be contemplated only with a purified mind. To gaze upon its luminance assumes a sort of participation in it, as though some bright ray etches itself upon the face.

The feasts of the Transfiguration and the Dormition of the Theotokos are meant to encourage us and remind us of why we struggle, why we joyously take up the sweet yoke of the Dormition Fast in order to move from image to likeness.

There is only one path to salvation, and it is the one trod by Christ the Lord and imitated perfectly by His most holy mother, the Theotokos. May God grant you humility and wisdom to follow the path that leads to life.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bishop Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rt. Rev. Bishop THOMAS (Joseph)
Auxiliary Bishop, Diocese of Oakland, Charleston, and the Mid-Atlantic

"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11: 26)

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