

Holy Transfiguration Day 2014

Dearest Beloved Fr. Philip, Fr. Peter, Brethren and Sisters in the Lord,

I am so pleased once again to greet you on the occasion of your church name day – The Holy Transfiguration Day, which we decided to celebrate together today.

I also greet you for your wisdom and great vision to accept this name for your beautiful church. Truly to say, I feel the divine power of the Holy Transfiguration on us and our lives.

Therefore, as your vладыka, I would like to remind you of the words of St. Apostle Peter who was a witness of the Holy Transfiguration. In his second epistle he said, “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His Majesty”.

This brief statement is a reference of the remarkable event that occurred on Mount Tabor - The Holy Transfiguration of our Lord. According to the Webster Dictionary the word “transfigure” means “transform into something more beautiful or elevated”.

It is in this context that we come today to our Tabor, to the light that is uncreated, the Light which emits from God Himself, the Light that illuminates all things.

The lesson now is how and when you and I as Orthodox Christians who struggle to accept Christ in our lives, can transfigure ourselves so as to enjoy the godly communion with Him.

Allow me to share with you my thoughts: How and when can we share with others the vision that was granted to the Apostles Peter, James and John upon Tabor? How can we recognize not only the divine light that shone upon the mountain, but also the disciples of our Lord so that they were seeing Moses and Elias, whom they had never met? How can we not stumble in our attempts to understand the Lord but to pray to Him, to follow Him to the best of our ability, to become true disciples in this sinful world and to reach our own transfiguration by His Grace?

I think we can do that when in difficult moments of great pain and trial where human weakness give way, we as Orthodox Christians do not act, do not speak, do not think about disbelieving and doubting God. On the contrary, we bear humbly with prayer and accept and respect the Lord's holy will as He wishes and knows best to express in our lives:

When you, our young Orthodox Christians are indifferent to the hedonistic, (earthly pleasures), and flesh worshiping practical theory of the world, then you overcome the filth of the many and various temptations.

When with God's grace you practice self-restraint and remain clean from obscene spectacles and news, deeds and words, but also from unclean thoughts.

When you remain chaste until your marriage, you increase thusly the spiritual sense in your souls and also deepening the holiness of your relationship as future husbands and wives.

When you marry in the Church with consciousness and fear of God, you consider this holy mystery as the divine blessing for the beginning of your new life, of your family. In this manner, you lay strong foundation for the happiness of your married communion.

When you, our young Orthodox Christian couples living in moderation and devotion, you abstain from extra-marital relationships as well as from illicit pleasures within the marriage. This increases your respect for one another, your love and the unity of Christ between you.

When with patience you "carry each other's burdens", you obey one another.

When you offer to your children, not only with words but with deeds as well, advice for a spiritual life, you thus guide yourselves towards the obedience of the Church in fear of God.

When you, our Orthodox Christian women don't heed the various contemporary, foolish and humanistic "feminist" messages that make you turn to easy, egoistic solutions to life's various problems. Such solutions are opposed to God's will and

are sought in order to satisfy your own will, so that you have an easy life in the world with bodily comfort.

When you detest the vain prosperous life, the "dolce vita", the illegal pleasures, then you avoid with a fear of God the various bodily sins that separate you from the grace of God.

When you shut your ears to the devilish voices that urge you to turn to abortion then you refuse to go through with this terrible crime, coping with all the difficulties of life and being faithful in God. Because you know that life, our life, our children's lives or the life of our fellow men doesn't belong to us. It belongs to God. You also turn away from abortion because you prefer the holy eternal law of God and not the ephemeral, illegal laws of atheist, selfish men.

Thusly, you avoid this greatest sin of abortion from which the soul is left deserted from the grace of God. Moreover, you avoid the consequences of terrible remorse of conscience and the huge psychological traumas that are aroused within you. Instead of these you receive God's blessing in your house and your profit from His happiness and joy in your personal life.

And finally, when you as an Orthodox Christian mother raise your children, that God sends to you, according to God's faith and advice, you accept with happiness and thankfulness His holy plans for you and your family.

When you as a regular Orthodox Christian struggle, then you want to live an honest life with consistency and responsibility, first towards God and your conscience and then towards your fellow men.

When you avoid every obvious or not so obvious illegal profit, then you avoid every sort of disgrace, every evil deal.

When you refuse to deceive brethren and sisters; but when there's a dilemma, you prefer to be deceived rather than to deceive.

When, always with discretion you offer yourself to the service and relief of your fellow man who is in need of assistance. Thusly, satisfying God himself, according

to the patristic words: "If you have relieved your brethren or sisters, you have relieved your God".

When you struggle and long to find ways and time to speak with God. When you do not neglect your regular prayer, but even sacrifice a part of your relaxation for it.

When, generally, with attention and study of the holy writings, you put forth every effort and endeavor in all the virtues, so that living in repentance you satisfy God and try not to distress Him even in the least with works, words or thoughts.

This is the struggle for our transfiguration that our Holy Orthodox Church proposes to all of us. Indeed, she proposes and recommends it mostly to you, our young brethren and sisters, who being young, have pure desire and creative energy for something great, real and beautiful in your life.

Indeed, the struggle for transfiguration in Christ fits in such souls. In souls with drive, desire and decisiveness, all of which are elements that exist in the pure souls of the young. Souls which can love strongly, sacrifice whatever valuables they possess: souls which can ignore enemies and obstacles and can struggle for victory.

Young people's souls can and must feel joy, deeply, truly. They must enjoy the only real happiness of Christ. In this happiness they must live their lives. They must taste His peace and His love. They must not waste themselves on the vanities and on the fake, cheap "pleasures of the passions, of the world and of the devil. These will quickly destroy the liveliness and beauty they received from their Creator. This struggle for transfiguration in Christ will bless their lives, the lives of all of us and: will release us from the evil of our malicious inertness; will enrich us with the virtues of Christ; will sweeten us with penitence; will bring us the salvatory memory of death and our judgment; will fulfill us with the desire of His eternal Kingdom, of our desirable Land; will guide us to the perfect liberation from the opinions of this world; will make us worthy of deification.

So, let us hope that the Philanthropic God will illuminate and will transfigure us. He will help us to mature spiritually and will make us happy and living members of His holy body.

Let us pray with the words of St. Nikodimos the Hagioritis, "Lord, treat me as You wish, whether I like it or not". Amen

It is a pious Orthodox custom to offer fruits to be blessed at this feast; and this offering of thanksgiving to God contains a spiritual sign too. Just as fruits ripen and are transformed under the action of the summer sun, so is man called to a spiritual transformation through the light of God's word by means of the Sacraments. Some saints, (for example – Saint Seraphim of Sarov), under the action of this life-giving grace, have shone bodily before men even in life with this same uncreated Light of God's glory; and that is another sign to us of the heights to which we, as Christians, are called and the state that awaits us – to be transformed in the image of Him Who was transfigured on Mount Tabor.