



Finishing Our Course

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. (I Corinthians 9:24-25)

Anyone who has ever run a race (or watched one) knows that the ending is very important, for in order to complete the race, we must cross the finish line. Each year on September 1/14, we begin our spiritual race: the Church's Liturgical Year. A whole spiritual cycle starts which we follow from beginning to end. During the month of August the Church celebrates the last two Great Feasts of the Church Year: The Transfiguration of the Lord and the Dormition of the Theotokos.

Just as the goal of our lives is to work out our salvation with God's help, we also hope to draw as close to God as possible in this life. The Feast of the Transfiguration (August 6/19) is for us an image of the

Divine Uncreated Light shining through the humanity of the Incarnate God upon Mt. Tabor. Just as our Lord said 'These things I do, so shall ye do...' many saints and righteous ones have experienced this Uncreated Light.

St. Seraphim of Sarov is one of the most well-known in this regard. When his disciple Motovilov asked St. Seraphim how he could know whether he was truly in the Grace of the Holy Spirit, St. Seraphim prayed, placed his hands on Motovilov's shoulders and told him to look at him. Motovilov beheld a strange sight: St. Seraphim had become brighter than the sun! He could not bear to look at him. Then St. Seraphim said to him, 'How do you feel now?' And Motovilov answered, 'Extraordinarily well...I feel such calmness and peace in my soul that no words can express it.' Although we may not have quite the same experience that St. Seraphim and Motovilov had, we can receive inspiration from the Lives of the Saints and the Divine Services of the Church.

St. John Maximovitch once said that the Liturgical Year begins with the Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos (September 8/21) and ends with the Dormition (Falling Asleep) of the Theotokos (August 15/28). Not only are Orthodox Christians called upon to honor the Most Holy Mother of God on this occasion of her translation from this earthly life to the heavenly life; but there is a great mystery for us to contemplate.

"...the Mother of God receives the glory which belongs to God and is the first among human beings to participate in the final deification of the creature. God became man, that man might become God. (St. Athanasius the Great)...The glory of the age to come, the last end of man, is already realized, not only in a Divine Hypostasis made flesh, but also in a human person made God." (from *The Meaning of Icons*) Our Lord promised us "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." John 14:3

The Mother of God offers us a glimpse of her ineffable glory and the first-fruit of the Church's eschatological consummation that is the spiritual heritage which awaits all faithful Orthodox Christians when Christ returns in His Second Coming.