

The Most Holy Theotokos

According to Saint Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain

Presented in San Francisco, October 6, 2012 by CZ

Your eminence Archbishop Kyrill,

Holy Fathers, Deacons, monastics, guardians of Our Myrrh streaming Virgin Nectary, brothers and sisters, Christ and His Mother are in our midst.

Our Most Holy Mother will always be with us because, although totally unworthy, we belong to the generations of Christians who call her blessed. Our presence here at Our Lady Joy of All Who Sorrow Cathedral, with St. John (Maximovitch) of Shanghai and San Francisco, continues to fulfill the prophetic words of her magnificent ode, after the Annunciation: *“Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed!”* And even though we belong among the most sinful generations of Christians, her miraculous and ever so fragrant presence among us validates and

justifies the early melodist of our holy Church:
*“During Birth you preserved your Virginity and after
your Dormition you did not abandon the world O
Theotokos.”*

What could be greater proof for this truth! For the past five years, she has blessed us with the paradisiacal myrrh of her Son. She anoints us with the heavenly fragrance of the Holy Trinity, the *oil of gladness*, according to the 45th Messianic psalm of King David. Yes, we can boast in the Lord, His Mother and *our* Mother Church, the pillar and foundation of the Truth! Only in Orthodoxy do we taste Paradise in this Life! We see, smell, taste, touch, and live the majesties of God with our body and soul! Emmanuel, God with us! At the same time, we are saddened by the orphanage of millions of non-Orthodox Christians around us, because they have never truly felt the warm embrace of such a majestic mother—the sweet kiss of our celestial mother. The

myrrh, pouring from this icon that our impure lips come in contact with, is the sweet kiss of our Glykofilousa—the sweet kissing ever Virgin Mother.

The holy Virgin's distant forefather David, the prophet and king, beautifully captures what we have been experiencing not only this weekend, but for the last five years with her miraculous myrrh steaming presence. Approximately 3060 years ago, he wrote about the majesties of the Messiah, His Bride the Church, and the Theotokos—the Virgin Mary—because our Virgin Mother is synonymous with the Church—and I quote:

“Therefore God, your God has anointed you with the *elaion aggaliaseos*, with the oil of gladness, more than your companions.”

What a stunning prophecy about the hidden mystery—hidden before all ages! Oil is material, and anointing can only take place in the physical world! A spirit cannot be anointed with oil! What God can

be anointed? The God Who would be betrothed to His physical creation. The God Who would assume a physical body, in time. Therefore “God, your God has anointed you” ... refers to the human nature of Christ.

The devil hid this verse from Arius and his contemporaries who fought the divinity of Christ. Remember, the Triune God addressed Jesus Christ as God approximately 3060 years ago! The next verse is equally astounding... “All your garments are scented with myrrh, aloes and cassia... All your garments are perfumed with Myrrh...” This is a phenomenal prophesy about the companions of Christ: the Virgin Mary, first and foremost, and all the Holy Virgins that she will lead to the palace of the king, according to the same psalm. We all have been sanctified and covered our spiritual nakedness with the garment called Christ! *For as many of you have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ*, according to Saint Paul.

Adam and Eve were clothed with a God-woven garment, an immaterial garment, the garment of the Uncreated light... But after their tragic disobedience, they lost that fragrant garment, and they were dressed with the skins of dead animals. They lost the fragrance of Paradise, and they chose the stench of death and corruption... Our predecessors' ill use of the gift of free will removed God from the center of their lives, so to speak... Yet, the love and the longing of the Hypostatic Wisdom was to live with men... One of the titles of Christ in the Old Testament is the Wisdom of God. "I the Wisdom (with capital W) was beside Him as a Master craftsman, and my delight was with the sons of men..." we read in the eighth chapter of Proverbs.

I am not giving out verses anymore... this is a good way to get some of you to read that whole Chapter.

Several weeks ago I was speaking at one of your parishes, The Holy Apostles in Beltsville Maryland and we had a most pleasant surprise ... Metropolitan Ilarion stopped by to visit and stayed for the presentation. I protested and tried to convince him to teach, but I was unsuccessful. I was stunned by his simplicity and humility...With such leadership, it is no wonder God is blessing you with miraculous icons...I tried again to persuade him to speak after my talk, and he said very few words. Yet he was the real teacher that evening. He taught all of us by his simplicity and humility. May God grant him and all your hierarchs many years! One of his comments that evening was that we Orthodox are lazy in reading the Scriptures... So I thought from now on it would be a good idea to provide (only) the chapter, and those who love the word of God enough, will read through the chapter to locate the verse.

So, the delight of the Wisdom—Proverbs, Chapter Eight—was to wear garments and live with the sons of men. This was the *kat'evdokian*—the prior or primary will of God. God created the entire Universe through His Master Craftsman, Wisdom—His Word and beautified it to share His love with us. The rebellion of Adam and Eve left the Wisdom homeless. Sin, death, and corruption insulated nature from God. He needed to borrow His initial physical garments from this physical world, but there were none compatible with the brilliant purity of God. According to St. Gregory of Thessaloniki, God cannot touch anything unclean, and the fall made the world unclean. The garments of man were full of blood, treachery, and evil.

According to the church Fathers and St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, the Incarnation of God was independent of the fall. The Wisdom would incarnate regardless of the fall. The ultimate purpose

of man is to reach theosis, and this could not take place without the hypostatic (personal) union of the two natures of Christ. Thus, the prior or primary will of God was to incarnate and live with His creation. The delight of the Wisdom was to live with the sons of men.

His foreknowledge of the fall pre-eternally worked out a few minor adjustments. My elder and teacher, Athanasios Mitilinaios, calls this *the concessionary* or *secondary* will of God. This is extremely important especially for those converts who may struggle with the western doctrine of predestination. The foreknowledge of God does not contradict the concept of man's free will. God predestines with His primary will but He economizes—He mends—the bad choices of man's free will with His Secondary will. For example, the primary will of God was for Adam and Eve to stay in

the garden without sin, then mankind would increase and multiply in an angelic manner.

In view of the fall, however, in view of that tragic ancestral sin, God's foreknowledge pre-installed a sort of a safety net called gender, or marriage. So marriage between a man and a woman is that safety net that safeguards man from the inherited consequences of that early fall. Virginity and purity were the primary will of God, the state of His Kingdom. Marriage is certainly blessed by God, but it is His secondary will, and as such, it will not exist in the Kingdom of God where only His primary will shall prevail.

While preparing these lines, I glanced through the first chapters of Genesis and at the end of every creating day, God used the refrain: *and God saw that it was good*. He does this for all natural creation but not for mankind.

There we read: *So God created man in His own image; male and female He created them.* Here the refrain *and God saw that it was good* is missing.

At the end of the same Chapter, however, we read: *Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.* This *very good*, according to St. Nicodemos, who often quotes Saint Gregory Palamas and Saint Maximos the Confessor, includes the contribution of our Most Holy Virgin. Her amazing virtue and purity would work in a synergistic action with God to reverse Adam's fall. Her words *Let it be done to me according to your will* would repair Adam's ill will. God had His eyes on her and through her the renewal of man when He said everything was indeed very good.

The sin perpetuated by Adam and his descendants made the Wisdom homeless, incapable of acquiring His garments, His human nature. He needed a House according to the ninth chapter of

Proverbs: Wisdom has built her house. She has hewn out Her seven pillar. ...The house and real Temple of the Wisdom was Mary of Nazareth. Wisdom needed a sinless virgin to cloth Himself, so He could give birth to His Bride, the Church, to establish Her with the seven pillars—the sacraments of the Church—and to cry out: Come, eat of my Bread and drink of the wine I have mixed with water!... That water is the Zeon that our altar boys carry to the liturgist priest.

None of these mysteries could take place without the *Let it be done according to your will* of our Fragrant Virgin.

Please forgive me if I exhausted some of you with this lengthy and perhaps too theological introduction, but this knowledge will help us somewhat understand our saints' preoccupation with, admiration, and adoration of the person of the Most Holy Theotokos. ... The Great Gregory, the second theologian of our Church, sharply warns Kleidonios

and all his followers past and contemporary: “Anyone who does not call Mary Theotokos—Birthgiver of God—is separated from divinity—he is godless...” very strong language from this otherwise very sensitive and most meek theologian.

Rightfully then and most befittingly, Saint Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain concludes that only one person in human history surpassed the spiritual height of even the angelic world. According to this holy Father, all creatures communed “only of God’s energy, while our Lady received in herself, hypostatically, the second person of the Holy Trinity, ending up mainly and truly Theotokos ... setting to prove that according to the volition and foreknowledge of God, the Theotokos was the most purposeful and utmost end of the entire creation.”¹

¹ Theoklitos Dionysiatis, *Saint Nicodemos the Hagiorite*, 2nd Edition, pp. 250.

Naturally, the teaching of St. Nicodemos echoes the holy patristic teaching on the most Holy Theotokos, the teaching of the Church. The Saint's most fervent eros of soul for the most Holy Theotokos is parallel to the deep love and the deep piety all holy Fathers felt towards the venerable person of the Mother of the Lord.² Moreover, this is axiomatic in the area of Orthodox hagiologion: One cannot be a saint without first being a lover of the Mother of God. The theology of the Theotokos of Saint Nicodemos is the result of the profound piety, love, and personal experience of the Saint, who lived and was in constant occupation with her name. According to the verbal tradition of his contemporary monks, the Most Holy Theotokos would often appear to him and tell him: "I bless you, my child Nicodemos, and strengthen you to write."³

² Ibid., 245.

³ Ibid., 248.

Of course, all the saints (precisely because they were saints) with their strong spiritual vision discerned that the Most Holy Theotokos drew the love of God, and she became very beloved and desired of the only desired One because of her universal holiness. However, even the Saints confess their complete inability to approach, even partially, the bottomless ocean of the mystery of her ever virginity. Basil of Seleucia writes relatedly, “How can I dare to investigate the virginal ocean and depth of the great mystery, unless you O Theotokos teach me, the inexperienced swimmer that I am, to cast off the old man corrupted from the deception of desire?”

Saint Nicodemos’ great love for the person of the most Holy Theotokos drove him to be insatiably occupied with her name, with the blessedness, and

with all the majesties which the Mighty One did for her (Luke 1:49).

The saint wrote in his Theotokarion, which includes 2450 hymns to the Virgin, full of contrition and read in our monasteries daily, “[from all the creatures] she only from birth became by disposition completely unmoved towards evil. She had **forever** put to death the passionate inclinations of the three parts of soul [noetic, appetitive, and irascible] for she gave birth to the Creator of all and (to) a man crucified in the flesh.”⁴ In the interpretation of the Ninth Ode, Saint Nicodemos continues to develop his theology of the superior worth of the Theotokos compared to the rest of the created world of people and angels, “*The Virgin Mary, with her ultra supernatural purity in all her life and especially during the period of the twelve years in the Holy of*

⁴ Theoklitos Dionysiatis, *Saint Nicodemos the Haghiorite*, pp. 187.

Holies, was deemed worthy to become Mother of the Son and Word of God Himself.”⁵

And the Saint continues, *“Who else was more theoretical* and capable to transverse into the mysteries of heaven more so than the Theotokos; no one, from the ranks of Angels or men more than her, understood the majesties of God.”⁶*

Yet in our recent theology, especially in the academic area where the Protestant influence has been intense, we may hear the expression “the first after the One” distinguishing the intellectual and theological profundity of the “mouth of Christ” of the Apostle Paul. The Apostle of the Gentiles certainly was a vessel of grace, a chosen vessel, a tireless servant of the Word.

But the holy living Tradition which saves the Church from this sort of intellectual theologians

⁵ St. Nicodemos, *Garden of Graces*, pp. 196.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 195.

through the centuries, singles out one theologian par excellence who is “higher than the heavens and purer than the rays of the sun” according to St. Nicodemos, who summarizes the universal consciousness of the Fathers of the Church by attempting to appraise the unrepeatable and forever unique person of the Theotokos. As St. Nicodemos expounded in his confession of faith,⁷ in Orthodox theology “the first after the One” is our Virgin Mother, and the Orthodox views of the Kollivades (Saint Nicodemos, Saint Makarios of Corinth, and Athanasios Parios) stressing the need for continuous holy Communion and concerning the performing of memorials on the appointed day of Saturday and not Sunday created storms in the souls of the 18th century “zealot and uneducated monks of the Holy Mountain” resulting

⁷ Saint Nicodemos, *Handbook of Counsel*, Athens 1987, pp. 314.

in him being slandered with rage for twenty-two years.⁸

The sacred community of the Holy Mountain, naturally, justified and acquitted the Saint from this unsacred war, whose cause was a daring hypothesis in the footnotes of his newly published book, *Unseen Warfare*,⁹ which said, “*With every right the Holy Triune God, enjoyed and greatly rejoiced before the ages foreknowing according to His divine knowledge, the Ever Virgin Mary. Because it is the opinion of certain theologians that if we were to assume that all the nine ranks of angels would be torn down from the heavens and would become demons, if all of the people from the ages would become evil and all go to hell ... With all of this, all these evils compared to the Theotokos’ fullness of holiness would not be able to sadden God, because the Lady Theotokos alone*

⁸ Krikonis Chris., *Saint Nicodemos the Haghorite, Life and Written Work*, Athens 2001 pp. 125.

⁹ See. Theoklitos Dionysiatos, *Saint Nicodemos the Haghorite*, pp. 246.

would be able to please Him in all and for all. ...she alone loved Him above all, because she alone obeyed His will, above all, and because she alone was capable and receptive of all those natural, optional, and supernatural gifts—which God distributed to all creation ...”¹⁰

All these gifts of the Most Holy Theotokos are listed in the content of his interpretation of the Ninth Ode where the insatiable longing of the Saint is poured out, *“Oh most sweet in person and in name Mariam, what passion is this that I feel in myself? I cannot get enough of the praises of your majesties! For the more I praise them all, the more I desire them, my longing is forever kindled, and my desire becomes insatiable ...”¹¹*

In the passage “for He looked upon the humility of His handmaiden,” Saint Nicodemos underlines the

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Saint Nicodemos, *Garden of Graces*, pp. 214.

depth of our Virgin's humility and footnotes, "The Theotokos did not only have the depth of humility rooted in her heart, but as from a spring springing forth, it flooded all the external members of her all pure body ...". In her whole demeanor, in her movements, in her words, and in all her inner character and appearance, her humility shone like the sun ... Generally speaking, the presence of the Lady Theotokos radiated so much divine grace and respect, that, whoever first gazed upon her, received in his soul such reverence and compunction ... even from that initial glance one knew—merely from her external character—that she truly is the Mother of God ...

St. Dionysius the Areopagite, like all the saints, had great love for Christ, his Lord. When he was informed that Christ's all pure Mother was still alive, he travelled from Athens to meet her. When he first gazed upon her divine countenance and her amazing

and royal beauty, not to mention all the angels who were encircling her as a queen, he was dumbfounded... finally upon hearing the godly words of her all pure mouth, he was amazed and awestruck, confessing that her physical character and appearance alone proclaimed her to be the Mother of God.”¹²

The Lady fully possessed the God-woven garment of humility. Although she was chosen to be the true Mother of God and queen of all creatures visible and invisible, she addressed herself as the slave of the Lord at the annunciation of Archangel Gabriel with the most natural ease.¹³ The more a soul is purified and perfected, the more she feels her weakness and unworthiness. Such was the depth of the Ever Virgin’s humility that she considered herself unworthy to be the servant of the Virgin of Isaiah,

¹² Ibid., 204.

¹³ Ibid.

who would give birth to the Messiah according to our host, St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco (Isaiah, 7:14).¹⁴ Also some teachers consider “that the Virgin, out of her great and unparalleled humility, did not reveal the annunciation of the Archangel Gabriel to her betrothed Joseph, so that she might not seem boasting and proud, but she left God to inform him from above.”¹⁵

Some of the personal majesties of the Theotokos are her relative sinlessness and her personal struggle. According to Saint Gregory of Thessaloniki, as a little child, the Theotokos in the Holy of Holies invented the “noetic action” and was the inventress of noetic prayer and noetic hesychasm, “for through the return of the *nous* to the heart and everlasting prayer, she was elevated above each form and shape and thus

¹⁴ Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco, *The Orthodox Veneration of MARY the birthgiver of God, California*, 1996, pp. 65.

¹⁵ Saint Nicodemos, *Garden of Graces*, pp. 205.

constructed a new path to heaven—noetic silence—through which she ascended above all creatures and envisioned the glory of God more perfectly than Moses, saw divine grace which cannot be captured by the senses, but is a most graceful spectacle of angels, monks, and of pure souls.”¹⁶

St. Nicodemos in his book *Garden of Graces* continues with the “majesties that the mighty One has done for her”:

1. God foreknew her and fore chose her before all creation to serve in the mystery hidden before all ages.

She is the distillation of all seventy-seven generations of the righteous, before and after the law, from Adam all the way to Righteous Joachim according to Saint Basil the Great.

¹⁶ Saint Nicodemos, *Garden of Graces*, 195.

2. She is the acrostic of every prophet and the beginning of all the prophecies beginning in Genesis.
3. She is the mother of Grace before the time of grace.
4. He has made her wider than the heavens for having contained the Uncontainable God in her womb.
5. The majesty of all majesties was the supernatural conception of God the Word, Who did not grow in her womb according to the common laws of developmental biology. Saint Basil teaches in his Christmas homily that “the Infant formed itself instantly and not by small divisions [of cells and blastomeres]...” The saint is suggesting that in the absence of gametes and ova, there was a different kind of development, not so different from that of the Old Adam. The Master

crafting Wisdom fashioned the Old Adam out of clay. Once again, 2000 years ago the same Master-crafting Wisdom fashioned His garment, His human nature from the all pure blood of the Virgin, and the King of all was seen for the first time by the Archangel Gabriel during the Annunciation according to the Theotokion of the first tone, “While Gabriel was saying rejoice to you oh Virgin, at the sound of the voice the Master of all was incarnating. ... The Virgin carried the tiny Infant which continued to grow naturally for nine months without any birth pains and without any feeling of weight or exhaustion.

6. Finally, she gave birth to the One through Whom all was made without any change and corruption. She preserved and maintained her virginity during this supernatural birth and for the rest of her life, since she was totally

devoted to the primary will of God, which preordained virginity. In the absence of this crystal clear patristic Orthodox theology, our non-orthodox Christian neighbors struggle with the brothers of Jesus for centuries now and very recently have slipped to the sad point of ascribing carnal thoughts and even a marriage to the Son of God, Whom they obviously no longer accept as One with the Trinity. This is nothing other than the spirit of the Antichrist according to Saint John the Divine. The Orthodox position is that the hypostatic union of the two natures made Jesus totally immune to any worldly desires and temptations. Jesus was the only true man who never deviated from the perfect will of God as the Father proclaimed during Epiphany and Holy Transfiguration: “This is

my beloved Son with Whom I am well pleased.”

According to Saint Nicodemos, the Lady Theotokos continued her personal struggle after her Son’s Resurrection and Ascension, “The Lady Theotokos strove honorably to also struggle after the Ascension of her Son, with fasting, prayers, prostrations, and with every kind of ascetic struggle ...”¹⁷

In the passage of the ode “and my spirit rejoiced in God my Savior” the Saint summarizes the Church’s teaching on the Theotokos’ relative sinlessness. He Who would save the world from its sins also saved the Theotokos from the ancestral sin, because although the Theotokos was higher than every voluntary sin, forgivable and mortal ... she was, however, subject to the ancestral Sin until the Annunciation. Then she was cleansed of this through

¹⁷ Ibid., 217

the coming of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁸ Saint Nicodemos places her ever-virginity, Resurrection, Translation, and Ascension in the Kingdom of the Heavens,¹⁹ in the supernatural majesties of the Theotokos.

Saint Nicodemos in his book, *Garden of Graces*, includes Saint Augustine’s testimony on the Theotokos’ inconceivable worth, “If the great Creator God, Who brought everything into being from non being, was able to make more perfect creatures, of course, He was able by being Almighty; three things, however, God Himself could not do more perfectly: the humanity of Christ, the birth-Giving worthiness of the ever Virgin Mary, and the everlasting glory of the Blessed ones.”²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid., 200.

¹⁹ Ibid., 213

²⁰ Ibid., 214. In this homily of the Sacred Augustine Saint Nicodemos observes that Augustine classifies the “everlasting glory” in the creatures and footnotes: Perhaps the Sacred Augustine called the everlasting glory a creature, not in and of itself, far be it! For it is uncreated, as a natural and inseparable energy of the Divine Essence.

In the light of the above, we cannot agree with the opinion of some theologians in the Orthodox sphere who claim that the Virgin's mediation or intercession, as they hasten to call it, does not differ essentially from the intercession of other saints. It is known that a few decades ago, the Tradition of the Church of Christ which prays "Most Holy Theotokos save us" was doubted. Only God, they say, saves. The All Holy Virgin Mary can only intercede like every saint.²¹ Certainly, the Church prays "by the intercessions of the Theotokos, Savior save us" but also chants "and I have you as a mediatrix towards the philanthropic God," and since our Lady is "More Honorable than the Cherubim and incomparably more glorious than the Seraphim,"—"the Saint greater than saints,"—"God after God," all this implies that her intercession—her mediation—is

²¹ Mavromatis George, *She is Truly Theotokos*, pp 190.

incomparably higher than that of the saints and angels.

It seems the danger of rationalism and humanism continues to lurk in the Orthodox world today. This danger was much greater in the age of Saint Nicodemos because the Orthodox lands were impoverished by the enslavement to the Ottoman Turks. The “saved” missionaries of Protestantism “were running rampant in the forsaken vineyard of Balkan Orthodoxy attempting to save the Orthodox.”^{22*} Perhaps this is why Saint Nicodemos puts forth an excellent argumentation for the superior mediation—intercession—of the Virgin Mother to her Son and God. The Saint begins his apology from the inspired canon of Pentecost “...look, he argues,... the melodist did not say that the Virgin gave or granted, or another such word, but that she lent flesh to the Creator of all, she gave a loan to the Word of

²² See. Theoklitos Dionysiatis, *Saint Nicodemos the Haghiorite*, pp. 251.

the Father... This implies that the Theotokos, through such a loan, made the Son of God a debtor to herself.”²³ The Saint further elaborates that this was a loan of a different type and irrelevant to the “external” loans of money and objects which are usually returned with interest in the commercial world. The loan to the “All-crafting Wisdom of God” was inner and everlasting, and with no prospect of repayment. The hypostatic union of Christ is irrevocable since God the Word will be endlessly united with the human nature (a loan from the All Holy Virgin Mary) because this presence of human nature makes him the ontological Mediator between Creator and creature, God and man. Without the presence of human nature, the “impossibility of the Old Testament Moses to see God” would be prevailing until today. As a result, those various

²³ Ibid., 250.

heretics who set the boundary for the work of Christ's salvation at Golgotha and those who argue that the body of Christ dissipated during the Ascension are delirious! Far be it! Saint Nicodemos would say, who further theologizes: "What can we conclude from this? Since the Son of God is permanently indebted to His Mother, for this reason first He needed to glorify her with all the Godbefitting glories and honors unknown to another creature; secondly, since the loan He received from her is endless, He must now endlessly fulfill the petitions and requests of His Mother..."

And the *Theotokifilos* Nicodemos continues, "Did you ever see such glory, my beloved? Did you see the majesties of the Virgin? Hasten to her with piety and faith and your prayer requests in all matters of salvation will be answered."

Your Eminence, the love and compassion of the Queen of heavens knows no boundaries according to this wonderful story from St. Cosmas the Aetolian.

According to St. Cosmas, a certain Christian named John surrendered to the evil path of thievery. He became the captain of a band of an hundred thieves, but he also had great reverence for the Mother of God, which he probably inherited from his pious home. He never failed to pray the salutations to our all holy Mother, morning and night.

Soon enough, the mercy of God, through the intercession of the Panagia, the all holy Virgin enlightened a holy ascetic to visit this band of robbers and preach to them the word of salvation. He convinced the captain, John, to summon all his followers, and the clairvoyant ascetic saw that one was missing. “Who is missing?” he asked. Indeed, the cook was missing. The ascetic requested his presence, and this cook upon his arrival refused to

look at the man of God in the face. The holy ascetic ordered this strange cook: “In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to tell us your name and where you come from...” He replied, “I am the master of lies...but now that you have bound me with the Name of Christ I am forced to tell the truth... I am a demon and my master sent me here to serve Captain John, eagerly waiting for that first day that he would skip his prayers to the Mother of God, so I can take his soul straight to hell. I have been here for fourteen years and he has never omitted his ‘Rejoice Bride Unwedded’!”

The ascetic distanced the demon to the other side of the world, and then he evangelized the thieves who showed exemplary repentance. Some became monks, and some were married and lived very pious lives.

Your Eminence, my brothers and sisters in Christ, this story beautifully exemplifies the love of our Lord and His mother for every sinner. There is

nothing more precious to the Lord on this earth than a few drops of tears from a contrite heart. Even one tear of true repentance outweighs a ton of good works done in the absence of repentance.

EPILOGUE

Your Eminence, the par excellence theological title, which renders the All Holy Virgin Mary's position in Orthodox theology, is Theotokos. The term Theotokos goes directly to the heart of the Christological dogma and, due to this, it was natural for it to be contested by a number of heretics, who distorted different aspects of the Christological doctrine and the hypostatic union of God the Word.

In the Church's conscience, the Theotokos is classified as the "bulwark of faith" and as an unshakable term, it comprises a formidable fortress against all Christological heresies.²⁴ In the unanimous teaching of the Fathers, the name Theotokos is unbreakably associated with the soteriological consequence of the name Theanthropos, and the Theotokos, as a term and as a person was, and remains throughout the centuries the anchor of salvation "of those who kiss her venerable icon." Alongside the title of Theotokos, the Fathers and teachers of the Church validated the title ever Virgin Mary in the Fifth Ecumenical Council in the Ninth Canon, formulating the correct faith about Christ, "incarnated of the holy glorious Theotokos and Ever Virgin Mary" as the Liturgy of the Sacred Chrysostom preserves till today.

²⁴ Theodoropoulos Epiphanius Arch, *The Akathist with Interpretation*, Athens 1988, pp. 174.

The multitude of prophecies, depictions, types, and symbols of the Most Holy Theotokos in the Old Testament proclaim the unrepeatable person of the All Holy Virgin Mary, truly making her the “ladder, bridge, and gate” of mankind’s salvation. In his work “Eortodromion” Saint Nicodemos conducts comprehensive commentaries interpreting the hymnographers and melodists throughout the centuries who “borrowed” from the prophetic word for the interweaving of their hymns for the Mother of God. Extending the theology of the Fathers, Saint Nicodemos declares that the “center, end and purpose of the whole law, all the sayings and enigmas of the prophets is the Theotokos herself, and before her, God the Word Who incarnated from her.”^{25*} Like other Theotokos-loving Saints, Nicodemos used a large part of his writings to express his insatiable

²⁵ Saint Nicodemos Haghiorite, *Eortodromion*, pp. 233.

longing for the “incomprehensible miracle” of the Mother of God.

Interpreting the Ninth Ode, St. Nicodemos theologizes on the superior worth of the Most Holy Theotokos vis-à-vis the other creatures. The Theotokos exceeds every creature in purity, brilliance, simplicity, inexpressible longing, and perfect obedience to the will of God. So the gifts of the Theotokos make her “full of grace” before the Annunciation and Mother of grace before the time of grace, Pentecost. With the “behold the handmaid of the Lord” the all holy Virgin Mary was cleansed of the Adamian stain and “became spotless and undefiled” to serve the mystery of “rebirth” lending her all pure blood to the new Adam.

The indwelling of Christ in the virginal womb of the Theotokos graced her and deified her to an incomparable degree in relation to any other creature and, according to Fr. Athanasios Mitilinaios, He

made her the ontological mediatrix between the human race and the new Adam, her Son, although this may sound excessive to some.

The Most Holy Theotokos certainly saves because according to the davidic psalm, she is the Queen who is standing at the right of the King, her Son, Who sits “at the right of the Father” in the kingdom of the heavens.

Most Holy Theotokos protect us, shield us, and save us from the fiery darts of the evil one through the prayers of our holy Hierarchs. Amen.

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