

WEEKLY MEDITATION

LEAVETAKING OF THE DORMITION

The account of the Dormition of the Mother of God comes down to us as a family story, a product of the kind of intimate family storytelling that gets told at a wonderful family dinner or get-together. It is 'family lore'. This is a very reasonable way to think about church tradition and the manner in which church tradition can function. Those who knew and cherished the Theotokos passed on important information about her within the household - the big extended family - of faith, and they in turn have passed on this information (and their reflections on this information) down to us.

At the heart of this memory is the way in which we talk about her death. We refer to it as a 'dormition' - which means a 'falling asleep'. Our hymns speak of her death as an act of life. This is a paradox from the point of view of this world, but it is the practical meaning of the Resurrection. Her death was a movement, a translation from this passing world directly into the Kingdom of her Son and God. The festal icon shows her lying in death, surrounded by the apostolic community, as her soul is received into the arms of Christ. In this way the death of the Theotokos is held up as an example and the true pattern for Christian death - a death that is a falling asleep to this world and a waking into eternal life, alive in Christ.

Her falling asleep is the first-fruits, the beginning of the manifestation of the power and hope of the Resurrection and our life in Christ.

Fr. Andrew