

"A Spiritual Contest to Break Friendships"

A monk had a dream one night that he was invited to a wedding feast. At the head table was a long forgotten friend whom he hadn't seen in years. As the monk greeted the groom, he noticed that bride was not present. Concerned he asked about the bride. Just then, his friend turned toward him and fire began pouring out of his mouth and the monk awoke from his dream.

As the monk pondered the dream he was at a lost for its' meaning. Then he realized that evil was disguised as an old friend in the dream. God opened his mind to see all of the sins that the monk had befriended. As the Church enters the month of August, we are called upon to make a break with any "friendships" with evil that may have been made. As with any change the Church guides us lovingly and firmly by leading us by an example - the All Holy, ever -virgin Theotokos.

On August 15th we remember the death of the ever-virgin Theotokos. As with all "remembrances" in the life of the Church, more than recalling an event - we enter into it.

To enter into the experience of the death of the most perfect member of the Church a preparation is indispensable if we desire more than a superficial experience. The first fourteen days of August are known as the fast of the Dormition. The Church presents us the time honored pillars of repentance as She always does during spiritual contests. We are free to chose whether or not to enter this contest, however, if we chose not to the lost is ours.

Pillar #1 Fasting

* No Meat or Dairy products. * No wine or oil. *Eliminate television, newspapers & movies. WHAT'S INSIDE THIS ISSUE OF THE OASIS?

Pillar #2 Prayer

Besides a call to change our eating habits we are also challenged to greater prayer. Every time we feel the urge to eat, God ought to be remembered and called upon in prayer. The Jesus Prayer, "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me" should become a daily companion that keeps our souls in Christ. Establish a daily devotional time and stick to it as best as you can. Pray to the Holy Spirit to teach you how to pray. Seek God's wisdom and guidance by reading daily from Holy Scripture.

Pillar #3 - Alms Giving

A spiritual contest without rewards is a failure. Virtues come from knowing our vices and repenting of them. The sacrament of Confession ought to be sought so that guided

by the Holy Spirit the contestant may find appropriate healing. If while pursuing to renew and deepen our relationship with God we brake-off from sin then Gods' Holy name will be blessed. Having taken one step closer to His Kingdom the blessings of entering into the end of the life of Mary shine upon us.

The life of the Theotokos teaches that judgment will not be based upon miracles performed but upon a relationship sealed.

The life of the Theotokos reflected a loving and faithful relationship with her son. Her love and devotion to Christ never ebbed or faltered. She was faithful to her son in everything. When we approach our end and stand before the judgment seat of Christ. We are not going to be asked how many times did we feel the Holy Spirit work in us; or how many times did God use us for his good? The question before each of us will be how faithful have we been in bearing our "cross" to know and love God?

The "cross" is our war with sin that each of us must wage if we are to be "known" to God. By entering into the contest of the cross, old friendships with evil end and the door to Gods' Kingdom opens before us. Destructive habits and attitudes inhibit us from approaching and entering into a loving relationship with Christ.

Whether it's pride, anger, greed, self-love, jealousy, sarcasm, laziness or lust; these vices cripple our souls and lives from approaching the King of Glory.

The fourteen days of August have been planted for us to reap the harvest of a renewed life in Christ. Humility, gentleness, patience, godliness, devotion, faithfulness, watchfulness and love are the signs of this new life in Christ.

Come, see and participate the beautiful evening services at which the most perfect member of the body of Christ stands before her Son on our behalf and intercedes for us. Our souls are dead when they are not being fed by the goodness of God. The goodness of His love he pours upon us unconditionally. Unconditionally, he accepts all who worship Him with a pure and devoted heart. The only thing conditional about our relationship with God is us.

It's conditional upon whether or not we concede to enter into the contest of August. It's up to us whether or not we want to cleans our souls so that we may become pure and love God as He has loved us.

The pillars of repentance are the keys to braking away from evil and entering into Gods' Kingdom.

In Christ's Love,
Fr. Andrew