

His Eminence  
The Most Reverend  
Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend  
Bishop THOMAS



Archbishop of New York and  
Metropolitan of  
All North America

Diocese of Oakland, Charleston,  
and the Mid-Atlantic

## ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA

August 6, 2018

Beloved brother Hierarchs, Reverend Clergy, God-fearing Monastics, and all my Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ our True God:

I greet you as we celebrate these most joyous feasts, the Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos! These feasts coincide with the holy fast of the Dormition as well as the new ecclesiastical year which is just around the corner.

Most importantly, these two great feasts lead us to the very heart of Orthodoxy-union with God through His energies and our ascetical efforts. These two feasts also remind us that ultimately this is our purpose and goal in life-experience of the Uncreated Light and full participation in the life of Christ. If we are to experience the glory and salvific power of this Light that purifies our souls, we have to cooperate. We have a role to play.

The Transfiguration and the Dormition of the Theotokos are also instructive for us in another most important fashion, they provide examples of theosis-union with God. Saint Ephraim the Syrian describes the Most Holy Theotokos in these words, “I do not say that Mary became immortal, but that being illumined by grace, she was not disturbed by sinful desires.” (Homily Against Heretics, 41) The holy father continues in another work, “The Light abode in her, cleansed her mind, made her thoughts pure, made chaste her concerns, and sanctified her virginity.” (Mary and Eve)

In the Transfiguration, the Lord Jesus Christ manifests His glory to three of the Twelve. Why these three and not the others? According to Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos in his work “The Feasts of the Lord”, he states that these three were the most prepared to receive the revelation of the glory of God.

We know from Sacred Scripture and holy Tradition that the Most Holy Theotokos prepared herself to receive the Word through ceaseless prayer and ascetical practices in the Temple. In other words, Peter, James, John, and the Most Holy Theotokos experienced the Uncreated Light because they had first exerted the ascetical effort in purification and illumination to make such a glorious experience possible.

Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos sums this up for us in writing about the Transfiguration. “The theology of the Transfiguration is integrally connected with the method we must use to experience this great light, and the Orthodox faith is connected to Orthodox hesychasm, because when one is disconnected from the other, then we arrive either at metaphysics or external ethics, which do not save man.”

*“The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11: 26)*

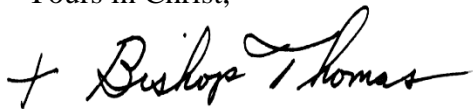
4407 Kanawha Ave. SE, Charleston, WV 25304-1734  
(724) 787-9832 Phone  
Bpthomasjoseph@gmail.com

This is precisely why these two feasts are so important for us as Orthodox Christians. Their exposition provides us with the foretaste of the glory awaiting us if we are willing to undertake the tried and true ascetic methodology of Orthodoxy which is necessarily linked to noetic prayer of the heart-the Jesus Prayer.

The keeping of the Commandments is a necessary first step along the path of purification but it is only the first step.

As we continue on the path of our life's journey, let us maintain our focus on the true goal of this earthly life which is nothing less than union with God. May the thrice holy God bless you and the Most Holy Theotokos protect you always.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bishop Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

Rt. Rev. Bishop THOMAS (Joseph)

Auxiliary Bishop, Diocese of Oakland, Charleston, and the Mid-Atlantic

*"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11: 26)*

4407 Kanawha Ave. SE, Charleston, WV 25304-1734

(724) 787-9832 Phone

Bpthomasjoseph@gmail.com