

Dormition – The Falling Asleep of the Mother of God

Youth Group Session Seven

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Let us begin today by reading pages 57 – 65 in your book.

You may be confused about the words “falling asleep”. When a person dies the Orthodox Church says they have fallen asleep. That does not mean that they will wake up the next day! Their life here on earth is over, but because Christ died on the cross we have the chance to live forever with Him in heaven if we live the best life that we can.

The prayer on page 65 is very important, let’s write it down here:

In learning about Mary’s falling asleep and assumption, we learn about her personality and why others loved her. What are a few words used to describe Mary in this chapter?

By reading that God witnessed Mary’s falling asleep, we know that death can be a beautiful and blessed event, not something to be afraid of. In fact, when we remember Saints in our church, we remember the day that they died, not the day that they were born. By learning about Mary’s death we get another example of the fact that death is not something to be worried about. Even at the end of her life, Mary was not worried about her death. Instead she was concerned about the people that she was leaving here. What did she tell the people who came to see her before she died?

What did she call the day of her death?

What were some special things that happened during the falling asleep of the Theotokos?

When St. Thomas was sad because he missed Mary's funeral, what did she say to him when she appeared with the angels?

The Theotokos has promised to pray for us and be with us always.

Orthodox Memorial and Burial Services

We have learned about the falling asleep of Mary the Mother of God. We learned how beautiful death can be when we live our life the way Jesus tells us to. Today, we are going to learn a bit about how Orthodox Christians commemorate the dead.

The church teaches us that when we die we have the chance to live with God forever. In the end, God will judge every person and if we have acted the way that He wants us to, He will allow us into heaven. Heaven is not somewhere "Up there" or a place high in the sky. We can't get there by traveling in a space ship or by building a really high tower. We don't know for sure what heaven looks like or who will be there. The important thing to know about heaven is that it is the place where God is -- just like Adam and Eve in paradise. Do not be confused, God is always with us but when we die, if we go to heaven it is the closest we can get to God and his glory. In heaven we don't have to worry about any of the things that bother us, or scare us, or make us nervous. Heaven is also a place where we will meet up with people who have died before us. All of the saints will join us in heaven.

That is why in our Orthodox memorial services (panahydas or parastas), we hear "with the saints give rest O Lord" and "with the souls of the righteous departed".

We here on earth are the _____ which means that we are still fighting the good fight as Christians. Those who have died and have gone to join God are the _____ . Together we make "The Church".

What do we mean when we say that we make "the Church"? As Orthodox Christians we believe that "the Church" is more than just the building where we have our services every week. "The Church" is all of the Orthodox Christians. We are one family in the Holy Spirit. This is why we continue to pray for those who have departed this life and they pray for us.

Dr. Albert Rossi and Fr. John Schmichik explain it like this, "Heaven is the place where we will know and be with God and with all of those who also wanted to know and be with God forever. We are reminded in the Gospel of St. John that "this is eternal life" to know God and Jesus Christ (17:3). To know and be known, to be with God always are what it means to be "remembered eternally" (thinking here of the final hymn -- "memory eternal")."

Have you ever heard the hymn in church Memory Eternal? What did you think it meant? Do you understand it better now?

In the Orthodox Church we often celebrate panahyda's on the 40th day after someone dies. We can also ask our Spiritual Father to hold a panahyda or parastas at anytime for a loved one. Can you think of another time we may want to pray for a loved one who has died?

What are some other ways we can honor or remember the dead?

We also recently discussed intercessory prayer. Do you know what a theologian is?

A theologian is someone who studies the teachings of Christ and helps us understand them. Father Schmemmann, a great Orthodox theologian, used to say "to love is to remember." In the Orthodox Church we remember people, and show that we love them by praying for them.

We can pray for those who have left us and they in turn can intercede for us! We also remember the dead during the Proskomedia (preparation of bread and wine for Divine Liturgy.).

Wrap up the lesson and review what was discussed.

At this time you may do any of the following:

- Have a short discussion time about the material or for teenagers an open Q & A.
- Review and discuss the icon of the Dormition
- Present a copy of the icon of the Dormition to each participant
- Give time for a snack and short break for the participants to play games
- Move right into the next activity
- End the session in prayer to the Theotokos, "Hail Mary Full of Grace". This prayer should be used for the remainder of the lessons.
- Add their worksheet to their worksheet binder

Have the participants use the remaining time to work on their mosaic icons.