

THE INDIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH (The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church) Catholicate of the East



Diocese of Ahmedabad



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By His Grace,
Dr. Geevarghese Yulios Metropolitan

Soonoyo Fast and Feast

Dearly beloved faithful!

Every year, the month of August invokes us to the Dormition Feast of Virgin Mary, Mother of God, with fasting and special prayers. On this auspicious occasion, we would love to share some thoughts on the theme: "Btsulto Mariam- Virgin Mary"; may her prayers be with us always and may her memory be glorified for ever!

When talking about St. Mary, the words in the thoughtful array have no limit. It's certain that Mary has been given many attributes. Nevertheless, poetically none of them complete the portrait of such a holy figure! But with a more wider theological perspective, the attribute "Theotokos", draws a near to perfect sketch of Virgin Mary; the Holy Triune God being the only perfect in this universe.

In order to celebrate the Feast on 15th August, the canonical-liturgical year calendar proscribes a fast for a fortnight days from August 1st till 14th. This fifteen days fasting period is duly observed in all the Oriental group of Orthodox Churches & few other sister churches. This feast has got significant & mystic reflections! The Dormition or falling asleep or Departure of the Theotokos is a broader concept of study in Mariology.

A fasting time before this important Feast helps the individual to revalidate his/her devotion & loyalty towards the Lord. In the race of advancing in the worldly possessions, we humans get so burdened that we fail to quench for the divine possessions that ultimately set us free. In this swing of materialism, when we pause to observe the fast, by meditating & honoring the 'Holy Theotokos', our lives get prepared with a repenting heart, which according to the psalmist is the apt sacrifice in God's sight.

The life of St. Mary from the very childhood till falling asleep or dormition sets a divine paradigm for contemplation. St. Ephraim the Syrian says that: "To honor the Mother of God is to unlock the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem!"

Pope Saint Pius X once quoted: "Let the storm rage and the sky darken – not for that shall we be dismayed. If we trust as we should in Mary, we shall recognize in her, the Virgin Most Powerful 'who with virginal foot did crush the head of the serpent'."

So, when the church glorifies her blessed remembrance, they with her strong intercession to the 'Fruit of Her Womb', are blessed and freed from the chains of material drives to work merrily in the heavenly vineyard & reap the fruits of spirit and thus crush the desires of our adversary!

The falling asleep of Theotokos is also a mystical episode! No human can enter the Eternal House of Lord, unless he/she leaves the body that belongs to this world and raise in spirit that bears God's sign. Here, setting aside all the natural laws, the Theotokos was taken to the heaven with her body while sleeping! The heavenly armies marched ahead with triumph & in great astonishment! O how marvelous is the one who bore God to the earth, dwells as queen of Heavens in the eternal Kingdom!

Further, the Dormition reflects that the Mother of life cannot taste death! The one who was chosen to yield the 'Life Giver' to this world stays calm at her final hour! According to the humanistic living, the final hour of life is the moment tending to death. It's the most disturbing melancholic moment we scare to face. But taking the Feast of Dormition of Holy Theotokos, we learn with her blessings to calm the storms of death that may devastate our soul. Death may not be the one referring to return to the soil but also the moment which kills the drive within to do God's wishes.

In the entire range of Old & New Testament period, Mary has been addressed. The burning bush, fleece of wool, the thicket etc, all metaphorically bring Mary into the light. Thus the role of Holy Theotokos in bringing forth to us the salvation is knowledgeably made aware to us through the divine studies & writings of our holy Church Fathers or teachers. And with them, we too extol: "Hail Mary, full of grace! Our Lord is with You, blessed are you among women, And blessed is the fruit of your womb!"

Again our beloved, we enjoin you to observe the Fast and Feast of Dormition of Holy Theotokos with due preparations & faith. Pray for us & for the betterment of our church. In our humble prayers you all are remembered. May the prayers & blessings of the Holy Theotokos be a strong refuge for all.

Yours Shepherd in Christ,



By His Grace, Dr. Geevarghese Yulios
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