

September 5 OEI Sermon

Hello. This is Met Moses on behalf of the Saint John of Damascus Orthodox Educational Initiative.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Not long ago we celebrated the feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this feast our Lord revealed His Divine-Human nature in the glory of His uncreated energies before the eyes of Saints Peter, James and John.

We believe that our Lord is true God and true Man, one Person in two natures, as the fathers of the Fourth Ecumenical Council taught:

“Following the Holy Fathers we teach with one voice that the Son [of God] and our Lord Jesus Christ is to be confessed as^[SEP] one and the same [Person], that He is perfect in Godhead and perfect in manhood, very God and very man, of a reasonable soul and [human] body consisting, consubstantial with the Father as touching his Godhead, and consubstantial with us as touching his manhood; made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted; begotten of his Father before the worlds according to his Godhead; but in these last days for us men and for our salvation born [into the world] of the Virgin Mary, the [Theotokos] according to his manhood. This one and the same Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son [of God] must be confessed to be in two natures, unconfusedly, immutably, indivisibly, inseparably [united], and that without the distinction of natures being taken away by such union, but rather the peculiar property of each nature being preserved and being united in one Person and subsistence, not separated or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only- begotten, God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, as the Prophets of old time have spoken concerning him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ hath taught us, and as the Creed of the Fathers hath delivered to us.

What He was, our Lord remained, that which He was not He put on for our salvation. The Person of God the Word put on *all* aspects of our human nature, save sin. He became in all things like unto us, save sin uniting the two natures “unconfusedly, immutably, indivisibly, inseparably.” Our Lord is the God-Man.

Think of that. Our Lord did not unite Himself with the angelic nature in this way. He united Himself to our sinful, debased nature. He is uniquely united to our human nature for all eternity. He became Man so that lowly sinful men and women who repent from their sins and turn to Him can be renewed by His divine grace and become gods according to grace, gods, not by nature, but by participation in His divine energies. This is not pantheism, the saints do not partake of God’s essence, but rather the saints partake of God’s uncreated energies and thus are transfigured.

The first Sessional Hymn of Matins for the feast beautifully expresses this :

*Thou wast transfigured on Mount Tabor, * O Saviour, showing the exchange * that all mortal men will make * with Thy great glory at Thy dread * and second and fearful coming, O Christ our God. * Hence, Moses and Elias * did speak together with Thee, * and Thou didst call together * Thy three blest disciples, O Christ, * and as they gazed upon Thy glory, O Master, * they were amazed at Thy blinding brightness. * O Thou Who then didst shine Thy light upon them, * O Lord, enlighten Thou our souls.*

At the dread and fearful Second Coming of our Lord, there will be those who partake of this “exchange” and are transfigured and deified by grace in unspeakable joy. Conversely, from the words of our Savior we know also that there will be those who will be engulfed in the darkness of the captivity of their own sins.

Our Savior came to set us free from sin and illumine us and sanctify us and transfigure our lives. We begin this life of Transfiguration by being baptized and partaking of Holy Communion. By baptism we enter into the life of sanctification, but as we grow and mature, we must follow His call and, ascend the mountain of the virtues, leaving behind the sinful ways of the world. In this context “the world” signifies the collection of the various passions.

Our Light and our Savior, became Man and lived in the midst of men to set us free from sin and to transfigure us and illumine us in all aspects of our humanity and the details of our life. When we gaze upon an icon of the Transfiguration we should consider this mystery and strive to cooperate with God and transfigure all aspects of our life.

The foundation of such a life is prayer and remembrance of God. One also must examine one’s habits and how one spends one’s time. Today’s media driven culture projects the life of self-indulgence and slavery to the passions as something natural and good. Almost everything in the media is repugnant to an authentic Christian life.

The act of a calculated withdrawal and separation from popular culture and the media can be described as the beginning of the ascent of the mount which leads to a transfigured life. Again, it is how we manage our thoughts and how we manage our time that determines whether we live in the light of the Transfiguration or if we still remain in the darkness of sin. These ideas are foundational to what we are trying to achieve in offering instruction in Natural knowledge in our efforts at the Saint John of Damascus Orthodox Christian Educational Initiative. Prayer first, then clarity of thoughts, good habits and management of time are integral to a Christian education.

The saints are our examples and guides. For example, although we do not know all of the details, we do know that Saint Gregory Palamas was thoroughly educated in the traditional methods we seek to imitate. After this, he embarked on a life of genuine monastic silence and prayer. Saint Gregory made such progress that his peers on Mount Athos called him the “child elder.” When the time came he used his practical training in natural knowledge together with his experience in divine vision to defend the Orthodox faith. It was Saint Gregory who more than all of the Holy Fathers explained the workings of grace and the light of the Transfiguration.

Our efforts at the Saint John of Damascus Educational Initiative is to alert and awaken everyone to the possibility that, if they so choose, we will strive to provide the opportunity for them to peer into the intellectual culture of the confessing saints and apologists of our Church and deepen their knowledge.

God the Word became the God-Man for us, becoming like unto us in every way. In response to this, let us seek to enlighten every aspect of our being.

Our Lord Jesus once taught:

... thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:29-31)

Love God with all of your heart, soul and strength by applying your mind to greater understanding so that you can help your family (neighbor) remain steadfast in the faith.

For those of you who have children who attend the parishes that perform the services in the Greek language, one of the greatest goods that you can give your child or grandchild is to provide the opportunity for them to learn ecclesiastical Greek. The banquet of faith that is provided in the hymns of the Church provides nourishment only to those who understand what is being said. One can stand in the services and say the Jesus Prayer and still be profited, but the amazing and rich hymnography found in the Orthodox Church was written to teach, edify and stir our hearts.

For the sake of your children, I entreat you to consider enrolling your child in the Introduction To Ecclesiastical Greek provided by the Saint John of Damascus Orthodox Christian Educational Initiative.

<https://orthodoxlearninggoc.com/greek/>

May God grant you all the fullness of natural and spiritual wisdom in Christ.
Amen.