



## Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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### Giving Thanks to the Lord in Hell November 23, 2025

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### Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory Forever!

**Giving Thanks to the Lord in hell.** (Community Thanksgiving Service, 11/23/2025)

#### Philippians 4:

*[11] Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. [12] I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. [13] I can do all things in him who strengthens me.*

- Text, greeting, title:
  - Giving a title to the sermon is not something we usually do in the East. Every sermon is a proclamation of the Word of God and the saving Grace of His love and the offer of His forgiveness.
  - For what it's worth, I never titled the lectures I gave at the university either. I told the students that everything I said to them was important and to be taken down in notes; of course they didn't believe me, but I said it anyway.
  - What is Thanksgiving? Giving Thanks to the Lord in hell.
- As human beings we excel in producing hell on earth
  - Hell is wherever and whenever we choose not to be one with, not to unite with, God.
- Hell: Gulag: 1929 to 1955
  - A vast system of prison camps, primarily for political prisoners
    - Some 30,000 camps in Soviet Union
    - Almost as many as in Nazi Germany (44,000)
  - The Assault Upon Heaven is what we call it in the East
    - 18,000,000 prisoners passed through them

- 1,700,000 or more died as the result of the torture
  - 106,000 Orthodox clergy and monastics shot outright
  - 100,000 more killed within the camps
- This was hell on earth. Perpetrated by political atheists opposed to those who acknowledged God
- It was indeed the Assault upon Heaven. It was indeed hell on earth.
- In 1942 a priest, an archpriest like me, named Fr. Gregory Petrov died and in his few effects was found a hymn of praise to the Lord that had been written by a Metropolitan (Metropolitan TRYPHON) a few years earlier, a Bishop with responsibilities over a large city or region, that is, who knew the hell that the Soviet government was inflicting on their beloved people.
- Called the “Akhathist of Thanksgiving,” a short hymn of praise to the Lord for His mercy. Akhathst is from the Greek meaning, “not sitting,” so typically this hymn is chanted in church antiphonally between a priest and people standing, facing east.
- How can one give praise to the Lord while being tormented in a concentration camp? How can one give thanks to the Lord when one is in the hopeless arena of hell on earth?
- First Hymn of Praise: Kontakion 1:
  - *Incorruptible King of all ages, holding in your hand every path of human life through the power of your saving Providence. We thank you for all the good things You do, those we know and those we don't know, for earthly life and the heavenly joy of Your Kingdom to come. Hold us in Your mercy now and ever, we who sing: Glory to You, O God, unto ages of ages.*
- From there, the foundation of his prayer of praise,
  - He acknowledges His creation in the Image of God:
    - *Into the world I was born as a weak, helpless child, but Your Angel spread wings of light over me, guarding my crib. Ever since then, Your love lights all my paths, wonderfully guiding me towards the light of eternity. Gloriously, the generous gifts of Your Providence have been manifest from the very first day. I am thankful to You and with all who have come to know You, call out: GLORY TO YOU, WHO CALLED ME TO LIFE. GLORY TO YOU WHO HAVE SHOWN ME THE BEAUTY OF THE UNIVERSE. GLORY TO YOU [EVEN] FOR EVERY SIGH OF MY SADNESS.*
- Onward. To thanksgiving for God's presence in the beauty of creation:
  - *The sky is a deep vessel of azure with the sound of birds; the rustling sound of the forest. ... Every flower is fragrant through the power of the Holy Spirit.. GLORY TO YOU FOR THE DEPTH OF YOUR WISDOM REFLECTED IN THE WHOLE WORLD ... GLORY TO YOU FOR THE HOPE OF IMMORTAL, IDEAL, INCORRUPTIBLE BEAUTY.*
- And by the time of the 5<sup>th</sup> stanza of praise, he addresses the tension of light versus darkness:
  - *The storms of life are not frightening to one in whose heart shines the light of Your fire. All around the weather is bad – there is darkness, horror and the howling wind. But in the soul of such a one, there is peace and light. Christ is there! And the heart sings: Alleluia!*
- He goes on in his great praise of thanksgiving to God, the Holy Trinity:
  - *You can set aright those whose conscience has become decayed ...*
  - *Through the icy link of the ages, I feel the warmth of Your Divine Breath; I hear the flow of blood. You are already near; time has partly vanished. I see Your Cross – it is for my sake. My spirit is in ashes before the Cross: where there is a triumph of love and salvation, and unceasing praise unto all ages: Alleluia!*

- *Many times I have seen the reflection of Your glory on the faces of the dead. What unearthly beauty<sup>3</sup> and joy shone from them; how ethereal and immaterial were their features. This is the triumph of happiness attained, and peace, as they silently call upon You. At the hour of my death illumine my soul too as I call: Alleluia*

- *GLORY TO YOU FOR EVERYTHING, O DIVINE TRINITY, ALL BOUNTIFUL. GLORY TO YOU, O GOD UNTO AGES OF AGES.*

- **Gratitude. Thanksgiving. Evcharisteo** in Greek, from which we take the English Eucharist.
- Let us give thanks to the Lord our God! Begins the most sacred time of our Divine Service on a Sunday morning. Let us give thanks!
- How is such thanksgiving even possible? Explicitly shown in the Akhathist of thanksgiving:
  - **First**, like Fr. Gregory Petrov, we must realize the true nature of our situation. We cannot save ourselves. We cannot extend the length of our lives by one second by wanting it. We cannot even live in peace with others. Surely, the situation in our own country at the moment is enough to show the turmoil of life. The rich grow richer. The poor are overlooked and cast aside. Those who come seeking a better life are rounded up like feral cats and thrown out to face their doom without aid. And there is nothing we can do. We wait, and watch as those around us suffer and as the clock ticks on. We are helpless.
  - **But second**, if and only if we acknowledge the reality, the supreme goodness, the love without end or prejudice that is given to us through the Grace of the All Holy Spirit – not only in the massive or great realities like forgiveness and eternal salvation, but in every breath, every sign of light and life... Then, and only then, can we be thankful in and through all things.
- Glory to God for all things! Glory to God in and through all things!
- In the final hymn of praise, the last Kontakion of the Akhathist, may each of us say in the true meaning of this most beautiful of national observances,
  - *O all bountiful and life-giving Trinity, accept this gratitude for all of Your mercies and make us worthy of Your Divine gifts so that having multiplied the talents given us, we may enter into the eternal joy of Our Lord with victorious praise: Alleluia!*

Fr. Elias

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