



The Church of the Protection on the Nerl River. Bogolyubovo, Russia. 1165.

The Epistle and Gospel Readings at the Liturgy on the Feast of The Protection of the Most Holy Theotokos

THE EPISTLE OF THE HOLY APOSTLE PAUL TO THE HEBREWS

9:1-7

The Earthly Sanctuary

¹ Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary.

² For a tabernacle^[2] was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary;

³ And behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle, which is called the Holiest of All,

⁴ Which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's^[3] rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant;

⁵ And above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

⁶ Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services.

⁷ But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance.

(New King James Version, 1982)

1. Theotokos — from the Greek, *the Mother of God*
2. Tabernacle — from the Latin, *tent or hut*. A tent sanctuary used by the Israelites before the construction of the First Temple in Jerusalem by King Solomon (approx. 1000 B.C.).
3. Aaron — a male name of unknown Egyptian origin. Aaron was the first high priest of the Hebrew nation, Moses' older brother. Subsequently all true priests had to be descendants of Aaron.

The Feast of the Protection of the Most Holy Theotokos was established in the XII century by the holy Prince Andrei Bogolyubsky, the grandson of Vladimir Monomakh. This feast commemorates the X century miraculous appearance of the Mother of God in Constantinople at the Blachernae church. It was in this church that the robe, veil, and part of Her belt were kept after having been transferred there from Palestine in the V century.

During the All Night Vigil, when the city of Constantinople was surrounded by a large enemy force, the Fool for Christ St. Andrew saw the Most Holy Lady moving through the air surrounded by an assembly of angels and saints. She then entered the Royal Doors, shed Her veil and spread it over the people praying in the church, thus signifying protection to all Christians from enemies both visible and invisible. By the intercession of the Most Holy Theotokos, the enemy retreated from the walls of Constantinople.

In Russia, churches in honour of the Protection of the Mother of God began to appear in the XII century. The church of the Protection on the Nerl River is world-renowned for its beautiful architecture — it was built in the year 1165 by Prince Andrei Bogolyubsky. In 1561, Tsar Ivan the Terrible built the cathedral of the Protection of the Theotokos in the center of Moscow on the Red Square (known also as the church of St. Basil). After the Revolution, churches in honour of the Protection of the Most Holy Theotokos also began to appear abroad. One such church, for example, was built in 1964 in Palo Alto, California by the faithful of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.

The Most Holy Mother of God always spreads Her protective veil over all Orthodox Christians and implores Her Son Jesus Christ to grant us eternal salvation.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT LUKE

10:38-42

Jesus Visits Martha and Mary

³⁸ Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village^[2]; and a certain woman named Martha^[3] welcomed Him into her house.

³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary^[4], who also sat at Jesus^{'[5]} feet and heard His word.

⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore, tell her to help me."

⁴¹ And Jesus answered and said to her, "**Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things.**

⁴² **But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.**"

11:27-28

"Blessed are Those Who Hear the Word of God and Keep It"

²⁷ And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!"

²⁸ But He said, "**More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!**"

(New King James Version, 1982)

1. In the Gospel reading cited above, the words of Christ are in boldface.
2. Bethany – a village located several kilometers from Jerusalem.
- 3 & 4. – Martha and Mary were the sisters of Lazarus who was raised from the dead by Jesus Christ on the Saturday before His entrance into Jerusalem.
3. Martha – from the Aramaic, *lady of the house*.
4. Mary – from the Egyptian, *beloved*.
5. Jesus – from the Aramaic, *the Saviour*.

Today's excerpt from the Gospel according to St. Luke is the one we hear regularly in church on feast days dedicated to the Theotokos. When there is a feast of an Icon of the Mother of God, the celebration of Her Nativity or we celebrate any other event associated with Her, these verses about Martha and Mary are being read. What do they teach us? We know that people have many earthly chores: one must eat, drink, prepare a place to sleep, do the laundry, tidy up... all of which take up a lot of effort and time. The Lord does not tell us that these chores are of little importance, but He teaches us that there are things that are more important. What is more important, is to devote time to one's heart, to the spiritual life.

From a sermon by Archpriest Dimitry Smirnov.
Feast of the Protection of the Most Holy Theotokos, 1989.