

The Odes of the Consecration Service

Today the visitation of Thine unapproachable glory hath prepared the temple fixed on earth for Thee as a heaven, wherein we chant with one voice: Let us sing a song unto our God.

The service of the Consecration of a Church Building reveals that God is delighted to dwell with humanity. The Incarnation saturates every part of this service. Christ is known as Emmanuel: God with us. As revealed in this service, the Incarnation is more than Christ becoming human in the Theotokos' womb. That mystery is the beginning of the Incarnation, not the whole of it. As the Epistle to the Hebrews relates, Christ participated in all of humanity, including death, to redeem those under the power of death.

Overview of the Odes

As we process around the church we sing the odes of the Canon of Consecration. These eight odes powerfully reveal that God is love. There are several themes, but we'll focus on the Incarnation as the union of God and Man as most clearly expressed through the Cross.

The first ode starts with the imagery of Baptism. Those who are baptized and chrismated have a greater revelation than Israel did while being led with the pillar of cloud and fire. The saints who lived before Christ were made perfect by the revelation of Christ and the establishment of his Church (Hebrews 11.40). When Moses saw the heavenly tabernacle on Mount Sinai, he saw the image of the Church (Ode 5), of which the earthly tabernacle was only a shadow (Hebrews 8.5).

In the Odes we repeatedly sing that the Cross is the Foundation, Sanctification, Protection, and the Glory of the Church.

Having Thee as her indestructible foundation, O Christ, the Church is crowned with Thy Cross as with a royal diadem. (Ode 3)

Not with sacrifices of dumb beasts is the Church sprinkled, but with Thy precious Blood from Thy life-bearing side; and she crieth out as is meet: Glory to Thy power, O Lord. (Ode 4)

The hosts of hostile demons quake before Christ's Church, which is signed with the sign of the Cross and overshadowed by the Spirit's sanctifying illumination. (Ode 6)

Not by the Law is the Church made fair, O Lord, neither by the stretching-out of servants' hands; but in the grace of the Cross doth she glory, while chanting unto Thee: Let us sing a song unto our God. (Ode 1)

In his death as a human, Christ is united to humanity whom he loves. In the Church, we see the unveiled glory of the face of God, a vision Moses the God-seer longed to look upon (Exodus 33.11 & 20-23, John 1.14-18).

The dwellings of the Lord are beloved unto them that long to see the glory of his countenance unconcealed, as with one voice they shout: Glory to Thy power, O Lord. (Ode 4)

Importance of Consecration

The service reveals that the particular church participates in the universal Church. Christ is pleased to dwell with this particular people, and by so doing these people are united to all those who are united to Christ.

Do Thou, the same Lord Who lovest mankind, look upon us Thy sinful and unworthy servants who now celebrate the consecration of this holy church in honor of The Church of the Holy Resurrection in Jerusalem, after the pattern of Thy most holy Church, that is, of our own body, which Thou hast vouchsafed unto us, according to Thine all-laudable Apostle Paul, to call Thy Church; and establish it immovable unto the end of time and glorified in Thee. From the Bishop's First Entrance Prayer

In the physical actions of the Consecration, the Holy Table of the Church is washed with water and anointed with oil, just as the new Christian is baptized and chrismated. Relics of a saint are sealed in the altar showing the union between the departed and the living in Christ. In the prayers we ask that the invisible powers enter into the church building and worship with us, and we participate in heavenly worship. In Christ, creation which was marred by man is made whole by man. The Second Adam plants the Tree of Life, the Cross, in the midst of Paradise, his people the Church.

In his Cross and Resurrection, Christ defeats our enemies, the demons, and grants us life.

Today hath the second Adam, Christ, shown this new tabernacle to be a spiritual Paradise, which beareth, instead of the tree of knowledge, the life-giving weapon of the Cross for them that chant: O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord.