



There Is No Death

Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

1 Cor 15, 54-55

**...We proclaim Thy mercy, we conceal not Thy beneficence...
[From the prayer of the Great Sanctification of Water]**

On the 26th of May, in Cleveland, Ohio, my mother, Parasceva Ivanovna Potapov, nee Golikov, reposed. Her physicians had predicted that she would live between two weeks and two months from the date on which her cancer was discovered. She lived exactly two weeks from the date of that oncological evaluation.

Mother accepted her sentence like a true Christian. I had the honor of administering to her the Mystery of Holy Unction; throughout the following 12 days she received Holy Communion. Every day she listened to the Paschal Canon and to other prayers. Filled with a spirit of love and reconciliation, she asked forgiveness of, and said goodbye to, friends and acquaintances, and expressed her readiness to joyously go to her eternal home. When death finally came to her on May 26th, both members of my family and the parishioners of the St. Sergius Cathedral, of which my mother had been an active member for forty years, felt a sense of joyous relief. All of her requiem services were marked by a sense of Paschal triumph. Mother was vested in the pure white baptismal robe which she wore when, during a pilgrimage to the Holy Land several years ago, she was immersed in the waters of Jordan.

During the days I was honored to spend at her death-bed, I learned more about death, and about the passage from transient life to life eternal, that I had in all of my past reading and in all of my theological courses.

On Sunday, May 29th, on the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman, mother was committed to the earth at the cemetery of Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, New York. It is on this Sunday that the Church commemorates Christ's discussion during which Our Lord revealed His Divine identity to a simple woman. During the Church service, as I listened to the Gospel narrative, I realized that through my mother, another simple woman, the Lord had revealed to us, to her relatives and acquaintances, the mystery of death and life, and the profound meaning of faith in His Resurrection and in life eternal. Her experience of death revealed to us that, for the faithful, there truly was no death, but that rather, there was life in the bosom of Abraham.

This was especially apparant in a conversation with my mother which I recorded on tape on May 21th, just five days prior to her blessed repose. Here is a portion of this conversation which was translated from Russian and printed in our parish bulletin Parish Life.

Victor Potapov:

Mother, what spiritual testament would you like to leave us?

Parasceva Potapov:

That you love one another...that you remember me, and that you have no fear. Over here is earthly life. But over there, beyond the grave...is the good life. I want you to love and cherish one another, and not to fear death. There is no death...I am not sure whether I am speaking so that you can understand...

Victor Potapov:

Your every word is precious to us...

Parasceva Potapov:

I go there joyously. With love. You will pray for me. That is what is most important to me. I have heard so much about how people go there, about what joy is there.

Victor Potapov:

To what do you attribute your calm? You show absolutely no fear; you are so full of joy. From what does this stem? From the Lord?

Parasceva Potapov:

From the Lord. It is important to me that I am to be over there, and that you feel all right. What is there to fear? Nothing that you told me about my cancer saddens me... I only rejoice...It is my wish that you, my children, feel as I do. You do not comprehend how I feel, this feeling of great love...

Victor Potapov:

Do you consider it to be God's mercy, that He sent you a difficult trial?

Parasceva Potapov:

It is my wish that this mercy might come to you as it has come to me. I awaken feeling such joy! I look at you weeping, and I become so sad. I sense that you fear for me. However, it is quite the opposite...

Victor Potapov:

No, mother, I am weeping because I am selfish, because I simple want to be with you for as long as possible...

Parasceva Potapov:

But I am still sorry that you weep. You should not weep; you are a priest...I cannot explain it to you...I feel that warmth of prayers surrounding me. Besides, Vladyka Ivan [Archbishop John Maximovich] is next to me. I do not believe myself to be worthy of this...

People telephone me to say that perhaps I should go see another doctor. Why should I see another doctor? It is too late to go. Apparently, I have had this condition [cancer] for a long time. People tell me that perhaps they should perform a surgical procedure on me. What kind of procedure? They would fill me with chemicals...But now I feel all right...and if its all right, why be downcast? There is no reason to be discouraged, since it is good over there...According to God's will, I prepared myself as best I could, I feel very good; I always wake up joyous. I sense, especially in the mornings, some kind of sweet aroma. See, you gave me Communion. Fr. Peter has visited and prayed. My children are with me day and night. What more do I need? It is very good. I anticipate joy.

Victor Potapov:

Why does this joy come to you in the mornings?

Parasceva Potapov:

I arise, and see the light of God...

Victor Potapov:

Theophanes the Recluse says that the light which we see in our earthly life...the light of the sun, is but a candle in comparison to the light of God which you will later see...

Parasceva Potapov:

This one thing I know, that it is an extraordinary light, God's radiance...There is much I do not understand; I understand only that I feel very joyful.

Victor Potapov:

Mother, here on earth, we are members of the Church on earth; you will be a member of the Church in Heaven. Do you understand? We remain members of the one Church of Christ. While we will no longer be able to kiss you or hold your hand, we will, through our prayers, be able to kiss you and be kissed in return.

Parasceva Potapov:

If I accomplish that, I will of course pray for you. That is, of course, if God finds me worthy. And you will pray for me. Since you are a priest, you will never leave me out of yours prayers at the Divine Liturgy. I count on that. I love people, and have now drawn especially closer to many.

Victor Potapov:

You will meet Archbishop John. On July 2nd, as we participate in his glorification on earth, you will participate in his glorification in heaven, the same glorification, Pascha in the midst of summer.

Parasceva Potapov:

What a wonderful coincidence!...After you administered Holy Unction to me, I began to free myself of everything earthly, and joy entered in...Later, when you gave me Holy Communion, I

became even more liberated...

Victor Potapov:

Surely this is because your soul is beginning to free itself from the body, and is, as it were, between heaven and earth. Your soul senses heavenly joy, and so you experience such peace and joy.

Parasceva Potapov:

Certainly. My passage has begun...it is happening, and I am content...Do not weep; it is all right, even very good. In my soul [I sense] some kind of feeling of paradise. There is no need to cry or to be discouraged. I await the moment. It will come. I am ever closer to joy. Evidently, I have become free, and I easily endure everything.

Victor Potapov:

Christ is Risen!

Parasceva Potapov:

Truly...

In your prayers, please remember the soul of the ever-memorable handmaiden of God Parasceva, who in her 66th year went over to a better world...

Fr. Victor S. Potapov





**Hosea: I will ransom them from the power
of the grave; I will redeem them from
death: O death, I will be thy
plagues; O grave, I will
be thy destruction:
repentance sh-
all be hid
from mi-
ne e-
yes
+**