

The Mother of God – “The Guide”

We are not referring here to the icon of the Most Holy Theotokos known as “The Guide” or “Hodighitria” (ὁδηγός – guide, leader), although it is one of the iconic depictions of the Theotokos with a venerable history and profound theological significance. According to tradition, it was painted by Saint Apostle and Evangelist Luke, a fact mentioned, among others, in the *Paraklesis of the Most Holy Theotokos*, where we read: “Let the lips of the impious who do not venerate your honorable icon, painted by Saint Apostle and Evangelist Luke, the one called the *guide*, be silenced” (*Psaltirea*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, Bucharest, 1990, p. 364). In this icon, the Mother of God holds the Divine Child in her left arm, while with her right hand, she points toward Him, symbolizing the act of showing, indicating, guiding to the unique center of all visible and invisible existence, which is Christ-God, One of the Trinity. In fact, all saints guide us toward Christ. This is evident, for example, in the life and ministry of Saint John the Baptist. Preaching repentance at the Jordan River, the Holy Gospels record that crowds from everywhere came to hear his teaching and be baptized. However, when Christ comes to be baptized, John points to Him, saying, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Luke 1, 29). The crowds came to him, and he guided them to Christ. This model was followed by all the saints. All fulfilled this work, but in a special and complete way, it was and continues to be fulfilled by the Mother of God.

In addition to the icon expressing the idea of guidance toward Christ, the Theotokos also fulfills this role through her words. It is well-known that in her profound humility, the Mother of God chose silence, allowing space and time for the eternal Word of the Father, incarnate in her womb “in the fullness of time” (Galatians 4, 4), to express Himself and reveal Himself to us. She entrusted her entire life to the will of God: “Behold

the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word!” (Luke 1, 38), she responded to the Archangel Gabriel when he brought her the news of the Incarnation of the Son of God. This attitude of the Mother of God shows that all humanity redeemed and saved by the One incarnate in her womb must entrust its will to God’s will and shape its life according to His Word. Nonetheless, the Holy Scriptures preserve a few words, some spoken by the Mother of God, others closely connected to her liturgical veneration, which highlight her role as a guide to Christ, differently than she does in the icon through the simple gesture of pointing to Him.

At the wedding in Cana of Galilee, the Holy Evangelist John records that together with Jesus and His disciples, His Holy Mother was also present. An unexpected event occurs: the wine runs out, and the first to notice and seek to save the wedding organizers from the difficult situation was the Mother of God. She approached her divine Son and said: “They have no wine” (John 2, 3). Apparently, Jesus remains indifferent to His Mother’s words: “What does this have to do with Me and you, woman? My hour has not yet come” (John 2, 4). The time to reveal His glory had not yet arrived. As if nothing had happened, the Mother of God turned to the servants and said: “Do whatever He tells you” (John 2, 5). In other words, listen to Him, place yourselves in a state of obedience to Him. The narrator of the event explains that the servants filled with water the six stone jars used for ritual purification, and upon Jesus’ blessing, the water turned into wine of the highest quality. The time had not come, yet the miracle was performed at the intercession of the Mother of God. The account concludes: “This, the first of His signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested His glory. And His disciples believed in Him” (John 2, 11).

The passage from the Gospel of John (2, 1-11) tells us that the Mother of God continually guides and directs us toward obedience to God. “Do whatever He tells you” is the leitmotif that rhythms the daily spiritual life of the faithful Christian constantly striving for spiritual improvement. The third petition in the *Lord’s Prayer*, “Your will be done”, recited persistently by the zealous believer, represents their response and effort to always fulfill all that He commands.

In the same vein is another Gospel passage read during the Divine Liturgy on feasts dedicated to the Mother of God. It is the passage from Luke 10, 38-42, recounting Jesus Christ's visit to the house of Martha and her sister Mary. This episode is part of the liturgical events (feasts) dedicated to the Mother of God, not because it contains words spoken by her but because it profoundly and clearly reflects, in an essentialized manner, the life of the Divine Mother, lived in complete obedience to God. “Let it be to me according to your word” is not a formal, emotional, or superficial utterance but one involving total existential commitment. Saint Luke recounts that one of the sisters, Martha, was busy preparing a great feast befitting the Guest. The other sister, Mary, sat at the Lord's feet and listened to His word. Feeling the need for help, Martha asked Jesus Christ to instruct Mary to assist her. The Lord's response offers the key to authentic living in the spirit of God and according to His Word: “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10, 41-42). When the Mother of God said, “Let it be to me,” she chose the good portion, not partially or intermittently, but completely and forever.

The secularized society we live in today has a totally different perception of the “good portion”. In prayers requested at the Holy Altar by some faithful, especially mothers of adult children on the verge of marriage or their grandmothers, we encounter the expression “May God give them the good portion”, meaning a spouse with a respectable social position, higher education, a good job, material wealth, physical beauty, etc. Compared to the two passages mentioned above, the secular understanding of the expression “the good portion”, even when placed under the umbrella of prayer, reveals a reversal of values, a misunderstanding of them, and consequently, a completely wrong hierarchy. In this state, people can no longer distinguish between good and evil, confusing one with the other. The prophet Isaiah laments over these people, saying: “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5, 20).

“Choosing the good portion” means complete obedience to God, a state in which God works in our lives, performing miracles and revealing His glory to us. Toward this state, the Theotokos – “The Guide” – directs and leads us.

Rev. Prof. Dr. Viorel SAVA