



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

306 W. Main Street
2nd Floor Loft
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

The Rev. Fr. Elias Yelovich, Pastor

<http://EntranceMission.org>

On Holiness and the Saints Week of June 26, 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

*... it is written, "You shall **be holy**, for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:16)*

How distant we are from the Saints. We push ourselves away from them purposefully, without even thinking. We lock them into a chest, place them inside the altar, read bits and pieces of their lives, ask for their help for particular needs and wants, and then go about our lives as if they did not exist. The moment we leave the church, we turn our attention to more pressing needs: dinner, a nap, cutting the grass, entertainment, planning a trip, looking for the fulfillment of this or that desire, this or that want, this or that thing.

I was struck by this contrast on Sunday the very moment I turned the key in in the lock of our new Reliquary Chest that now resides in the altar. We all know the reasons for placing the relics in the altar: we follow the ancient custom of the earliest centuries of our faith, when the first Christians used the graves of the Saints in the catacombs as their altars for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. We continue to do likewise, treasuring the Holy Relics and lovingly placing them within our own altars in the modern Church, as did they. But they, almost 2,000 years ago, were very close to the Saints. They loved the Saints as fellow heirs of the Kingdom and as examples of holiness that they themselves lived every

moment of their lives. To be holy means to be “set apart.” And in the earliest years of the Christian faith, holiness was the one, entirely real and indisputable characteristic of every Christian’s life. Every believer, as a servant of the Master, Jesus Christ, was entirely set apart from the world – every believer had willingly turned from the darkness and followed the Light – the Light of Christ; every believer had distanced himself – each and every one – from the violence, the lust, the selfishness, the pride, the arrogance, the consumption of the world. To be a Christian in the earliest years meant to be set apart and indeed to be persecuted for the pursuit of righteousness – for before the Church became friendly with the world, it was persecuted by the world; indeed, the day is coming, when it will be so again. This is one of the main things that the Lord Himself tells us: *Be Holy, even as I am Holy!* Be different - set apart – at odds with the world, but friends with Him.

The Saints are held before us as a sign of what each of us should be – “Holy, set apart.” This does not mean “better than” or “more righteous than.” It means to look to God, and not to the world, for all the solutions of the problems of our lives.

On Sunday I spoke in my sermon to you about purity of heart. I said that purity of heart means that we are to be truthful in all things – particularly about ourselves. I said that all the Saints – *ALL* of them – exhibited such truthfulness. To look within ourselves honestly and to admit what we see within – and to take what is there and lay it at the feet of Christ – this is the beginning of holiness. This above all else is what sets us apart from the world. We look – we see – we admit what we are in all of its terrible ugliness; and, in our helplessness to do anything about it ourselves, by our own efforts or by means of the wisdom of the world, we turn and ask God for help. This is what *ALL* the Saints have done; it was always the first step, so to speak, along their path to holiness. They were set apart in that they looked to God for every solution – every need – and always after they had seen the emptiness of their own attempts at righteousness.

So let us remember this above all else when we think of the Saints. They are not given to us as mere stories or things to impress us. They are given to us as examples of people exactly like us – sinners, who took the first steps toward holiness that each of us must take as well: they looked in absolute honesty – in purity of heart into themselves – and saw what they were, and in great sadness turned to the One Who alone could help them – the Lord. This, Brothers and Sisters is the beginning of every person’s path to holiness, and it is what the Lord waits for each of us to do as well.

Remember what the LORD has done for you! Give Him thanks and praise! *Glory to His NAME for all things!* Pray for me, His most unworthy of priests.

In Christ our true God,

+Fr. Elias

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717-817-1669