



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 the Eye of the Soul and the Lilies of the Field Week of July 3, 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

I once knew a man who was consumed by worry. He was married to someone who was a member of a congregation I served many years ago, a young man with a promising future ahead of him. He was bright, well-educated and in good health, but he was consumed by anxiety over things both great and small. I remember that his wife came to me one day to share her burden. She was upset, because her husband would not allow them to plan and take a simple trip to visit relatives at an annual family reunion about an hour away from where they lived. He was afraid to take the trip, because he feared having a car accident along the way. He had reasoned it all out precisely in his mind. He said that he feared the possibility of the tires on his car somehow deflating while they were traveling on the highway; he said that he feared the possibility of an accident that would kill them both. No logical reasoning was possible with her husband. He was truly ill - consumed by anxiety and worry to such an extent that he had to be medicated and eventually admitted into the care of psychiatric professionals in a local hospital.

I often think of that young man whenever I hear the lesson that we heard yesterday on the Third Sunday after Pentecost from Matthew chapter 6 (vs. 22-33). There are actually three parts to that lesson. It is

the third part that we tend to remember, because it is so beautiful and so powerfully presented by our Lord. He tells us that we are not to worry about anything in our worldly lives and that we are to commit all into the loving hands of our Father in Heaven. He says that we are to seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness and that all else will be ours as well. He bids us to consider the beauty of the lilies of the field, mere grass that is here today and burned in a fire tomorrow – how beautiful they are, so beautiful in fact that even King Solomon in all his wealth could not match in his attire their passing beauty. He bids us to consider the birds of the air as well – how the Father cares for them, even though they do nothing to earn or to deserve such care. And then He asks: are we not of more worth than they? Therefore, we should not strive after worldly things for our own benefit, and we should not worry about how our lives will go – about possessions or savings or future possibilities. We should commit ourselves each and every day in all things into the care of our loving Father, who created us for union with Him and Whose good will it is to care for us.

But such advice is not given to us in a vacuum. Our Lord first teaches us in the same passage how it is possible to have such freedom from worry and anxiety about things that are great and things that are small. He speaks first in this passage about the Eye of our soul, how it must be open to the Light and how terrible it is if it is open to darkness instead of the Light. The eye of the soul is called the *NOUS* in our Orthodox teaching, and the Holy Fathers often point to this passage as the key to our health and our faith and our ability to be One with God. Through the Grace of the All Holy Spirit, they teach us, we may all open our spiritual eyes to the Light of God's presence. This, they tell us, is a matter of turning away from this or that worldly concern, from this or that bodily emotion, from this or that worldly intellectual explanation or solution. Instead, they teach, the *NOUS*, the Eye of our soul must descend into our heart, the seat of our will, the center of our very essence, and allow the Light of God to enter our hearts, so that our human will becomes one with the will of the Father in heaven. Only in this way can we become free of worry and anxiety – by depending in simple faith on the good will and Love of our Father in Heaven Who wants only that which is always best for us.

This point, you see, our Lord drives home even stronger in the second part of yesterday's Gospel lesson. He says that no man can serve two masters; he will love the one and hate the other. We cannot serve both God and Mammon, he tells us. We cannot depend both on God and the various worldly solutions we all look toward for comfort and fulfillment and satisfaction. We must choose: we must depend either on the Lord or on the world.

The lessons from our Lord's Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 6:22-33 is one worth returning to each morning of our lives. Only the Eye of the soul that is open to the Father can bring us security. Only dependence on God in all things can make us free from the anxiety and worry that possesses all of us. The poor young man who was married to that woman that was a member of one of my first parishes many years ago is now ever in my prayers. May the Lord help him! And may we too, in our worries and our anxieties, learn from what our Lord has taught us in yesterday's lesson from the Sermon on the Mount.

Let each of us allow the Eye of our soul to turn away from the darkness of all the various worldly solutions toward the Light of the one solution that alone satisfies: God the Father in Heaven, Whose

good will it is to help and to save us even in our sin. Let us turn from this or that false worldly master whatever it is – money, acceptance of others, possessions, achievements, success, health of body, false worldly security – whatever it is that entices us – and let us become children once again that are entirely dependent on our Loving Father in Heaven. He alone will bring us security and peace. He alone knows what is best for us.

Consider the lilies of the field, Brothers and Sisters. They neither toil nor spin, and yet not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of them that so quickly blooms and then is gone. Will our Loving Father in Heaven not care for each and every one of us who are His children?

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

In Christ our true God,

+Fr. Elias

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717-817-1669