



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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On the One Who was Cast Out Week of July 17, 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Years ago I was trained along with a number of other people from our little community in south central PA to work as a hospice volunteer in a small hospital close to my church. During my training I remember seeing a priest standing by the bedside of one of his parishioners who was dying. She was in great distress in her final moments. The priest who was volunteering that evening kept telling her the same thing over and over: *You will be fine, he said to her; you will get better and be fine.* Of course the very fact that she had been admitted into hospice was itself a clear indication that she would not get better, that she would not be fine. I'm sure the priest knew this as well, but at the time, he found himself in the same situation that all of us have experienced ourselves. Instead of speaking simply and clearly about God's love and God's saving presence, he said something that did not help the poor woman at all; he pretended that it would all be ok. God and His love for us is the only real comfort there is in the midst of suffering or death or whatever frightens us. But instead, we pretend to the very end that it is not so.

The violence of the reaction of the crowd in yesterday's Gospel lesson is very much the reaction of a people who wanted to be left alone in their pretense. Jesus had healed two men by casting out demons from them. And it is striking that the crowd reacted not with gratitude or praise of God Who did this

great thing, but with the request for Him to leave. *Go away – do not bother us, Jesus of Nazareth! We are ok without you! Look how you disrupt our lives, taking our animals and sending them over a cliff! Things are fine with us! LEAVE!*

How like them we all are! We pretend that things are ok, even when they are clearly and absolutely not ok. We find ways to comfort ourselves with so many things that do not really comfort at all. And we keep ourselves distant from the One Who alone can comfort us and sustain us in every need. And when that One comes into our lives with His healing power, we drive Him away. We want to be left alone in our pretense, just like the people who drove Him away in our lesson.

But there is always one truth – one wondrous hope that He has given! He loves us so much that even in our attempts to drive Him out, He refuses to let us have our way. He allows us to know failure and suffering and distress so that we can turn to Him, for He alone is the fulfillment of the desire of our hearts. His love for us is so great, Brothers and Sisters, that He will not let us escape His love. And you can be sure that those who drove Him away from their community when He freed the demoniacs from their anguish did not have the last word. They too, we may be quite sure, saw Him again and were given yet other opportunities to trust and to love Him in return. Even in our pretense, He provides every opportunity for us to turn back to Him in faith. Remember this when the troubles of life threaten to overwhelm you. They are always opportunities to recognize the Hand of His Divine mercy and to turn in helplessness back to Him, Who alone is our joy in sorrow, our comfort in distress and our Life in death. To Him be all honor and glory forever!

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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