



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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On the Sanctification of Each Moment

*From the Pastor's Desk in the Emmitsburg News-Journal
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

I'm no stranger to traffic in large metro areas, but there's a quality about the traffic inside the beltway of our nation's capital that makes me shudder. I try to avoid it fastidiously. Twenty five years ago, however, I had no choice but to get in my car twice a week and travel down to one of the universities within the beltway to finish my last semester in graduate school. I hated the drive, and it always left me frazzled and exhausted, particularly because the time of my classes required me to drive in the densest traffic both going and coming. Out of all the many days I traveled down to the DC beltway, however, one day stands out. For some reason, I had left for class a few minutes later than usual, and I was in a hurry to get there on time; but, on that day the traffic was particularly heavy. As I came within a few miles of the university the traffic piled up and came to a standstill. Like the other drivers, I too began to jockey for my best position in line, becoming more and more impatient with those with whom I shared the road. As horns blew and drivers overreacted, I felt my blood pressure rising, and soon, I was just like everyone else on the road in that traffic jam: angry, impatient, ready to push for my advantage over

others, selfish and truly more like a beast than a man. But suddenly, I saw the face of an angel. Next to me, in a little, old subcompact car, there was an elderly woman. She must have noticed how upset I was that day, but she was different; she had not given herself over to the anger to which the rest of us had succumbed; she had clearly risen above it. She turned her head to me, and opened her mouth into one of the widest and truly awesome smiles I have ever seen. There was no mockery or judgment in that smile, for she was clearly uninterested in finding any fault or in pushing herself forward at anyone else's expense. Her smile was purely good, and when I saw it, all of my anger left in an instant; I had been lifted above my passions, and I was restored to my humanity again.

I remember this incident and speak of it often with the members of my parish. It is a symbol of how each of us has the capacity to heal, to be Christ to those in even the most mundane moments of everyday life. On January 6 Christians of the Eastern Orthodox Tradition celebrate a Holy Day that illustrates this clearly; it shows how Christ Himself openly revealed this to be Will of the Father. The Holy Day is called *Theophany*, and it simply means *revelation of God*. In the Eastern Orthodox Tradition, Theophany is actually a day that is held in higher esteem than Christmas, for it builds on the foundation of His Birth by proclaiming the reason for it. In other words, it says to us: *THIS* is why He was born; and, *THIS* is what He IS; and, *THIS* is what He does for the salvation, for the healing of the world.

Theophany centers on the story of our Lord's Baptism, and at first glance it is a perplexing story indeed; for at the very beginning of His ministry, the Gospels tell us that the Lord Jesus did something that seems to make no sense at all. He Who is without sin, submitted to the Baptism of John the Forerunner, a Baptism of repentance from sin. How it is that the Sinless One would do that which was intended for repentant sinners is something that John himself wondered. In Matthew's Gospel it is even reported that John tried to prevent Him from coming to Baptism. The Holy Forerunner said to Jesus, *I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?* But the Lord nevertheless allowed Himself to be baptized by His cousin in the River Jordan; St. Matthew says that the Lord saw the Holy Spirit descend upon Him in the form of a dove, and that He heard the Father's voice, saying: *This is my Beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased!*



The Holy Fathers of the Eastern Orthodox Tradition have a perspective on that moment that is truly revealing. They say that the Lord submitted to the purifying waters of Baptism, not because He needed to do so; after all, He was without sin, and He needed to repent of nothing. There was no need for Him to be purified of anything. Instead, they say, it was Christ Himself Who was the purifying agent in that story. He entered the waters of the Jordan, not to be purified by those waters, but rather to purify them by His presence. It is *He* Who cleanses in the story; it is *He* Who purifies the moment by His presence; it is *He* Who restores the waters of creation to their original purpose, so that they become the means of our purification, the means of our union with the Father. Thus, the Great Feast of the Holy Theophany is a sign of how the Father brings about the restoration of all things. Each moment and each element of creation is sanctified by the presence of

Christ; through Him the waters themselves are cleansed, becoming a sacramental means of our union to the Father; through Him we offer back to the Father that which we are given by the Father, and He returns it all as a greater blessing, a blessing of Life – water, bread, wine, oil, each moment in time, become means of our union to the Father. Through Him, every moment is sanctified, and even the ordinary, dull moments of daily life become the means of healing. Each moment and each element of creation become for us opportunities of blessing and sanctification, so that even in the most mundane of circumstances, we may receive what the Lord gives us and offer it back to Him as a sacrifice of opportunity for the healing of others around us.

This sounds perhaps a bit overwhelming, but it is really quite simple. All of life becomes *sacrament* for us who follow Him. Just as the good will of a stranger became the means of my healing in that miserable traffic jam so many years ago, so too may we Who confess Jesus as Lord become the means of healing for others around us. Each moment becomes opportunity and means of blessing. We receive from God, and we offer back to Him the sacrifice of our simple actions of charity and good will on behalf of others; in so doing they *and* we are healed. We cannot solve the big problems of the world until we first submit to the opportunities given to us by God in each moment. The war is only won through the individual battles of each moment in time, as we receive them as opportunities to be Christ to those in our midst – for He Who is without sin, entered the waters of Baptism not to be purified, but to purify. And we who follow Him are given the great honor of doing likewise, of bringing Him to those around us in each mundane moment of our own lives. To this end, may the Holy Spirit enliven us all, and to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Undivided Trinity, the One True God, be all honor and glory forever! Amen.

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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