



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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Humility: St. John the Wonderworker of San Francisco Week of July 1, 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

The humility and faith of the centurion that we heard about in our Gospel Lesson on Sunday has been matched in our time by the humility and faith of a truly wondrous saint of our own times, **St. John Maximovitch, the Wonderworker, Archbishop of San Francisco**. The prayers of this holy man were sought by me in desperation back in 1994, when my Khouria gave birth to Xenia Elizabeth, our fifth daughter. By God's grace our new child was healthy and well, but Khouria had lost so much blood in her fifth Caesarian section, that the surgeon gave up hope for any possibility of saving her. Twenty-three units of blood were transfused, and still the bleeding would not stop. The doctor called the grieving nurse to sit with me, and the priest on call from Mount Saint Mary's came to issue a plenary indulgence for Khouria. How well I remember it all! But after anointing her with the oil from the relics of the recently glorified Saint of San Francisco, the bleeding stopped; it stopped immediately, and the life of our beloved wife and mother was spared. We will never forget to thank God for His healing of one we love, and for the life of His saint, Vladika JOHN of San Francisco, whose intercessions He heard.

For me the life of St. John of San Francisco is much more than the answer to a prayer spoken in desperate need. I praise God for His healing of Khouria back in 1994! But I also praise God for the life and example of St. John Maximovitch, which above all else is such a stunning example of true holiness in our time. When I begin to lose hope in ever growing in the spiritual life, or when I am tempted to fall

into sin, I need only think of St. John and remember that he stands as the example of what is possible for me – indeed for all of us - in the spiritual life; and when I remember how he was and how he behaved in his life of ascetical discipline and commitment to God, my shame for my weakness and my love for his example drive me to strive harder after righteousness, which I am so very far from achieving in my own life, but which is such a shining example to all of us in his life. The Saints, Brothers and Sisters, are not merely our helpers and intercessors in times of great need; they are that to be sure; but, they are also the examples that enlighten our own path toward growth unto righteousness. Are you tempted? Do private sins afflict you? Are you weak in the resistance to wrong and too easily led astray by your misdirected passions? Then think of St. John, and remember that he not only intercedes for you, when you ask him in love and humility; but, he stands as the example of what each of you can be. God calls each of you to be a saint; it is the most natural of all states in the human life. To be less than a saint, is to be less than God created you to be. Never forget that!

Join with me in praying to St. John, the Troparion that is ever dear to me:

Glorious apostle to an age of coldness and unbelief, invested with the grace-filled power of the saints of old, divinely-illuminated seer of heavenly mysteries, feeder of orphans, hope of the hopeless, Thou didst enkindle on earth the fire of love for Christ upon the dark eve of the day of judgment; pray now that this sacred flame may also rise from our hearts.

From the Sermons of St. John Maximovitch on the Fundamental Virtues, (20 May / 2 June 1953)

God's grace always assists a struggler, but this does not mean that a struggler is always in the position of a victor; sometimes the beasts did not touch the righteous ones, but by no means did they not touch them always. What is important is not victory or the position of a victor, but rather the labor of striving towards God and devotion to Him. Great is the Apostle Paul, but he asks the Lord many times ("thrice" means not once, but many times) that the messenger of Satan depart from him, for he "buffets" him, making some sort of attacks that are difficult and averse to his spirit. But the Lord leaves him in such a position: "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Cor. 12:7-9) - enough assistance of grace and gifts are provided for him. The Lord wants from the apostle the striving which cleanses his soul.

What is important is the state of the soul, the striving towards God, and not the stature of a victor. "Strength is made perfect in weakness"(2 Cor. 12:9). Though a man may be found in a weak state, that does not at all mean that he has been abandoned by God. The Lord Jesus Christ, according to the worldly view, was in trouble, but when the sinful world considered Him to be completely destroyed, in actuality He was victorious over death and hades. The Lord did not promise us positions as victors as a reward for righteousness, but told us, "In the world we shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33). The power of God is effective when a person asks for the help of God, acknowledging the weakness and sinfulness of his nature. This is why humility and the striving towards God are the fundamental virtues of a Christian.

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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