



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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He must increase, but I must decrease.
Week of July 8, 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

He must increase, but I must decrease.

The Gospel of St. John records these remarkable words of the Holy Forerunner and Baptist John in the third chapter, shortly after our Lord's teaching that we have come to call "the Gospel in miniature." You remember those words, memorized by each of us I daresay in Sunday School, words that should be on our lips and in our hearts at every moment of our lives: *For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life; for God came into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved.* Our Lord spoke them, St. John the Apostle says, shortly before He began to go into all the regions surrounding His home to baptize the multitudes with His disciples. He did this at the same time that the Holy Forerunner John was likewise baptizing the multitudes, and it was very likely that the number of John's disciples far outnumbered those of our Lord. When asked by the people how he felt about this, the Forerunner answered by pointing to Jesus: *Behold the Lamb of God*, he said; *He must increase but I must decrease.* In all things, the Holy Forerunner deferred to the Lord. Indeed, it has been said rightly that he was born for this purpose above all others – to defer to the One Who is greater – the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Deference is a word that we do not like. It is a cornerstone of common cultural belief among people in general that we must push for our rights, that we must fight against those who threaten us, that we must resist force with force and violence with violence. This behavior is so built into our culture that we often do not think twice about gesturing to the aggressive driver, tailgating the slow one in front of us or shining the high beams of our cars into the eyes of those who come around the corner with high beams shining into our eyes. Yet these actions are not the way of the Lord Jesus.

We are supposed to be the followers of the One Who teaches us in all things to defer, to submit, to Him by relying on Him in all things. Vengeance, He teaches us, is His, and His alone. It is not ours. If we are struck on the right cheek, we, His disciples, are to turn the other. The One Who teaches us this is the One Who did likewise; He stood before Pilate in silence, and when the governor dared to reprimand Him, the God of all, He said merely that all things were in the hands of His Father, that not even the power of the governor to stay or carry out the order for execution could happen without the power to do so having been given by the Father. In all things, the Lord deferred to His Father in heaven; and, in all things, the Holy Forerunner deferred to the Lord. He decreased, so that the Lord might increase; our Lord decreased, so that the Father might increase. In all things, as the wondrous icon of the Holy Trinity shows us, the unity of love that binds the Holy Trinity is a unity of mutual submission and deference.

This is what we acknowledge, Brothers and Sisters, when we call Jesus *Lord*. And this is who we too are to be in words and in deeds, confessing Him not only in words but in actions that speak louder than words. We are to defer to Him, without Whose knowledge not even a sparrow falls out of its nest. Either we trust in His power and His will over our lives in all things, or we trust in ourselves. The choice is straightforward and before us in every moment of time.

The Holy Forerunner's life, whose birth we have just celebrated this past weekend, demonstrates the choice that leads to Life. Salvation is all about deference to Him. At any moment in time we are saved in our deference, or we are lost in the exercise of our own self-will away from Him. This is true in *every* moment of our lives. In all things, let us defer to the One, Who gave Himself for the Life of the world in eternal self-giving, eternal deference to the Father in all things. He, Brothers and Sisters, is our Lord – we will not trust in our own strength, the wisdom of our own choices, the intelligence of our minds, the cleverness of our actions, the power of our positions. We will trust in Him, and in Him alone! This is who we are. It is the very foundation of our salvation in Christ, and it is the only way we can ever be the kind of people that will be a blessing to others.

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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