



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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The Great NEVERTHELESS of Faith Week of October 7, 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

And when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! Nevertheless at your word I will let down the nets." And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zeb'edee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men." And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

The Gospel lesson that we heard on Sunday begins the so-called Lukan Cycle of readings that we will hear at the Divine Liturgy each week almost up to the beginning of the Great Fast. The first of those lessons was from Luke chapter 5, the story that we often refer to as the *Miraculous Catch of Fish*. But truthfully, I think it might really be more appropriately called the *Miracle of the Great 'Nevertheless.'* The word '**NEVERTHELESS**' is truly one of the most important words in scripture; it appears precisely at the point at which we make the decision to follow the will of God, even when it appears to be futile or ridiculous to do so.

St. Peter and his men had apparently been out all night fishing. Their livelihood depended on a good catch. But the night before this event took place, they had caught nothing. There are times like that in the fishing trade; sometimes the catch is ok, but at other times the effort produces little. When our Lord tells him to take the men out onto the lake again, it would have been entirely reasonable and understandable for St. Peter to have refused. He could have done so with the respect that any student would show to his Rabbi: *Master, St. Peter could have said, we were out all night and caught nothing; we will not catch anything now either in the light of day; let us try another day.* Such a response would have been understandable, and I daresay any or all of us would have said something like it after such a sleepless and futile night.

But St. Peter did not say that. Wondrously, he evoked one of the most powerful words in all of scripture, the great word **NEVERTHELESS!** He said to Jesus, *Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! Nevertheless, at your word I will let down the nets. NEVERTHELESS! Nevertheless, Master, I will do as you say. Even though it seems to make no sense, I will keep silent. I will cast out into the deep with my men and do what you bid me to do. NEVERTHELESS I will do as you direct me to do.*

St. Luke says that the results were astonishing. They caught so many fish, that the boat was weighted down to the point of taking on water. St. Peter was both astounded and humbled; and, St. Luke points out that he actually changed his form of address, no longer addressing Jesus as a Rabbi, as *Master*. Now, he addresses him in the terminology that is reserved for God – **LORD**. *Lord, he says, depart from me; I am a sinful man.* In the presence of God, when we apprehend Him, when we know that we stand before Him, when we know Him to be there with us – we are always humbled and drawn to repentance (Romans 2:4).

The Holy Fathers speak of this first lesson from the Lukan Cycle with profound respect. The **NEVERTHELESS** of St. Peter, they say, is actually equal in importance to the submission of the Mother of God to the will of God at the annunciation, when she says to the angel, *May it be done unto me according to thy word.* The great **NEVERTHELESS** of faith simply submits in humility and allows us to follow the Will of our Lord and Master even when it makes no sense to us. We do as He directs; we follow where He leads; we submit to His Will in all things!

The miracle of faith always involves the choice to follow the Will of God even when it seems to make no sense, even when we do not understand. We must do so **NEVERTHELESS**, even as St. Peter did, when he said to the Lord, **NEVERTHELESS, I will do as you say.** And if we do not discern His will – for that is not only possible but likely for each of us in the particular circumstances of our lives – then we must ask Him. It is a simple question: **Lord, show me your will, and help me to do it.** He always answers that prayer. If you do not hear the answer, continue asking – wait in silence – ask again in respect and with humility, until your spirit has quieted down and you can discern His answer. The answer, Brothers and Sisters, is always given, for He has promised it. We simply need to listen **nevertheless!**

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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