



## Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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### *No Entitlements in the Kingdom* Week of November 18, 2012

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

*And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him and how she had been immediately healed. (From Sunday's Gospel lesson: Luke 8:41-56)*

The time in my semester at work has come during which I can now say that I really do know the character of my students. Even though my classes at present are more crowded than they ever have been before, the kind of students in them is pretty much the same as in every other academic year. There are those who work and those who do not; there are some who care very much about their own grades and their own progress, but who ignore the struggles of others next to them in class; and, there are those who push the limits of my tolerance, my patience, because they think they are superior – **entitled** to special recognition and honor, because they have always been so treated by their parents.

I could not help but observe on Sunday that we Christians fall into very much the same categories. Some of us work at our faith, and some of us don't. Some of us come to the Church thinking only of ourselves and our individual salvation; we attend the Divine Services, fast and pray (if we do so at all) in order to see to our own selfish needs; we think of the Church as a mechanism for our own salvation; we

approach the faith in order to be saved ourselves, many of us thinking that we are better off than those who do not approach it at all. We Orthodox Christians more often than not fall into this way of thinking: *The few, the proud, the Orthodox*, we think. We keep the ancient rules and regulations and practices, and because that sets us apart, we so easily fall into the danger of thinking we are in some sense better than those who do not. We are like the students in my classes who work hard for themselves and their own benefit alone, but who never see the struggles of those next to them, who would like to do well no less than they. And because so many of us have been infected with the heresies of modern religious thought around us, we dare to think that God will reward us for our adherence to the rules and regulations of our somewhat stricter faith; we dare to think that we are in some sense *entitled* to recognition and honor in the Kingdom ourselves because we are members of the Orthodox Church. We forget one of the very central teachings of our faith, that we are justified only by grace and that even our best efforts pale before the righteousness of God, that none of us enter the Kingdom because of our worthiness. All of us enter only through His mercy and grace, and only if we are willing to live eternally with Him according to His divine will.

The Gospel lesson from Luke - about Jairus, who interceded for his daughter, and the woman with the life-long hemorrhage, who was so humble before Him that she would not even allow herself to be seen – shows us exactly how we should be in our spiritual life. We should approach God first and foremost on behalf of those who struggle beside us, even as Jairus stepped out of his exalted role as ruler of the synagogue to beg the Lord on his knees for his daughter; and, we should approach the Lord always and only in the same spirit as the woman with the hemorrhage - in humility, never presuming that He owes us anything. We are not *entitled* to receive anything from Him; but whatever He gives us in mercy, we should accept with joy and thanksgiving.

These two people from our lesson truly stand out in contrast to the way in which we more often than not see it ourselves. We cannot be saved, Brothers and Sisters, unless we live for each other, unless we strive to help and pray for the salvation of those around us with every fiber of our being. How could we ever think that we would be happy in the Kingdom of Heaven if we keep hold of our own selfishness; for there, all of life is life in the spirit of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who lived in all things and in every way for others, for you and for me. And how can we ever presume to put ourselves forward in arrogance or pride before the King of Glory, Whose Glory *IS IN* His self-giving and humility? We dare only approach Him in humility ourselves, like the woman from our Gospel lesson who was healed of the flow of blood when she reached out in faith to touch the hem of His garment.

Above all things, Brothers and Sisters, let us pray for one another, and let us do so in humility, with the necks of our bodies and our souls bowed low before Him. This is one of the great messages of our Sunday Gospel: For truly He owes us nothing, but in His great mercy, He calls us to strive first for the salvation of others; only in that we can we be saved ourselves. 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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