



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

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### *Not One Among Many* Week of January 27, 2013

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

**Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!**

*And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone...." (Luke 18:18-19)*

The story of the rich ruler who came to Jesus for advice is told in each of the first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. The version of this story that we heard on Sunday from Luke tells us that the young man approached Jesus much the way he might have approached any other teacher or Rabbi. "Good Teacher," he says, "What is your take on what I must do in life in order to achieve eternal life." The way he asks the question is the way he might have asked any respectable teacher or philosopher seeking to have some tidbit of advice imparted to him. But Luke says that our Lord responded instantly with a strong comeback: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." When we approach the Lord Jesus Christ, you see, we do not approach Him as if He were merely one teacher among many, one advice-giver among the myriads of others who offer forms of self-help; no, when we approach Jesus Christ we approach Him as the *One and Only* source of Wisdom and Understanding; He alone, you see, has the answer and the teaching and the example to give us that will lead to Eternal Life.

The story goes on to relate how our Lord recited the commandments to the young man and told him to obey them. The man replied with the most astonishing of all answers, telling our Lord sincerely that he had

done so from his youth up. Who among us can say that? St. Mark says in his version of this story that Jesus looked upon the rich young man and loved him. And then He says to the young man, that he lacks only one thing: he must sell all of his possessions, distribute the money to the poor, and follow Him; if he does this, Jesus says, he will have “treasure in heaven.” The young man turns away and leaves, for as St. Luke observes, “he was very rich.”

Each of us comes to Christ with the hope that we will have treasure in heaven ourselves. And yet each of us is just as unwilling to approach the Lord Jesus Christ as God and do as He bids us to do. For you see the problem is that we too approach Him like the rich ruler in the Gospel lesson ourselves. We come to him for partial solutions to problems; we ask Him for help; we say we will follow Him, but when it comes down to it, we want Him and the Kingdom on our own terms. We want to hold onto our possessions or our money or our comfort or our bad habits or our self-indulgences or our sin. We say we repent, but each and every time we come forward for absolution, do we not confess the same sins over and over again? Like the rich ruler in our Gospel lesson we want the Kingdom together with our self-destructive habits and possessions. And this cannot be, for the Kingdom of God is completely incompatible with the world. Our Lord said clearly that “we cannot serve God and mammon.”

Brothers and sisters: Jesus Christ is indeed God, and He is indeed the solution to all the problems and fears and uncertainties and insecurities we have. But He is not merely one solution among many; He is *THE* solution, the one and only. We must approach Him with a radical faith that trusts in Him alone - a faith AS radical as is the Grace He gives to each of us even in our unrighteousness, and we must obey Him just as radically in all ways. So you see, we cannot expect things to be right with our souls unless we give in to Him entirely – not as one teacher or purveyor of wisdom among many, but the Only One Who gives us the grace of forgiveness and the Kingdom. And these things we cannot have if we will not let go of the false securities of our wealth or our health or our status or our expectations. Our wealth will someday be gone along with our health, and our status and expectations are all false hopes, ephemeral like the fog that diminishes in the light of day. There are many facets to this lesson from St. Luke’s Gospel, but the one that the Holy Fathers underscore above all others is the simple realization that we so easily accept with our lips but so unwillingly within our hearts: Christ is the only One Who provides Life in our death, forgiveness in our sin and a new beginning in our repentance. Let each of us struggle to cast off the passions that hold us in bondage to the world, and let us do as our Lord directs, for *we cannot serve God and mammon.*

**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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