



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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The Son of Man Came to Seek and to Save the Lost Week of February 17, 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. (Luke 19:10)

At least once or twice a week I must work late at the university. On those days I often leave long after dark, usually around 9 PM or so and travel home on a variety of deserted country roads with my high beams on maximum. When I meet a car or truck coming in the opposite direction, I usually have no problem clicking my high beams off to avoid blinding the driver of the other vehicle. This is something we were all taught in driver's education in school, but it is honestly as much a matter of common sense and courtesy to the other driver as it is a law that should be obeyed. Every so often, however, there is a person in some sort of monster truck with four lights blazing into my face with bright high beams glaring, and I am tempted to keep my high beams on. There is still an instinct of "revenge" and "violence" left in me that wants to repay the harm that the bright lights of the other driver inflict. But when I lower the bright beams of my own car's lights, almost inevitably the driver coming in the opposite direction does likewise. Sometime it is the other way around. The other driver lowers the lights of his car, and then I lower mine as well, and I experience an appropriate pang of guilt that I was not the

one to back down first. For I do know better, but in my sin, the passions within me still want to have their way at the expense of the other.

The cycle of *hurt – retribution – violence – retribution – more hurt* is one that all of us are familiar with. We think that the violence played out in places like the Middle East or North Africa are in some sense far from us and that we are not a part of it in our more “enlightened” part of the world. But it is not so, for all of us are subject to the misdirected passions within us, unless we submit to the Grace of the All-Holy Spirit and stand apart from them courageously. Someone in a disagreement has to back down first; someone has to be the one to lower the bright high beams first. Otherwise, the cycle merely continues, and the passions within us, unchecked, lead us to hurt, retribution, violence and harm.

Surely the Lord knew what sort of a man Zacchaeus was when He passed by beneath the Sycamore tree in which the chief tax collector was perched. Zacchaeus, St. Luke says, was not only a tax collector, but a “*chief*” tax collector; and, the Evangelist says succinctly, “he was *rich*.” In other words, Zacchaeus was the sort of person who took the bread out of the mouths of widows and children, sent a portion of his take to the pagan Roman invader, and then kept the rest for himself. He was greedy and selfish and hurtful to others until He came into a relationship with Jesus. He was the sort of person that the holy people of God would have not only distanced themselves from, but whom they would have despised and hated. The way they would have dealt with such a person was the way of anger, hatred and disdain; their passions would never have been healed, and Zacchaeus would never have been led to repentance if he had not been found by the Lord. It is the way that everyone is tempted to act against those who do violence against them or who oppose them in some way that is hurtful to them and/or to others.

But the way of the Lord Jesus Christ is different. The Gospels tell us this as plainly as they tell anything. The Lord came *not* to condemn, but to save. St. Luke says that our Lord Himself described His ministry as a ministry “to seek and to save the lost.” And this means going out of His way to find those who were on the fringe or lost or in some way despised by others – not by virtue of some sort of misunderstanding on the part of others, but by virtue of their own despicable behavior. The Lord came to find precisely those who are guilty, who clearly deserve the disdain of others. He came to seek them out and to pull them into the communion of the Kingdom.

Unless the cycle is broken, the cycle of *hurt – retribution – violence – retribution – more hurt*, it will continue that way until the end of time. Nations will continue to rise against other nations; people hurt by others will continue to seek vengeance and hurt their enemies; violence will continue to be met by violence; the passions will continue to be misdirected in ways that hurt and destroy lives and souls.

Jesus taught us to *love* our enemies, which at one of the most basic levels means to seek to do for them what is in their best interest; to pray for them – not merely for their conversion (as if we were better than they) but for every good thing to come to them from the hand of God. This teaching He illustrated so very clearly in the story of Zacchaeus, when he called the rich, chief tax-collector down from the lofty heights of the bush and invited Himself to the house of the sinner for table fellowship with him. It angered those who knew who and what Zacchaeus was. It would most likely anger most of us as well.

And yet, it is the only way to achieve what the Lord Himself identified as the cornerstone of His ministry: “to seek and to save the lost.”

If we do not do likewise – if we are not the first to lower the high beams that blind the drivers in opposing traffic or to back down in an argument or to step aside when the first blow is aimed at us – we do not walk in the steps of the Master. We cannot solve the problems of the nations by falling into the very behaviors that lead to war and death in destruction if we do not first practice in our everyday lives the simple example of our Lord in the Gospel lesson about Zacchaeus. It is this lesson that shows us so very clearly what we are to be like in our own lives of service to Jesus Christ and that sets the stage for the time of repentance that begins this coming week in the first Sunday of Triodion. **The Son of Man, Brothers and Sisters, came to seek and to save the lost.** And that means He came to seek and to save precisely those whom we most likely despise and fear; and, it also means, that we too are called to do likewise. There is no other path to salvation than for us to do the same, for have not each of us been sought and found by Him the very same way?

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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