



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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Truth and Humility Week of February 24, 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

A Publican once went up into the temple with faith and prayed to God; and he was justified. For he drew near with tears and cries of sorrow, in contrition of heart, and obtaining mercy he laid aside the whole burden of his sin.

This very last of the Troparia from the Canon we sang in Matins this past Sunday beautifully summarizes our life in the Church. We enter with faith, with tears, with cries of sorrow and with contrition of heart, and we obtain mercy; and thus, we too lay aside the whole burden of our sin.

It is a grievous burden for each of us, is it not? Years of selfishness, so many plans to help others pushed aside by our passion to serve the self, so many acts of unkindness, the arrogance of false pride, self-righteousness, the many hurts we have inflicted in the pursuit of our own desires. The Publican knew these burdens all too well, as does each and every one of us. And when he entered the Temple he saw the truth for what it is: that there was nothing he could ever do that would sufficiently make right what he had made wrong. He approached the Holy Place from a distance, with his eyes cast down in shame, and he prayed the prayer of the heart, “*God be merciful to me the sinner.*”

The faith of the Publican was that of a man who understands all too well that there is only One to Whom he *could* go in the realization of what he saw so clearly about himself. He could never lay any claim on that One, for he knew that he was as far removed from righteousness and purity and holiness as a man could be; yet, he went with the supplication for mercy; he went to the Lord, Who waits for the return of every one of His creatures, another truth of which we will be reminded on Sunday next in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The Publican came to the Temple in meekness and humility.

Humility can never be feigned. It comes only from a realization of the truth of *who* and *what* we are, the truth that there is nothing within any of us that would ever make us worthy of the Lord's love. We come like the Publican or we come like the Pharisee; the only other option is to not come at all. But if we come – and how can we not? - let us come like the Publican with honesty and open awareness of the truth: that none of us are righteous; that none of us have anything to point to within ourselves other than the burden of sin inflicted so consistently on those around us. Let us come with understanding, having looked within and having admitted what we see there. Let us come with tears of repentance, crying, "*God be merciful to me the sinner.*"

This, Brothers and Sisters, is the only way we can ever approach humility. Not by pretending or feigning it, but by seeing within our hearts who and what we are and how we have behaved throughout our lives toward others. Let each of us make a good Lent this year by looking within that secret place that we strive to hide from everyone else; let us go into that place with boldness, as the Publican did, for it is the beginning of the road toward humility. And as we hear so very often from the Holy Fathers, humility is the foundation of all the virtues, the key that unlocks the gate that will allow us to enter the path toward participation in the Kingdom of God. Together this Lent, let us pray to the Lord:

On those who for Thy sake are poor in spirit, bestow thy blessedness. Obedient to Thy command, we offer Thee a contrite spirit: accept it Savior, and save those who worship thee.

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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