



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

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### ***“So He Divided His Property Between Them”*** **Week of March 3, 2013**

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**Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,**

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

*Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, “Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.” So he divided his property between them.*

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is appointed for our hearing in the Divine Liturgy two weeks before the beginning of Great Lent. The younger son who dared to request his inheritance from the father is given it without question; he takes the money and runs into a “distant country,” a place far from the benevolence, influence and guidance of his father. There, he squanders it in loose living, and after he has spent everything, he sinks to the depths of misery when a famine comes upon the place where he has chosen to live. Brought up in a pure, or kosher, house, he is now reduced to feeding swine, the very symbol of impurity; and, so reduced to need is he that he even hungers after the pods that he must throw to the animals; and, then, as if that were not enough to depict the horror of his situation, our Lord adds the observation that “... *no one gave him anything.*”

The misery of the prodigal son is symbolic of the misery of our own sin, is it not? We have been given every good thing both materially and spiritually. We have food, family, people around us who love us,

jobs, children, parents, extra cash to use at a moment's notice to buy this or that thing or to indulge ourselves in this or that momentary pleasure. But more: we have life, health, the promise of salvation, forgiveness; God Himself draws near to us at every Divine Liturgy with the Unspeakable Gift of His own Precious Body and Blood; when we repent, the priest pronounces absolution, which is reconciliation restored between us and the Lord Who waits for our return. We have people next to us in the Church who honestly and sincerely pray for us, people in communion with us by virtue of the loving kindness of our Father in Heaven, Who sends us freely the Grace of the All-Holy Spirit to unite us with His Beloved and Only Begotten Son. All of this we have: every good thing, every blessing, every opportunity to rejoice in the presence of the One with Whom to *BE* one is joy and life and salvation. And yet, we take it all for granted every day of our lives; we go repeatedly into the "distant country" to have our way, to promulgate our own wills, to follow our own desires, selfish and self-destructive though they are.

The Father knows this about us just as surely as the father in our Lord's parable knew it about his younger son. Such patience and love cannot be described adequately by my words; it is, as the words of the Divine Liturgy remind us each week, truly "*ineffable*:" Such patience and love for children, sons and daughters, who are ever greedy and selfish, so as to take what is given and then go with it into the "distant country" to waste the wondrous gift in self-service.

I do not think I could have done what the father in the parable did. I would have reacted in anger against my son, if he had asked for such a thing before I had even been laid to rest in my grave. And yet the father gave the boy what he wanted, just as He, our Heavenly Father, allows us to have what we sinfully desire as well, knowing where it will lead us – to misery and defeat and loneliness and despair and pain; for this is where sin always leads us, and not just us, but those who love us as well. This, the Father allows, so that we learn by our own experience the Truth that our Lord proclaimed with every breathe and action of His earthly ministry: that sin *IS* separation from God, and that only union with Him is life and salvation and joy. St. Gregory the Theologian said it simply: "*That is saved which is united to God.*"

There is much to say about this parable. Little by little I try to say it year after year. I have not always understood or said it rightly or in a manner sufficient for helping you understand it as well. Honestly, though, it is elemental in some ways, for the messages it bears are pretty clear: The prodigal son who repents – the elder brother who resents the mercy shown to his brother – the father who patiently allows the prodigal to go and then waits for his return, welcoming him back with such great joy that it is hardly matched anywhere else in all of scripture. How wonderful it is, and how very clear to us who listen.

Brothers and sisters: We are all prodigal sons and daughters. Every one of us. Our Heavenly Father has given us every good thing. And His love for us is so great, that He allows us in mercy to wander off and experience the disaster our separation from Him inevitably brings. And as we wander, He waits for our return, ready to welcome us back with a ring on our finger, a cloak on our back and shoes on our feet. And He even makes the sacrifice for us, as did the father in the parable, allowing His own Son to be the sacrifice of atonement for us. It is too profound a mystery to merely hear and then put aside. It is truly stunning – *ineffable* as the Holy Fathers wrote it into the words of the Divine Liturgy – worthy of our entire life's devotion and our unending love and gratitude to Him.

This year let us truly emulate the Prodigal in his return and fall before our Heavenly Father in humility and joy. This, Brothers and Sisters, would make a Good Lent indeed!

**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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