



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

306 W. Main Street  
2nd Floor Loft  
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

The Rev. Fr. Elias Yelovich, Pastor

<http://EntranceMission.org>

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**Just as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me!**  
**Week of March 10, 2013**

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**Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,**

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

*Then the righteous will answer Him, "Lord when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."*

The Parable of the Last Judgment is read every year on the Sunday of the Meatfare. The Holy Fathers appointed it for our hearing, because it summarizes the goal of the spiritual life so very clearly and prepares us rightly for the ascetical struggles of Great Lent about to begin. It was the last and final teaching of our Lord before He prepared to celebrate the Passover with His disciples. We are to live in such a way that we cherish the image of God within us and strive in all things, at all times and in every way to attain unto the likeness of God.

*And what is God like?* He is compassionate and long suffering, abiding in steadfast love; He is merciful and kind, loving the righteous but showing mercy to the sinner. He is like the father in the parable we heard last week, extravagant in mercy, waiting for our return in repentance even as the father waited

for the return of his dissolute son. Our God, the One True and Only Existing God, shows mercy to the lowly, feeds the hungry, gives drink to the thirsty, upholds those in prison, heals the sick, raises the dead, never meets our violence with violence in return, but instead suffers our violence with humility and the submission of infinite servitude. Our God is humble of heart, calling us in every conceivable way into union with Him so that we can grow evermore like unto Him. This is what God is like.

And the question for each of us to ask ourselves is where we are in comparison to what He has revealed His will to be; it's no secret. We are to strive in all ways to be like unto Him. Are we the sort of people who do as He does? Do we have the kind of hearts that cannot abide the suffering of others, that refuse to condemn the sinner held captive by sin, that find no joy in justice for the sinner condemned by their own sin but who instead cry out for mercy on their behalf? Are we the kind of people who cannot look only to our own welfare, our own private and individual salvation? Are we the kind of people who cannot be satisfied until all around us are saved and forgiven and offered the new life of reconciliation?

We err so very grievously if we see this parable merely as a call to social justice, or if we conversely explain it away in light of some other set of rules dear to us (ritual, ascetical, aesthetic or organizational). It is many things, this parable of the Last Judgment, but above all it places before us the question: *To whom do we belong?* Have we allowed ourselves to be united to God? Or are we still all about our own selfish welfare? Are we to be numbered among the sheep who hear the voice of the Shepherd and follow Him? Or, are we to be numbered among the headstrong, willful goats, who prefer to go their own way? Ultimately the judgment each of us will face in the presence of God on the Last Day will be that question: *To whom do we belong?* For if we have allowed ourselves to be united to Him and belong to Him, then we will do the things He has revealed to us to do and we will behave toward others as He behaves toward us.

You can see, Brothers and Sisters, that this Parable is therefore much more than a call to social action. It is a last and final call for us to allow ourselves to be united to God in all things and to strive to grow ever more unto His likeness – so that we too cannot abide the sinner being held captive by sin, or the poor man being hungry or the outcast being pushed aside or the sick being discarded and forgotten. We are to grow in the life of eternity every more like Him. And when we look within, into that secret place that we show no one else, we must recognize where we are and then cry out to Him for repentance. For without Him to empower us, we cannot even repent on our own.

Great Lent is our time to do these things. Of course, we should do them each and every day whether it is during the season of Great Lent or not. But, Great Lent is the means within the discipline and structure of our Holy Orthodox Tradition to do them together – to see where we are, to struggle together, to question and to learn, to pray and share the disciplines of abstinence, to give for the needs of others. All of these disciplines have but one purpose – to direct our selfish wills away from self-destructive sin and redirect them toward renewed struggle to grow every more unto the likeness of God so that we too may become the kind of people from whom love and mercy flow naturally, the kind of people who cannot rest easy with justice, but who yearn for mercy instead. Above all, let our prayer be this:

*“Lord, help me to repent. And draw me unto Thyself that I may become in every way evermore like Thee and do Thy will in all things! To Thee, Lord – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory forever! Amen.”*

**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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717-817-0084