



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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The Eternal Self-Giving of the Lord, our God Week of March 31, 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

From the moment the divinity existed in humanity, all the gifts of His divine power that belong to life and to piety were communicated to us, and that is why our weakness will be filled with divine strength, our lies cleansed by divine truth, our darkness illumined by divine light
(Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow).

I spoke to you on Sunday about a man I had known years ago who had a child that he never acknowledged in public. She had been born with a mental disability, and soon after her illness was discovered, the man and his wife had committed her to an institution. When I asked my bishop in those days about the child, he told me that it had once been a common practice among families who were ashamed of having such children, and that the child had been given the best of care in the institution. She had grown up healthy and well in the institution to which she had been sent, he said, but she always came across as somewhat sad when her parents were mentioned to her. Although they gave her every good thing, she never really knew them. To her, they were simply the people who gave her things, but they did not give her themselves; they were distant from her, never a part of her personal life. And this is what she so desperately missed.

There are many Christians who think about God in terms that keep Him forever distant. He is for such Christians little more than an abstract principle – a power to be obeyed and reckoned with to be sure –

the Great Creator to be feared or appeased by this or that good work, by the appropriate amount of faith or religious service – or to be ignored until the time when He can be ignored no longer. Such Christians believe Him to be the great giver of gifts – life, health, prosperity, etc. But it never occurs to them that the gift He gives above all things is the gift of Himself.

The Holy Orthodox Faith teaches that the greatest of all gifts given to us by God is the Gift of God Himself. For us, you see, the Gift and the Giver are one. There is no good thing that we receive at His Hands that is separate from Him, that is not the presence of the Giver at the same time. And as we grow in the spiritual life – as we submit in the Spirit to the eternal call to receive Him, we grow in our knowledge – our intimate knowledge – of Him. This is not only possible, but it is the goal of the spiritual life throughout eternity – for us to pass from glory unto glory in an ever more wondrous and perfect union with Him.

This personal relationship is what the great spiritual father, St. Gregory Palamas, defended in the 14th century when it was attacked by a scholar who was infected with the heresy of humanism. For all of his philosophical learning, the visiting scholar could never know or understand the God whom we confess, the God Whose gift is His own eternal self-giving to us in humility. I will not speak of the details of this controversy in this email; you can find them on many websites and in many books if you have the will to do so. I will only say that the great father of the 14th century, St. Gregory Palamas, would not compromise on the essential truth of our faith: that the Lord our God never ceases to seek us out, never gives up on us and never turns away from us in need. He is indeed the eternal fount of humility and love, forever giving Himself in humble service and calling us to do likewise for the life of the world in His Name.

This is our faith: the eternal self-giving of God is offered to each of us. Let us come before Him the way He comes before us: in selfless service for one another, in sacrifice and humility; let us open our hearts to the descent of the Spirit, so that *our weakness will be filled with divine strength, our lies cleansed by divine truth, our darkness illumined by divine light*. May it be so for each of us!

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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