



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

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### *Prayer and Fasting* Week of September 1, 2013

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

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

*Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me." And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting. (Matthew 17: 17-21)*

The reaction that our Lord had when the epileptic child was brought to Him by the child's father seems uncharacteristically harsh. Some commentators say that He was speaking primarily to the father of the child, who questioned the authority and power of the Lord to cure something that he believed could not be cured. Other writers say that the Lord was speaking to the scribes and Pharisees, who waited in the shadows to trap Him, hoping they could find some evidence of transgression against the law. Still others write that He was addressing the Holy Apostles, who did not have either the power within themselves nor the faith in their Lord to bring life and health to the child themselves. All of them are correct. For it is surely the case that the Lord was speaking not only to one of these three groups, but to all of them simultaneously, and to all of us as well, His disciples in this age.

From the perspective of the world the situation was impossible – as impossible as giving sight to a man born blind, or as giving movement to a man paralyzed from childhood, or new life to one who had died, or forgiveness to one like the Publican whose sins were irredeemable, because they were so many that they could not be all identified. But all of these impossible situations were made right, by the Lord's Word alone: His Word gave sight to the man born blind, movement to the man paralyzed from childhood, life to the child who had died, forgiveness to the woman taken in adultery, hope to the Publican, who had no chance of being saved apart from God's mercy. The world apart from God is indeed hopeless, and the ability of mankind to find any solution for its problems apart from Him is non-existent. Faithless and perverse are we indeed, who attempt to find fulfillment apart from union with Him. Only His Word, His promises, His love for mankind can give hope and life.

Once again, Brothers and Sisters, the world has revealed to us its emptiness. A corrupt government in Syria launches poison against hundreds, adding another 1,400 agonizing deaths to the 100,000 already killed in that nation's civil war. The hatred of unbelievers continues to lash out against the ancient Copts of Egypt, destroying lives and communities that gather in the Name of Christ to celebrate the Divine Mysteries. The nations of the world squabble, powerless to change situations that are seemingly impossible to change. Should missiles be launched? Should soldiers be deployed? Should threats be made? No solution is forthcoming, because the situation, so filled with the hatred of multiple generations, refuses to be solved. The generation in which we live, like the one in which our Incarnate Lord ministered in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, is indeed "*faithless and perverse.*" Even the best efforts fail to bring peace, just as even the best doctors failed to bring health to the epileptic child, for the problem in both cases is that same insistent selfish desire of our race to turn away from the One Who alone can bring life and health and peace and wholeness and joy.

The Lord teaches His Apostles what we too must hear: "*This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.*" **Prayer** is our purposeful turning to the Lord in communion with Him, and **fasting** is our purposeful turning **from** the selfish desires that enslave our flesh **to** dependency on the One Who alone can satisfy our deepest longings. Prayer and fasting are the weapons of the Christian against the corruption and violence and seemingly impossible hatreds and hurts of the world. While politicians and governments dither, we pray; while armies and navies assemble, we fast. Politicians and governments cannot cure a child or people corrupted by demons; armies and navies cannot solve the selfish hatreds of multiple generations. But prayer and fasting can drive away the dark forces, for in prayer we enter into communion with the One Whose good will it is to save, and in fasting we rise above the insatiable desires of our flesh so as to be free to live and care for others.

*Each one of us have these powerful weapons at our disposal at any time, and we may use them for the benefit of others – for the help and aid and cure and healing of those who suffer. **So I ask each of you: take one day a week – fast from sunup to sundown, and pray for the healing and protection of those who suffer in Syria, in Egypt and in any other part of the world where there is violence and hatred. Do not announce your fast; do so privately, in secret. If you work, say your prayers silently, and offer them in supplication and sacrifice on behalf of those for whom you pray.***

Each of us can do this, Brothers and Sisters, in any place or time of our lives. This is our work, while others dither or squabble, for we are disciples of the One Who alone can help and Who waits for us to offer ourselves on behalf of others. For this, you see, is what He has done for each of us, indeed, for the Life of the Entire World.

**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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