



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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Forgiveness is the Key! **Week of July 20, 2014**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you."

It is perhaps the case that we wonder at the words of our Lord to the paralytic when he was brought to Him. *Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you.* We might think that He should have responded differently, with an immediate cure of the man's physical problem. After all, the paralytic, most likely a quadriplegic on a litter having been carried by his friends or family, would have been brought for that very purpose to the famous Jesus of Nazareth. But our Lord says something quite different than what we might have expected. He first heals the man's soul, and then and only then does He extend the fruits of that first healing to the man's body. *Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you ... Rise, take up your pallet and walk.*

As Orthodox Christians we know the intimate connection that exists between our spiritual state and our physical one as well. We know that all human misery, suffering, illness, wrong, injustice and even death itself are the wages, the result of the rebellion of our human race against the One Who is our Creator and Savior; we know that all of our human ills are the result of our separation from God. Forgiveness of our sins is the opening of the door that will lead us to reconciliation and to healing; it is God's absolute refusal to allow Himself to be defined by our sin; it is His refusal to allow our sin to stand in the way of His love.

Only through forgiveness, when we know we can approach the Almighty Lord without fear, can we approach Him in love. Forgiveness is truly the precondition for reconciliation.

The past several weeks have been difficult ones in the world. So many innocent people have had the light of life snuffed suddenly out without warning: innocent victims in Israel and Gaza caught up in the turmoil of an endless war, and the horrible destruction of so many lives in the downing of a civilian airliner as it flew 33,000 feet above a war zone in another part of the world. Those who lost their lives will be in the peace of the Lord, who holds the souls of all He created in care and safety until the day of His return, when He will unite them once again to bodies of a new creation. But what about those who remain in the flesh? Those who lost friends or relatives or loved ones in destruction of war? Those who are the survivors of the injustice and violence that took their loved ones away? Truly, their only hope lies in forgiveness, for unless they forgive those who brought such suffering and injustice upon them, they will be in turmoil, broken.

When we allow the injustice or persecution of others to define who we are, we are bound by the very sin that has been directed against us. Only by refusing to allow the wrong of others to define us, only by allowing us to be free of that sin through forgiveness, can we find peace. This would seem to be a very difficult thing to do, but it is the only way; unless we drop our resentment at the sinful actions of others, we will never find the wholeness of peace in our souls.

Brothers and Sisters, just as the Lord God refuses to allow our sin to define Him, so let us refuse to allow the sin of others to define us. As our Lord forgave the very soldier who nailed His hands to the cross, so must we forgive those who hurt or persecute or visit injustice upon us. It is the only way that breaks the cycle of hurt and violence leading to more of the same, and it is the only way for us to find that peace which all of us seek. Only if we become like the One Who forgives us can we know the peace that passes understanding. Forgiveness is the key!

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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