



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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The Eye of a Needle Week of December 14, 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Luke 18: [18] *And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" [19] And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. [20] You know the commandments: "Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother." [21] And he said, "All these I have observed from my youth." [22] And when Jesus heard it, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." [23] But when he heard this he became sad, for he was very rich. [24] Jesus looking at him said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! [25] or it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." [26] Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" [27] But he said, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."*

There is perhaps no priest who does not cringe a bit when this particular text comes up as the appointed Gospel lesson. We are tempted as priests to either ignore its sting or to rail against the wealth of those who have what we do not have, but sinfully wish we did.

The first temptation, to overlook the sting of this text, comes out of the desire to be successful in our priestly ministry – successful in the eyes of the world, that is. Oh, how we desire to boast in the presence of our fellow priests! "We did this or that wonderful thing! We bought this or that glittering

thing to adorn our temple! We had this many people on this or that Sunday! We built this or that wonderful piece of real estate! We have this or that amount of money tucked away in the bank!” We overlook the sting of this text, because we want success and honor before men, rather than before God. We forget that success in the eyes of the world is not the same as success in the service of our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. He cares little for our worldly success, but instead calls us to be faithful to Him unto death. He calls us to stand and light the candle in the darkness of this present age, as Vladyka told us on Sunday – to be the light that is not hidden, but that shines as the one true alternative to the darkness of pride, selfishness, hopelessness and ultimately death. Glory to God that the apostle over us has reminded us once again of the truth of our purpose in our little parish congregation: to be the light of Christ to those in the darkness of the shadow of death.

The second temptation we fall into is to rail against those who have anything and to exalt the state of poverty in and of itself. This too is to miss the point of our Lord’s teaching, for the Lord is not exalting poverty per se, rather He is preaching against our reliance on anything that would give us security and hope apart from God Himself; and all of us fall into that temptation repeatedly, regardless of the amount of money we have in the bank. Any form of earthly security presents a terrible obstacle to our reliance on God for all things, for the truth of the matter is that there is no security apart from God; all forms of worldly security are false. Thus, it is truly easier for a camel to enter the eye of a needle than for any of us to trust wholeheartedly in God when we have money, earthly comfort or any worldly good thing to rely on instead. Riches are whatever we rely on other than God Himself, and that is why they are so dangerous. It is often the case that God permits us to experience failure and want precisely so that we can be torn away from those things that we would rely on instead of Him. As St. Paul said so very clearly, God’s strength is perfect in our weakness!

This lesson may be difficult, and it may make us feel uncomfortable. But how very necessary it is to hear! Let us boast in nothing but in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ! Let us rely not on what we have or what we have achieved in life, but let each of us see those things for what they really are – idols of false security. Instead, let us rely on God alone. And let us take whatever good things we do have and use them for the benefit of those who have little. That’s the primary purpose of our pre-Christmas fast in a nutshell – of course to fast and to pray, but to do so as we give of ourselves and of our wealth for the benefit of others. Let our wealth be in self-giving, and our reliance on nothing and no one other than the Lord Jesus Christ, for the celebration of Whose birth we are preparing. That is how we can all keep a worthy fast 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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