



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

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### *On Repentance and Its Fruit* Week of January 25, 2015

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

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

Last Sunday we heard two lessons about repentance: first, the lesson that spoke of our Lord's first public sermon in which He preached, *"Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"* And then, because it was Zacchaeus Sunday, we heard about a man who did precisely that: An odious, little nasty tax collector, who robbed the poor and gave a portion of what he stole to the pagan Roman oppressors and then kept a nice piece of what he had stolen for himself; this man, named Zacchaeus, repented. When Jesus saw him high up in the sycamore tree, He, the Blessed One, came to Zacchaeus and told him that He would come to the tax-collector's house on that very day. St. Luke who related this event reported that Zacchaeus received Him joyfully. And then with astonishing change of heart, Zacchaeus proclaimed that he would give half of his worldly goods to the poor and restore what he had stolen four-fold! The Lord said with undoubted joy, *"Today salvation has come to this house; for he too is a son of Abraham!"*

This story never fails to bring tears to my eyes; as I get older I honestly can hardly read it out loud. For who among us has not wished repeatedly that we could turn back the clock and undo the wrongs we have done to others and to ourselves by virtue of our sins, our selfishness, our foolish willfulness? I

certainly do. And yet, what has been done has been done, and not one of us can turn the clock back. We cannot undo what we have done to the ill-effect and hurt of others.

But the Lord provides us with a way, truly in His mercy the only way. And that is the way of repentance. We cannot undo what we have done, nor can we go back and change the actions that have hurt others, but we can repent. Glory to God!

Repentance is not mere sorrow for our sin. Repentance is change; it is setting out on a new path; it is recognition of our sin along with the earnest desire and action that changes our self-will into the kind of amendment of life that seeks to accomplish God's will. Repentance is to take what is precious to us in our sin and give it away, as did Zacchaeus. He was able to do that because he realized that next to the Greatest of All Gifts, the Gift of God in the Divine Self-Giving of His Son, nothing else that he desired or wanted was of any real value. Only the Lord brings peace and healing. And so, Zacchaeus could say, *"I give half of my wealth – the wealth that brings no peace or happiness to me – away to the poor. And I restore what I have stolen from others four-fold."* Zacchaeus repented. And this meant earnest care and love to make right what he had previously made wrong to the extent that it was possible to do so. Why four-fold? Because the harm we do to others is never as little or slight as we might think; it is always harm that grows geometrically, as the rings of a pebble thrown into a lake spread out ever wider and wider. Thus, four-fold.

God calls all of us to repentance, Brothers and Sisters. Truly we weep for the sins we have committed in our lives; we cannot undo them. But God can and will wipe them away along with the tears we shed for them; He promises to all of us who are indeed repentant to remove our sins as barriers to His love and acceptance of us. He always receives our repentance with Divine Love and Forgiveness. We enter the Kingdom truly sorry, truly weeping for our sins; but we enter, and there alone will we know peace.

Repentance, and repentance alone, produces the fruit of humility. Repentance precludes arrogance and leads to humility, for to see who we have been in our actions and how our actions have affected others can lead only to humility before God and others. We cannot become humble by play-acting in humility, by pretending to be humble (as so many throughout the ages have tried to do). We can achieve true humility only as we bow before the Lord of All, asking Him to please forgive us for the things we have done to hurt others, and for the grace and strength of the Holy Spirit to do what is possible in restitution and love for the benefit of those whom we have wronged.

Such humility we will see once again on Sunday when St. Luke relates another event in his Gospel about a man who stood in the back of the temple, another publican, who could not even bear to look up, to raise his eyes to the heavens, because he knew who he had been and how terribly he had wronged others. All he could say was, *"God be merciful to me the sinner."*

There is no time like the present, Brothers and Sisters, to do likewise. How could we not? For each of us knows the truth, that we too have nothing to be proud about and that our only hope, our only peace in life is to rely on the Divine Promise of forgiveness and to beg for time for amendment of life and the Grace and Comfort of the Holy Spirit to accomplish that end. 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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