



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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Week of February 22, 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

The teaching of our Lord on the issue of forgiveness is clear and straightforward. Our Father in heaven calls us to treat one another exactly as He treats us. In the face of our sin, our disobedience, our self-will, our continual tendency to hurt one another, our betrayal of Him: He forgives. And we are to do likewise.

So often we cringe at this teaching, don't we? We reason that our forgiveness of those who do violence against us is unjustified. Surely, the Lord does not expect us to forgive those who hurt us, who slander us, who libel us, who inflict insults or suffering upon us and others, does He? Yes. We are called to forgive all who do us harm, whether they want our forgiveness or not, whether they ask for our forgiveness or not, whether they intend to alter their behavior or not. We forgive others, because He, the Lord God Who created us, forgives us. And given the state of our actions throughout the history of our humanity – even the short history of our lives – none of us deserve to be forgiven; far from it; we deserve only to be punished and separated from those whom we might continue to hurt. And yet, God forgives us; the Life, Death and Resurrection of His Beloved Son are the true sign of His forgiveness, a

sign that we receive once in Holy Baptism and repeatedly in the life-giving medicine of immortality of the Holy Eucharist.

Forgiveness is the mark of the Christian. It can only be practiced by those who understand their own sin and the multitude of mercy shown by the One Who came to free us from sin and to reconcile us to Him. We benefit from the forgiveness He freely offers when we repent, for our reconciliation to Him is complete when His forgiveness is met by our repentance. Indeed it is the case that our repentance is called forth by His offer of forgiveness, for if He were not merciful, we would never be drawn to Him in repentance to begin with. So you see, His forgiveness is the beginning, the catalyst, the invitation for us to be reconciled to Him in repentance.

And so it is in our relationships with one another. If we meet our enemies with the offer of forgiveness rather than with the threat of retribution, then they too may be led to repentance, just as we are led to repentance through the offer of forgiveness by God. The path to reconciliation is always forgiveness.

Brothers and Sisters: The time of our renewal and the season of our repentance is upon us. Meet your enemies with the offer of forgiveness by first repenting of your unkindness toward them. Offer to them the hand of friendship and reconciliation. They may not take it, but they surely won't if you do not offer. Pray for those who persecute or hurt you, pray for them by name repeatedly; ask the Lord to give them every good thing beneficial to their salvation, for you see if they are saved, they will no longer be your enemies, and you will be one with them in your union with God. Either way, do so in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, for to follow His way is to follow the path to Life Eternal.

Seek out those whom you have wronged and beg their forgiveness. For this is the way of the Lord Jesus for all of us who would be His disciples, as it is the beginning of our time of renewal and repentance that we call Great Lent. This Sunday, the Sunday of Forgiveness, we will bow before one another and seek to do that which our Lord calls each of us to do: *For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*

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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