



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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Discipleship and the Cross Week of March 15, 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Unless a man take up his cross and follow me, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:27)

Last Sunday was the Third Sunday in Great Lent, the Sunday of the Adoration of the Holy Cross. Together with all Orthodox Christians throughout the world, we too at Entrance Mission sang the familiar “Trisagion”: *Before Thy Cross, we bow down in worship, O Master, and Thy Holy Resurrection we glorify.* We too presented the Cross on a tray of flowers for everyone to venerate and bow before, and we too focused on the words which we heard in our Gospel Lesson, that the key to one’s life is to deny oneself, to lose one’s life for Christ in order to find it.

It’s easy and desirable for us to focus on part of the message of this day, isn’t it? We are so very grateful to the Lord for what He has done! In our rebellion, He refused to let us wander off into darkness. Instead, He took flesh and blood from the most Holy Theotokos, came and dwelt among us and gave His Life as a ransom, a sacrifice – the one truly perfect sacrifice – in recompense for our sin; He took the punishment which we earned upon Himself, and we are therefore given freedom from eternal death. The price of our transgression has been paid by the One against Whom the transgression was made. His death for our life – our reconciliation, our reclamation, our salvation.

This message is so awesome, so wondrous, that we sing of it throughout the entire year and especially on the Sunday of the Adoration of the Cross. Each of us should indeed sing of it with our entire being, our whole heart, for truly it is the very essence of the Gospel, the “Good” of the “Good News.”

But there is another aspect of this day which we sometimes overlook, an aspect that makes us bow our heads in shame to be sure. For you see in order for any of us to claim discipleship of that One Lord Who gave His Life for the Life of the world, we must ourselves become like Him and follow His example in every aspect of our lives. This means first and foremost what the Gospel tells us: that unless we too take up our cross and follow Him, we cannot, we will not be His disciples.

What this means is so very clear, and yet so very difficult for us. To take up our cross means quite simply to do and to be as He did and as His is. It means that we too must bear the offense that others lay upon us unjustly; it means that we too must pray, “*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*” It means that above all things we must strive to be like Him, Who suffered injustice and disdain for the sake of those who heaped it upon Him.

It is for that reason that our Lord speaks in His Sermon on the Mount so very clearly about how we should act: *But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless those that curse you, do good to those that hate you, and pray for those who speak evil about you, and persecute you.*

To be a disciple of the Lord Jesus, the man of the Cross, the King of Glory, Whose Glory lies *in* His humiliation, to be His disciple means to do no less: to bear whatever unjust burdens are laid upon us for the sake of those who lay them on us; it means to pray for our enemies, NOT the prayer of a Pharisee (*O Lord make them better, more like me...*) but the prayer of a publican, asking sincerely for mercy and salvation and love and forgiveness *FOR* those who persecute and curse and hurt us. That is what it means to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Of course you might say, *Well, Father, surely it means more than that!* Yes, that would be true. But before you can even consider those other things that it might mean, it surely does mean what I have said, for the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has said it to all of us. We must pray for our enemies and ask the Lord to forgive them, forgiving them ourselves even as we ask it of the Lord; and, we must pray that He give them everything beneficial to their salvation. That, Brothers and Sisters, is what it means to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ; and, that is the powerful message of the Sunday of the Adoration of the Holy Cross. Before we dare kiss it, let us emulate it!

Unless a man take up his cross and follow me, he cannot be my disciple.

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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