



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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Salvation and the Parable of the Onion Week of August 23, 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

“Once upon a time there was a woman, and she was wicked as wicked could be, and she died. And not one good deed was left behind her. The devils took her and threw her into the lake of fire. And her guardian angel stood thinking: what good deed of hers can I remember to tell God? Then he remembered and said to God: once she pulled up an onion and gave it to a beggar woman. And God answered: take now that same onion, hold it out to her in the lake, let her take hold of it and pull, and if you pull her out of the lake, she can go to paradise. The angel ran to the woman and held out the onion to her: here, woman, he said, take hold of it and I’ll pull. And he began pulling carefully, and had almost pulled her all of the way out, when other sinners in the lake saw her being pulled out and all began holding on to her so as to be pulled out with her. But the woman was wicked as wicked could be, and she began to kick them with her feet: ‘It’s me who’s getting pulled out, not you; it’s my onion, not yours.’ No sooner did she say it than the onion broke. And the woman fell back into the lake and is burning there to this day. And the angel wept and went away.”

During the past week I had opportunity to discuss this parable (from the writings of Feodor Dostoevsky) in a seminar with other teachers at work. We were planning our first semester of literature and writing for our incoming freshmen students. The task before us was to find ways that we can help our students

ponder what it means to be human and how it is that they can live a “life well lived” in accordance with the witness of the Church. This parable is one of the pieces my students will read.

The parable of the onion, like every parable, is simple and direct, like the parables of our Lord as well. The woman in the story who was offered the onion as a means of escape from hell was condemned by her own selfish will. She would have been saved had she not spent her energy beating back others who wanted to be saved no less than she. Her unwillingness to allow others to be saved with her condemned her. We are saved only in communion with others, only in forgiveness of others, only in service with others. We cannot be saved by ourselves.

There are many directions for me to go with these observations. But the one that I want to highlight is that of forgiveness. How easy it is for us to condemn others who wrong us; how quickly we want to seek justice for those who mistreat us. But this is not the way of the Lord Jesus. Our Lord teaches us to pray for those who persecute and wrong us, to pray for their salvation, for their every good. If we would be Christ-like in our actions, we must forgive those who do us wrong and offer the hand of service and help to those who are guilty. Remember that the wicked woman in the parable was just as wicked as the rest of the people in hell. They were all there because they deserved to be. She had no more right to be saved than they; and, only if she had shown mercy, could she have been given entrance to paradise with them.

This coming Sunday we will hear a parable of our Lord that conveys the same message. Only if we forgive those who wrong us, will we who are just as guilty in the eyes of God as they, be saved ourselves. Forgiveness, Brothers and Sisters, is the key: only if we forgive others can we ourselves be forgiven; only if we strive and pray for the salvation of others can we ourselves be saved. We are truly no better than our enemies; all of us are in need of the mercy of God!

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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