



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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Release from the Habit of Sin Week of July 24, 2016

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw Him, they begged Him to depart from their region. So He got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city (Matthew 8: 34 – 9:1 – from this Sunday’s appointed Gospel lesson).

The reaction of the people in the region of the Gadarenes after our Lord cast out the Legion of demons into the herd of swine is perplexing. After seeing how He freed the boy possessed by the demons one would think that they would have welcomed Him and praised the great mercy He showed in freeing one who was bound by the evil spirits. But Matthew reports that instead they reacted fearfully and asked Him to leave. Why?

St. Theophan the Recluse offers an interesting explanation. The Gadarenes, he observes, were neither hostile nor welcoming of Him. Instead, *they were filled with a sort of indeterminate fear*; and, as such, beg Him to leave. St Theophan continues:

An order of things has formed around them which is not unfavorable; they are used to it, and have neither thoughts about nor the need for changing or abolishing anything, and they fear to

make a new step. They feel ... that should a command come down from above, the fear of God and their conscience would force them to renounce the old and accept something new. Therefore, they strive to avoid any circumstance which might lead them to such beliefs, so that they might continue living quietly in their old habits, pleading ignorance. These are the sort of people who are afraid to read the Gospels ... or to discuss spiritual matters. They fear that if their conscience is thereby disturbed, it might wake up and start forcing them to abandon what they have and take up something else.

This is truly the insight of a pastor who understands people. The multitudes around us who stay away from the church, who refuse to attend the divine services, who pay only lip service to God or refuse to acknowledge Him at all, are not necessarily enemies of God. Most are simply entrenched in their habits; they refuse to turn from their passions or their sinful ways, because they are comfortable in them. Until they face their own personal crises or come to terms with their deficiencies and the inevitability of their own mortality, they persist in their sin.

Each of us, Brothers and Sisters, come to God only when we first come to know the hopelessness of our lives without Him. For that reason the mercy of God permits us to endure suffering and death until the day of His glorious second coming. As we see and experience the disappointments and dead ends of our lives, then and only then, can we look to Him for help, health and salvation. Until we do so, we will be like the Gadarenes, comfortable in our passions, our sinful habits, and like them, begging Him to leave us alone. May the All Holy Spirit bring us to realize how needful we are without Him!

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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