



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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Christianity is Not a Spectator Sport Week of November 3, 2016

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Last evening many of us were excited to watch the closing innings of the 7th World Series game between Chicago and Cleveland. Regardless of which team we supported, we were thrilled by the masterful pitching and hitting and the tension of watching this or that team pull temporarily ahead of the other. And yet, as wonderful as it was to watch, nothing compares with the surge of joy and sheer fun of playing the game ourselves. It's one thing to watch or to listen to a game on TV or radio, but entirely something different to participate in it ourselves.

There have always been people in the Church who consider our faith to be more of a spectacle than a means of participation. Many people come into the Church out of sheer amazement of its ritual and the power of image that takes place each and every Divine Service; and, of those who enter into the life of the Church, many never get beyond the desire to watch and to see and to hear, as if they were at some sort of game or as if they were watching a show at the movies or on TV. Those who stay at the spectator level can never grow or progress in the faith; only when we actually participate in the life that is laid before us by the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ can we progress in the spiritual life.

It is for this reason that we have no pews within the typical Orthodox temple. Those who come to worship, worship with their entire being: body, mind and spirit. They acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ by standing in His presence, by rising during the reading of the Word of Life, the Gospel, as the icon of Christ is censed by the deacon or priest when he comes out to cense them, or by standing when the bishop or his delegated hand within the parish, the priest, comes out among them. Theologically, this attitude is expressed both by St. Paul and by St. James clearly: St. Paul speaks of those who are “in Christ” being a “new creation” (2 Corinthians), and the Brother of God speaks of faith without works being dead, in other words, being no faith at all. Christianity is the means of our union to Jesus Christ and our participation in the Life-Giving Death and Resurrection for the Life of the world. We cannot be mere spectators, sitting on the sidelines, watching. We must roll up our sleeves and take part in the saving actions of the One Who gives Himself for the salvation of all people.

It’s not enough for us to attend the Divine Services and watch; it’s not enough for us to hear the Gospel, the *Apostolos*, the Sermon and the rich texts of the Divine Liturgy. We must take part in what those words, what The Word calls us to do: to seek the least of our brethren and pour out our lives for them. How can we bear to see the suffering of others and not lift our hand in aid? How can we see to our own needs and wants at any cost, when the Savior drank the cup of suffering to its bitter depths for us in complete self-sacrifice for the good of the other? How can we repay violence for violence, when the Lord prayed from the depth of His soul to forgive the wicked men that nailed Him to the cross? Our participation leads us to seek in every way possible to do the things that He did, and to follow the path that He set before us.

Christianity is not a spectator sport. It is participation in the one, true, great alternative: the alternative to follow the Way that is different, to stand for others in their need and against those who would abuse or hurt rather than serve. We, Brothers and Sister, must all be true servants of the One Who invites us to follow Him in every circumstance. We participate; we do not watch; we stand for and with the One Who said, “Whatsoever ye do for the least of these my brethren, you do for me!”

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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