



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

306 W. Main Street
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What the Holy Icons Teach Us Week of March 5, 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

We venerate Your most pure image, O Good One, and ask forgiveness of our transgressions, O Christ God. Of Your own will You were pleased to ascend the Cross in the flesh to deliver Your creatures from bondage to the enemy. Therefore, with thanksgiving we cry aloud to You: You have filled all with joy, O our Savior, by coming to save the world.

Throughout the history of our faith there have been many people who came to Christ with good intentions, but who never progressed in the spiritual life. They ask questions, read books, practice the local traditions, read the prayers, keep the fasts and seek knowledge about God. Some of them become experts; great teachers, leaders, clergy, monks, priests, bishops, popes and patriarchs. They know the rules, define the methods, correct mistakes and judge; (above all, they judge!). They know all about God, often even memorizing the facts and figures, the details of theology, the passages from scriptures, the teachings of the fathers, canons in minute details.

But they do not *know* the Lord. They know *about* Him. But they do not *know* Him.

The First Sunday in Lent is the Sunday of Orthodoxy, the Sunday once every year when we remember the victory of the Church over a movement called iconoclasm. Iconoclasm was nothing less than an attempt to

do away with the personal nature of faith, of our relationship with the Lord God. The struggle with the iconoclasts was a struggle between two groups of Christians within the Church, between two ways of understanding the Gospel: those on the one hand who knew the personal nature of God and of the possibility of a personal relationship with Him, and on the other hand, those who tried to reduce the faith to a cold set of facts, figures, rules, and teachings and canons. Those who defended the Holy Icons did so, because they knew that the icons above all else present to us a personal God – not just a bundle of rules and regulations, but a God Who entered into life, and Who becomes a part of our own lives; a God Who has compassion on the way in which we have brought down ruin upon ourselves in our pride and in our sin; a God Who could not abide to see His creation ruined and destroyed. That God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, had such compassion, that He poured out His own divine majesty into the flesh and blood of the Divine Man Jesus, Who willingly took upon Himself our sin and death so that He might fill it with the power of His own divine life.

Thus we hear in our Gospel lesson the story of how Philip and Nathanel come to Jesus; we hear the discussion they have with God Himself in human flesh, and how they come to know Him in a way that they could not have known Him before, when they merely followed teachings and obeyed the rules and regulations of the Jewish temple. Thus also, we hear in the *Apostolos* reading for the day from Hebrews about faith, and the power of faith; for, our life within the Church is to be means of leading us to a relationship of faith with God; it is not to be a dry, rational set of philosophical principles or a system of rules and regulations. It is to be a relationship of faith with the One Who Is with us and for us and among us.

The Lord reaches out to us and becomes a part of our lives from the very moment we are Baptized; He is with us every step of the way that our lives lead; and at the end, He will take our souls and preserve them for the resurrection on the Last Day. This is what the icons proclaim: the presence and love of a personal God, the One Who wants above all else to save us.

How blessed are we who come into His presence in our little temple filled with icons – those steadfast reminders of the Abiding Presence of the God of our Salvation. He Who bowed the heavens deigns to enter into a personal relationship with each of us, a relationship that will not be destroyed even by death itself. As the priest exclaims at every Liturgy, so too do the icons bear witness: "... for His is an everlasting Kingdom that endures forever, and unto Him, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, do we send up glory now and always and unto ages of ages! Amen!"

In Christ our true God,

+Fr. Elias

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