



## Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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### *Follow Me!* Week of June 18, 2017

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

**Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!**

- <sup>18</sup> *And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen.*
- <sup>19</sup> *Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."*
- <sup>20</sup> *They immediately left their nets and followed Him.*
- <sup>21</sup> *Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them,*
- <sup>22</sup> *and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him. (Matthew 4)*

The Gospel lesson for the Second Sunday after Pentecost takes us to the very beginning of our Lord's ministry. He issues a call to the fishermen who become his first disciples: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." St. Matthew reports that they responded with the commitment to do so. In fact, he says that they did so "immediately." They did not engage Him in philosophical or theological debate; they did not ask the rules and regulations that would be required; they did not present Him with any "ifs, ands or buts." Immediately they followed; they left their nets on the shore and heeded the call. James and John actually left the boat in which they were working, mending their nets with their father

Zebedee. The Lord called them, and St. Matthew reports that they “immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.”

We make many commitments in our lives. Many, perhaps most of them, are commitments to ourselves for this or that action to benefit ourselves. We commit ourselves to a diet or more exercise, because it is supposedly good for our health. We commit ourselves to putting a limit on our spending and to putting a little money away in a savings account, because it will benefit us in the future. We commit ourselves to a program of educational study, because it may lead us to a better job or a more fulfilling career. We make many commitments, and we struggle to keep them before we eventually either succeed or lose interest in fulfilling them.

The commitment to follow Christ is different than the commitments we make in other areas of our life. The commitment to follow Him has benefits that far outweigh any other commitments we might make. It is a commitment that extends into eternity, beyond the shadow of death that lies over each of us.

**But more:** The commitment to follow Him is preceded by a call. Christ “calls” each of us to follow Him; to put aside the nets of our lives, whatever they might be, whatever drives us in our day to day actions and desires. He calls us to follow Him now, immediately.

**But there is even more to say** about this commitment, which is preceded by His call: The call itself comes to us with a promise. It is the promise that He bestows upon us at the moment He reaches out to us in Holy Baptism, adopting us as His sons and daughters, and promising us through the Self-giving Grace of the All-Holy Spirit to be our God, and to accept us as His sons and daughters forever. His call is preceded by the Grace of adoption.

We often lose track of this in our Christian lives, thinking that “we” have chosen to become Orthodox Christians on the basis of our own reading, our own thinking, our own examination of the rules and regulations and practices of the Orthodox Faith. But the truth of the matter is that Holy Spirit has been working from the moment of our births to bring us to Holy Baptism and then to enter within our hearts with the eternal promise that gives us the ability to hear His call and the will to commit ourselves to follow Him.

With every other commitment in life, there are no guarantees: eating less, exercising more may indeed help us, but the specter of death does not diminish no matter how wise our food choices are or how much we exercise. Spending a bit less on ourselves is indeed a good practice, and putting something away for a rainy day is indeed wise; but it will not save us from the inevitable end of eventual sickness, old age and death; even the richest men and women in the world will die. Education is a good and beneficial thing, but there is no guarantee that it will improve the quality of our lives ultimately. Only the promise of our Lord, bestowed first in Holy Baptism and then renewed again, and again, and again in the Holy Mysteries of which we partake throughout our entire lives - only **that** promise guarantees the grace of Life Eternal in union with the Lord Who unites Himself to us, Who calls us to follow Him, and Who continually works with us as we progress along the path of salvation.

Brothers and Sisters: Let us remember and rejoice in that promise; let us heed His call; and let us indeed put aside the nets of our lives and follow Him with our entire being!

In Christ our true God,

+Fr. Elias

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