



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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<http://EntranceMission.org>

Divine Mercy is for Every Person Week of December 24, 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

*Our 'neighbor' is in fact every member of the human race. We are all ontologically united and share in the same consubstantial human nature, which has been united to God in the Person of the Incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ. Our neighbor is indeed **every** person. This is the 'neighbor' whom Christ commands his followers to love 'as thyself'. Such love is not restricted to one's own family, friends, fellow-parishioners or even other Christians. Christ commands the believer to love **every** human being. This is the Christian way. And this does not refer to something abstract or theoretical, rather it is on a personal level. In this way the believer comes to comprehend and to appreciate the eternal value and precious uniqueness of **every** human person.*

*This true, compassionate, Christ-like love for all mankind leads the believer to grieve for the salvation of **every** human person, as if he were grieving for his own. St. Silouan's fervent desire for the salvation of **every** human person may be summed up further in his words, "... love cannot suffer a single soul to perish." Therefore, when he says "Our brother is our life" St Silouan*

*is actually implying that all mankind – indeed **every** human being – is indeed ‘our neighbor’, ‘our brother’, ‘our life’.*

(Boosalis, H. 2000. *Orthodox Spiritual Life According to Saint Silouan the Athonite*. South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press.)

These words are from a book on the spirituality of St. Silouan, the Russian elder from the monastery of St. Panteleimon on Mount Athos who was the spiritual father of Vladyka Theodore of blessed memory, who was the spiritual father of our own Vladyka John. Brother Anthony and I have been reading through this book on Saturdays prior to Vespers, and this Saturday we covered the chapter in which the passage above is located. When I read the words aloud on Saturday it was honestly as if a great burden had been lifted from my heart. I cannot explain how or why that was so, but it was. The words of St. Silouan place everything into proper perspective. Gone is our misunderstanding of the faith based on works righteousness or the pharisaic meticulous self-serving adherence of rules and regulations for our own benefit in the sight of God. St. Silouan rises above all of that, explaining with direct simplicity that God is an ocean of love, love that never fades, that never diminishes, that never limits itself to this or that person who might somehow “earn” it. St. Silouan’s teaching is of course the witness of the New Testament, so clearly proclaimed by St. Paul and St. John, the Beloved Disciple.

It is our tendency as fallen human beings, however, to think otherwise. When we think of our lives in the Church we so easily reduce the Faith to the practice of personal actions and disciplines that we somehow think will earn us salvation. In so doing, we not only deceive ourselves, but we turn in on ourselves, forgetting that we are all one with every other human being who lives, who has lived or who will live. We think of the Day of Judgment as the moment in time when we must somehow defend ourselves before the Father, pointing to our lives within the Church or our actions in adherence to the canons of the Church. The problem is that when we come before God, there *is* no defense possible. All of us, the Scriptures teach very clearly, have fallen short of the commandments; all of us have no real defense before God other than to throw ourselves before Him asking for mercy. We are all publicans, and the only prayer that we dare pray for ourselves is, “God be merciful to me the sinner!”

But that’s not enough either, is it? For, if we throw ourselves before the Righteous Judge asking for mercy for ourselves alone, is that not just another way of admitting that we are only concerned with ourselves? Is that not the very definition of sin? To think only of ourselves and forget our brothers and sisters of our common humanity with whom we are, in the words of St. Silouan, “ontologically” connected?

St. Silouan’s teaching brings a different image to mind. When we think the “great and fearful day of judgment” as the Scriptures call it, we should instead not think primarily of ourselves, but of one another. The believer who has received mercy at the Divine Hand of the One Who is an ocean of love cannot be content with mercy for himself, but instead will fall down before the Awesome Judge in supplication for every other human being. We cannot be content with our own salvation if there are others who will not be saved; we cannot be satisfied with mercy shown to us if that same mercy is not shown to others – in particular to those who have in some blatant and horrifying way shown the world

that they have lost their way. For us who are united to the One Lord and Savior Jesus Christ the Last Judgment will be about beseeching the Father in His Name for the salvation of others.

As I write these words I see in my mind the example of our Father Among the Saints, John Maximovitch. Each night he climbed to the cupola of his church in Shanghai and blessed the four directions, asking for mercy on those who had mistreated him, persecuted him and turned against the Lord in rebellion. This is who we must be, Brothers and Sisters.

This HolyDay season let us pray to the Lord not merely for ourselves, but for one another. And not merely for those whom we “like” but more especially for those whom we don’t. Let us be as Christ, God Incarnate, Who was entirely the man for others. This was the life and example of the Child born of Mary in Bethlehem. To Him be all honor and glory forever!

In Christ our true God,

+Fr. Elias

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