



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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I'm Ok, You're OK? Really? Week of January 28, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Every year on the first Sunday of the *Triodion* we hear the Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee. This parable that we all know so well makes me think of a popular book that was written back in the 1960s. It was called "*I'm Ok, You're Ok.*" There were a lot of pop psychology, self-help books written in those days, but this one spread throughout the culture like wildfire in the late 60s and early 70s, and it captured the imagination of many of my fellow college and seminary students. The theories espoused in the book were those of a psychiatrist by the name Dr. Eric Berne, and they had to do with a set of counseling therapies which he called "Transactional Analysis." His insights were about the way in which people thought of themselves and behaved: in each of us, he basically said, there were adult, child and parent qualities. The way in which they worked against each other within us often led to psychological dysfunctions that could be addressed in his counseling techniques.

A lot of people back then bought this book and used it as a way to justify their own pursuit of pleasure. This is not what the author said in his book, but it is what the title implied. People concluded from the book that it would be fine for us to do what we want, when we want, and that we must accept the sinful actions of people all around us as Ok; in essence, they concluded that there was no sin, and that guilt was essentially harmful. "*I'm Ok, You're Ok. Do*

what feels good; don't let your morality stand in the way; don't judge your actions too harshly, and don't question the actions or views of others."

In the Parable of the Publican and Pharisee our Lord tells of two individuals who were very much *not* Ok. The one knew it, and the other did not. The Publican knew who he was and where he stood before God: He came into the temple, head bowed, hands low by his side; he knew how he had defrauded the poor and sent money to support the armies of the invader; he knew how he had betrayed God's people, and ultimately, God Himself. He believed that there was no salvation in his future, for how could he have paid back all that he had taken; how could he even dare to think he could make restitution; in essence, he knew that he stood before God a condemned man. So his prayer, the prayer of one without any self-justification before the Lord was, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

The other man, a Pharisee, a member of the elite, strict group of Jewish religious leaders, on the other hand, did not know who he was. In his mind, he was fine, in fact better than fine. He fasted, he prayed, he supported the religious establishments, never giving in to the kind of self-serving betrayal of his people that the Publican had given in to. In gratitude, perhaps sincere, he stood before God, hands upraised, and prayed to the Lord that he was grateful not to have sinned as the Publican had sinned; he stood before the Lord thinking that he was basically Ok, righteous before Him. But he was deluded. For in reality, the comparison he made between himself and the Publican revealed his own self-righteousness, the impurity of pride that hid within him like a nasty virus. Jesus tells His disciples that it was not he, the Pharisee, who would be justified, but the Publican who in spite of his sin came before God in humility

I'm Ok, Your're OK? I don't think so. The Publican was not Ok, and he know it. The Pharisee was not Ok, but he thought he was, and furthermore, that the Publican was not. "I'm Ok, and You're Not," would be the description of what the Pharisee thought. But it is the Publican whose example the Lord holds before us. It is his attitude and his actions that we are told to emulate.

Brothers and Sisters, let's be honest! None of us is Ok! We have taken the wealth of this world and our lives and wasted them; we have pursued our own ways, often to the detriment of the lives and well-being of others. We absolutely have no right to point the finger at one another or at others out in the world at large. Each of us, if we are honest, knows that we have no righteousness, no right to expect justification, before the Lord. We may honestly come before Him only as beggars, hands at our sides, heads bowed, in humility. This, you see, is the only appropriate posture for those of us who see the truth about ourselves – that we are all Publicans.

Truly, this Parable is a powerful message as we approach the season of our repentance. We come like he did, opening the Temple of our Hearts to Him Who is merciful, the "Lover of Mankind," as our texts remind us over and over again. He waits with patience to approach us in our repentance and to bestow His forgiveness and the healing grace of His Divine Love so that we may be reconciled to Him. This is the lesson of the Parable! May each of us emulate the one who knew where he stood before God, and may each of us pray from the heart, "God be merciful to me the sinner!"

In Christ our true God,

+Fr. Elias

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