



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

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### *The Extreme Humility of our God* Week of April 1, 2018

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

**Glory to Thy Long Suffering, O Lord! Glory to Thee!**

*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2: 5-11)*

Throughout the course of Great Lent I have displayed the icon of “The Extreme Humility” in the back icon corner of our little church. Typically, it is displayed only on Great and Holy Friday. But I wanted everyone to see the icon and to ponder it throughout the course of the entire fast this year.

The icon depicts our Lord in the tomb; and, it’s a strange icon in the sense that it does not depict a “realistic image” of how that would actually have looked. Like all icons, it’s an abstract image, proclaiming a message, a sermon of sorts painted on wood by means of brush and paint rather than words. We see our Lord with His immaculate hands crossed over His breast inside a tomb or stone sarcophagus of sorts, as if He had been lowered down willingly into it. His Head is bowed in calm

acceptance of what has been done to Him, as if He were saying, "Not my will, Father, but Thine be done." It is the image of Extreme Humility.

As we enter into that week which we Orthodox Christians call "Great and Holy Week" we hear the story of The Humiliated One's entrance into the city of Jerusalem. It is a strange entrance indeed. The people filled with animated passion greet Him as if He were a great and powerful earthly king, expecting Him to ascend the throne of His ancestor David to renew the faded glory of the ancient Israelite empire; they case palms, symbols of their past glory, on the road before Him. But He will have none of it. He enters the city after having performed His greatest miracle in the raising of Lazarus from the dead, not in an imperial chariot or riding on a white stallion; no, He enters on an ass, the very symbol of humility. The scriptures point out that this is a fulfillment of the ancient prophecy of Zechariah, and indeed it is; but, it is more; it is a quiet and yet intensely powerful proclamation of divine humility. The Only Begotten Son of God, Begotten of the Father before all worlds, light of light, true God of true God comes in humility. Palm Sunday is a sign of one of the inmost of all Divine Attributes – humility. God in His inmost Essence is humble. Indeed, our Lord told us plainly: *Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*"

I daresay that most people do not think of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in this way at all. We know the images and remember the stories, but somehow they just become a part of the religious landscape we take for granted. And yet the message is clearly proclaimed in virtually every word and action of the events that take place during Holy Week. He is accused falsely, dragged into custody by means of betrayal, thrown before the Sanhedrin and accused of blasphemy, pushed into the governor's chamber accused of a capital offense, and yet makes no defense, says virtually nothing. He is spat upon, cruelly whipped, nailed to a cross, given vinegar to drink as He dies and stabbed by a spear. At the end He prays for those who persecute Him; and, reciting the words of Psalm 21(22), commits His soul into the Hands of His Father in heaven. He never resists, but instead greets violence and the horror of absolute rejection with peace and humility, trusting through all of it in His Heavenly Father. The Incarnate God submits willingly to the Will of the Father for the Life of the World; He submits in humility and accepts all that comes to Him, even Extreme Humiliation, in peace and silence.

The inner essence of God is humility. He never greets our resistance with violence; he never pushes or forces us against our will; He waits for us to come in submission to His Will. He waits for our trust in Him, even as the Humiliated One, Jesus Christ, trusted in the Father. He waits for us to treat one another in service, even as our Lord can "not to be served, but to serve." He waits in humility for us to respond to the Call of His Life-Giving Spirit to accept the vocation that Israel rejected, to be His presence in the world as a blessing to all mankind.

I said in my sermon today that there are really only two ways that people act in their relationships with one another. One is the way of power, and the other is the way of humility. The world is all about power. In daily life we encounter bullies, people who have no courtesy, decency or respect; people who defend the use of violence and the instruments of violence as if they were a God-given right. We have laws to protect those who are hurt by the misuse of power, and armies and police forces to enforce

those laws. And yet, over the centuries, very little has improved. Nations continue to rise up against nations; people still lash out in hatred and anger against others, the misery and cruelty in the world continue to increase.

The way of our Lord, and the way he bids His disciples to follow, however, is the way of humility. This requires a great sacrifice. If we treat those who hurt us with peace and forgiveness, then we will be surely ourselves be taken advantage of, mistreated and hurt as was He. Indeed, this is true. But it is the Way that He has set before each of us. We are all to go out in the world like “lambs in the midst of wolves.” Each of us who would be His disciples must decide if we will be His entirely or only in name. If we would be His entirely, then we too must bow our own heads in extreme humility, trusting in the Will of our Heavenly Father to save us in spite of whatever harm or dishonor or rejection comes upon us in our discipleship. We are truly to be lambs in the midst of wolves.

This is not a message that will be embraced by the multitudes. It is, however, one of the most important messages of this Week that we call “Great and Holy.” Let none of us forget that the goal of our pilgrimage this week is to bear the cross with the Humiliated One in the knowledge that the time of suffering and endurance in His Name will end with the proclamation of the first Pascha, that He is Risen! That the time of sorrow will have an end, and that He will indeed bestow the fulfillment of His promise to all who accept Him and strive to emulate Him: “Enter into the Joy of my Kingdom, prepared for you since the foundation of the world.” This, Brothers and Sisters is the meaning of our Lord’s extreme humility, so beautifully shown in the icon we have seen throughout the entire Fast in our little Church. The Extreme Humility of our God is the one eternal sign of His love and sacrifice for the Life of the World, shown and bestowed as an unspeakable grace and demonstrated for us to emulate. Truly, it is the only alternative to the misery of a world so terribly broken in its separation from the One Who bows His Immaculate Head in Extreme Humility.

In Christ our true God,

+Fr. Elias

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