



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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<http://EntranceMission.org>

Wolves in Sheep's Clothing Week of January 19, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Among the sayings of the Desert Fathers, those of Abba Poemen are among my favorites:

A man may seem to be silent, but if his heart is condemning others he is babbling ceaselessly. But there may be another who talks from morning till night and yet he is truly silent; that is, he says nothing that is not profitable.

A brother questioned Abba Poemen saying, "If I see my brother committing a sin, is it right to conceal it?" The old man said to him, "At the very moment when we hide our brother's fault, God hides our own and at the moment when we reveal our brother's fault, God reveals ours too.

Some old men came to see Abba Poemen and said to him, "When we see brothers who are dozing at the synaxis, shall we rouse them so that they will be watchful?" He said to

them, "For my part, when I see a brother who is dozing, I put his head on my knees and let him rest.

Every year we observe a holiday in the United States on the twentieth of January, The Rev. Martin Luther King (MLK), Jr. Day. At first I was rather oblivious over the reasons why our federal government chose a special day for Martin Luther King, Jr., but I came to the realization as I read about the history of his movement and as I studied his remarkable preaching and writing that we do indeed owe him a great debt of gratitude as a nation. MLK, Jr. was a man of faith and a man of peace. He was led by his conscience to object to the treatment of blacks in the deep south. As a director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, he went to Birmingham, Alabama in 1963 to help the black people there peacefully make public their suffering over their unjust treatment. He stood for justice, peaceful nonviolence and Christian charity. These are worthy attributes by any standard of moral discernment. It was the love of Christ that propelled MLK, Jr. St. Paul expressed this in 2 Corinthians 5:14: "The love of Christ controls us ". As a result of his preaching and writing in the Birmingham papers he was put into prison and stayed there, significantly I would suggest, during the high holy days of western Holy Week and Easter, suffering unjustly for a righteous cause. I have come to realize for many years that he was the single most important factor in the mitigation of potential violence between the races in places like Alabama and other parts of the deep south. Because of his devotion to Christ and his understanding of the principles of Christian behavior, he was able to minimize the potential of violence, destruction and hatred. His untimely death by assassination was a truly wicked tragedy.

Yesterday I received a complaint from someone in our congregation that there has been a series of objectionable and ignorant Facebook posts on the part of Orthodox laity, Orthodox clerics and even (God forbid!) an Orthodox hierarch condemning MLK Jr., criticizing his personal behavior and even judging him to be the equal of Stalin in his moral character. Ha! Can you imagine? The moral equivalent of Stalin, who murdered millions! If what has been reported to me is true, I honestly wonder what planet those people who say such things in a public forum are living on? And I wonder what makes such people convinced that they are in any serious sense of the word promulgating an Orthodox Christian witness? Any basic catechumen in our little congregation knows the distinction between discernment and judgment. Yes, it is indeed true that MLK, Jr. was not Orthodox and that he sinned in his personal life. So, I would hasten to point out, have you and I. Our position as Orthodox Christians is that God has given us the grace of repentance, and that we can and should repent of our sins repeatedly. If MLK, Jr. did not know that, I would be indeed surprised. He knew the Holy Scriptures and the meaning of the New Testament witness much better, I would argue, than those who made such foolish, ignorant, embarrassing pathetic pontifications on Facebook about him.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ: If you are one of us who live and pray in our little Entrance Mission, I adjure you to stay away from such heterodox and unchristian discussions on Facebook. Keep to your prayers. Receive the Holy Mysteries in repentance and humility. Live a simple life without pushing your opinions onto others. Most of all, open your hearts to the Holy Spirit that He draw you into an ever more perfect union with Christ, Whom to know is Life and Salvation.

To those who pontificate on Facebook from outside our little congregation, I would say this: If you would call yourself Orthodox Christians, then you must behave as Christians should behave. You must stop incessantly pointing out the deficiencies of others and focus more on the deficiencies in yourselves; this indeed is what each of us must do repeatedly as our Lord directs us. You must stop endlessly, ad nauseum, straining gnats and swallowing camels. If you want others to come to Christ as Orthodox Christians, then you must give worthy examples as Orthodox Christians. Among other things, that means that you must stop judging, stop nit-picking, stop endlessly pontificating about issues you self-evidently do not understand. Especially if you are a cleric. And if you are a hierarch, why are you expressing your opinion like a Junior High School schoolboy on Facebook to begin with? Remember that those who read your posts not only judge the Orthodox Faith and your own jurisdiction on the basis of what you say and how you act; they judge Christ on the basis of it as well. Please do not assume you know everything; you do not. Only God is omniscient. Why not follow the example of other Orthodox hierarchs worthy of emulation: St. Theophan, St. Nektarios, St. John Maximovitch? Why do you choose to present yourself with the naked self-aggrandizement of an Innocent III rather than with the gentle love and charity of a true servant of the Master?

So, please, Brothers and Sisters; I beg you: Stay away from discussions on Facebook and that bottomless pit of prideful opinionizing, Twitter. They have truly become the means of falsehood and the tool of the Evil One. Let your hearts be directed by the Holy Scriptures and the teachings of the Holy Fathers, not by those who place themselves above them, regardless of what they call themselves; they are nothing other than wolves in sheep's clothing.

In Christ our true God,

Fr. Elias

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