



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

306 W. Main Street  
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

The Rev. Fr. Elias Yelovich, Pastor

<http://EntranceMission.org>

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### *What We Have Lost* Week of March 1, 2020

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**Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,**

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

*Adam sat before the gates of Eden,  
bemoaning his nakedness and crying out:  
“Woe to me! I have listened to wicked deceit;  
I have lost my glory, and now am driven away!  
Woe to me! My open-mindedness hath left me naked and confused!  
No longer will I enjoy thy delights, O Paradise;  
no longer can I see my Lord, my God and Creator.  
He formed me from dust, and now to the dust I return!  
I beg Thee, O compassionate Lord:  
Have mercy on me who have fallen!”*

The Sunday of Cheesefare immediately before the beginning of Great Lent is known both as the Sunday of Forgiveness and the Sunday of the Expulsion of Adam from paradise. We of course all know the meaning of Forgiveness Sunday, for we have often come together throughout the

years at Vespers on that day to bow down before one another and to beg forgiveness from all whom we have wronged. We also have granted forgiveness to all who have wronged us. The path to reconciliation is always the same: repentance and forgiveness. There is no other.

The Holy Fathers, however, have taken great effort in the texts of the Triodion for this Sunday to remind us of what we have lost, in other words, of why our reconciliation is necessary. We all know the official teachings of the Orthodox Church that we learned in catechesis, from sermons, in Bible Studies or from our spiritual fathers. Like Adam, we have thrust ourselves away from a living relationship with the One Who Created us. This has led to all manner of ill: sin, suffering, death. Only the action of God Himself Who had pity on us could reverse the dreadful effects of our Fall. By becoming man in the Incarnation of the Word Made Flesh, He entered into the realm of our suffering. He Who came from the very throne of Grace in Heaven entered into our misery, took upon Himself our sin, our suffering and our dying, voluntarily! He filled our darkness with the eternal and inextinguishable light of Life, and reversed our Fall. We are still for the time being outside of paradise to be sure, but we now have a vision both of what we have lost and what awaits us in the never-ending day of His Kingdom to come.

Like Adam, we may well weep at our state. Because of our self-imposed expulsion from what God had freely given, we live much of our lives in misery. We sit like the Prodigal Son in the mire of the pig sty, unable to help ourselves. We boast of our paltry virtues like the Pharisee. And we recognize the perpetual inhumanity of ourselves and others when we refuse to visit the sick, comfort the dying, give sustenance to those in need and to show basic compassion to those whom the majority disdains. Life apart from Oneness with our Creator is means of misery to those around us and ourselves.

The path home, Brothers and Sisters, is the path of reconciliation. This path has been opened to us by God Himself, and we come together this Sunday to participate in its wondrous opportunity. We repent of the way we have treated one another, and like the Publican, bow down seeking forgiveness. We hear and receive the repentance of our fellow human beings, and we offer our heartfelt forgiveness. This is the path away from what we have lost to the restoration of our "high calling" to be Christ to our neighbor. As I said above, there is no other way.

Cast out of paradise, we weep with Adam. But the Lord has not forsaken us to live out our days in despair and misery. He has come to be one with us, His fallen creation, and to raise us up to be with Him eternally. Great Lent is the time of preparation for our eventual restoration, one that begins in this life and will continue unto life everlasting!

On Sunday, let us say to one another with conviction, "Forgive me the sinner!" And let us reply with sincerity and love, "God forgives, (as do I)!"

In Christ our true God,

Fr. Elias

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717-817-0084