



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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<http://EntranceMission.org>

Slaves of Righteousness July 5, 2020

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is in our midst! He is and every shall be!

And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. ... For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ... But now, having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6: 18, 22-23).

This Epistle appointed for the coming Sunday, the 4th after Pentecost, is memorable. It contrasts the two forms of slavery that characterize the spiritual life of each human being. Either we are slaves to sin, the wages of which is death; or, we are slaves to righteousness, the end or goal of which is everlasting life.

The context in which these words were written is important. St. Paul wrote to Christians who lived in a time of turmoil and change. Many were converts from ancient Judaism, the cult of temple worship and sacrifice and the strict observance of the law, the goal of which was the achievement of righteousness by means of good works and adherence to the law. St. Paul

reverses the notion of that spiritual methodology. He pointed out last week in the lesson from Romans 5 that we are justified not by our adherence to the law, nor by our good works, but by the grace of our Lord's own self-giving. Since it is God's will to save all of mankind, we are justified before Him by His Grace, His self-giving, insofar as we are joined with him in a relationship of faith. As with Abraham of old, God Himself provides the sacrifice for our reconciliation with Him, the sacrifice of His own son.

Within the context of ancient Christianity, these words were revolutionary. They reversed the entire way in which people were accustomed to thinking about their salvation. No longer was it centered on the human person to become and to do what was required in the form of adherence to the law; now, it was dependent, St. Paul preached, entirely on God's own love, His own self-giving, accepted by each person in a relationship of faith. We are now to look not to ourselves, but to God, and we are to become evermore like Him through the Grace of the Holy Spirit, Who unites us to the Lord, Whom to know is to know the Father. Our union to the Lord Himself is our salvation and the means for our life as slaves to righteousness.

The contrast between lives of selfishness and lives of self-giving could not be plainer. W. H. Auden characterized our age as the "age of anxiety." I would characterize it as the age of selfishness, the age of narcissism. As a people we have become entirely obsessed with our own personal "rights" and "freedoms" to do as we want, when we want, how we want. We can't even convince people to act with such basic humane behavior such as wearing some sort of face covering in public places so as to protect others near them from harm. We want above all things to have our way, to do as we want when we want without restriction. This innate selfishness has become the foundational modus operandi of the modern person in our culture. What would people who are unabashedly selfish care about righteousness?

And yet, as people come to the realization that their lives of selfishness lead to no good place, they will be drawn by the Holy Spirit to the One, Whom to know, is life eternal and freedom from selfishness. Those of us who have united ourselves to Christ understand that selfish behavior, narcissism, does indeed lead to the dissolution of our humanity as God created it. Indeed, the wages of sin is death, as St. Paul wrote. The only alternative to sin is union with the Lord, Who has poured out Himself into the self-giving of love and service and sacrifice for the Life of the world. Thus, St. Paul speaks of our two options, slavery to sin or slavery to righteousness; or, to put it in other words, freedom from sin or freedom to be One with the Lord, Whom to know is life and salvation. Only through our union with Him, are we freed from the bondage of slavery to our own whims and desires; only through Him can we be what we were created to be, men and women free to serve others, even He has served and continues to serve us. Thus, as St. Paul has summarized it, "having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is

eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” To this end, may the Grace of the All-Holy Spirit lead each of us!

Fr. Elias

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