



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

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### *What Really Matters?*

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**Brothers and Sisters in Christ,**

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

And behold, they brought to him a paralytic, lying on his bed; and when Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." (Matthew 9: 2-3)

What is it that matters? What should we seek? What goal should we have as we face the trials and tribulations of our lives? These are the questions that are answered so very clearly in our Gospel lesson this Sunday from the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew.

I must confess that whenever I read this lesson I stumble over the words. It has always struck me as one of the most perplexing stories in the entire New Testament. The Lord crosses the Sea of Galilee to come home to his own city, i.e. Capernaum, the base of His activity with His disciples. Four men carry a paralytic to Him so that He would heal him. St. Mark relates that the house was so crowded that the men actually dug a hole in the roof and lowered the man down to where Jesus was, in desperation and in faith that the Lord could heal him. But the story in Matthew's account strikes me as perplexing, for Jesus hardly even acknowledges the man's terrible physical condition. He does not ask, for example, how he became a quadriplegic or how long he has been paralyzed, or how it

happened, or even if he seeks healing. The Lord immediately says only one thing, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven."

The Lord cuts right to the heart of the matter, as He always does. Serious though the paralysis of the man is, more serious is the state of the man's soul, indeed of everyone's soul, in need of forgiveness. Now, let's be clear about the fact that the Lord is not saying that the man's paralysis is due to this or that particular sin. Whether it is or not is not the subject of the account that Matthew relates. The point is that there is only one thing that is crucial; there is only one thing that is needful; there is only one thing we should seek; there is only one goal that matters. And that is to seek with all of our heart, with all of our mind, with all of our strength reconciliation with God.

The impact of this account lies precisely in the contrast between what we expect to happen and what our Lord actually says and does. Of course, the Lord in His compassion heals the man. This was a foregone conclusion in the telling of the story in the Gospel. But it was not to be expected that He would first point to something much more important than even the healing of this poor man's paralysis. Jesus always points to the heart of what matters. And what matters above all else is our reconciliation as human beings with the One Who created us, Who sustains us and Who waits to receive us back in communion with Him.

I think this message is an exceptionally powerful one. We have suffering and fear and illness and death all around us. Everywhere we turn on the radio or the TV we hear the same terrible news. So many people sick, so many people dying, so many political leaders unconcerned and unwilling to help. We are all united in our prayer for healing for God's hand to come and bring an end to the misery at every side. But the role of the Church, Brothers and Sisters, is to persist in pointing out and proclaiming that there is only one thing that is needful, and that one thing is to seek reconciliation, forgiveness of our sins and transgressions, union with the One Who alone can and will make all things right, all things new again.

It has taken me more than a few years to see this powerful message in the telling of this miracle story from St. Matthew. Only one thing matters; only one thing is crucial; only one thing should be the goal of our entire life's effort and devotion, and that one thing is to seek His Kingdom, to humble ourselves before Him in repentance seeking the only thing that matters – reconciliation and union with the One Who is salvation and life eternal. To that end, may each of us aspire and struggle even to our dying breath!

Fr. Elias

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