



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

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

But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the prince of demons." (Mt. 9:34)

Over the years that I have been teaching, one of the things I have found myself asking students is, "What did you expect?" To be sure I typically ask it only of those who fail my courses and complain to me about it later. "What did you expect," I ask. "You did not do your work; you did not study; you did not even read the required chapters in the textbook. The only outcome possible is the one you arrived at. Your expectations have blinded you."

"What did you expect?" This is the question we must ask of the Pharisees in Sunday's Gospel lesson. They witnessed two of our Lord's most astonishing healings: a blind man and a man possessed by demons. In both cases the Lord reached out in mercy and healed them. Yet, the Pharisee's were led by their expectations to denounce Jesus. They saw His actions and they heard His words. But because they expected something different in their Messiah, they could not accept the possibility that Jesus was the One for Whom they had been waiting. So, they said

he was casting out demons by the prince of demons, a ridiculous assertion, which our Lord effectively counters with the observation that a “house divided against itself cannot stand”

I have been thinking of those Pharisees and their reaction all week. What would lead them to make such a stunning accusation against our Lord, our Lord Who brought healing, resurrection, forgiveness and love to all with whom He came into contact? Clearly, the expectations of the Pharisees about who and what the expected Messiah was to be was quite different from what they saw in the actions and what they heard in the words of our Lord. We get a strong insight into their expectations by virtue of what happened on Palm Sunday. After raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus enters the holy city, His face set toward the cross and the ultimate sacrifice He would be for the life of the world. But those who welcomed Him expected something different. They threw before Him palms, the symbol of Jewish military victory as He entered Jerusalem, thinking He would bring an end to Roman occupation of their land. But He would have none of it; His face was set toward Jerusalem to accomplish a much higher task than to wage war against the occupying Romans. His will was to do the will of the Father in Heaven, to become the true One and Eternal Sacrifice for the sin of the world. He rode not on a war steed, but on the very symbol of humble service, the foal of an ass.

The question each of us must ask is, “What do we expect of God?” The Pharisees expected their Messiah to come and bring an end to the Roman occupation of their land. But what they saw and heard in Jesus was different from what they expected. They were, in fact, blinded by their erroneous expectations. It is the same for us. We too approach God with expectations, often erroneous ones. As I’ve pointed out many times in the past, we either treat God as if He does not exist, or we approach Him as a genie. We go about our lives when things are good and comfortable, maybe saying this or that prayer or prayer rule in haste, because it intrudes into the routine of our lives. Or, when there are bad times, we pray with earnest, but with impatience and little humility, expecting miracles at our behest, impatiently wanting Him to do this or that thing immediately. We expect Him to snap to it, to make things right, so that we can go back to our normal lives, forgetting Him and His call to discipleship.

We must take a lesson from what we read this Sunday and from the example of Palm Sunday, which so clearly illustrates the truth of what Jesus came to be and to do. The Lord loves His creation and wills that all should be saved, and it was for that purpose that the Lord Jesus Christ came. To be sure, it is also His will that the sufferings of this time such as the horrific pandemic and the many families and peoples that suffer because of it, be freed from their suffering. But His will, His higher purpose goes far beyond the healing of the moment to the healing of eternity. It is His will that we be reconciled as a people and as individuals to Him, the source of our salvation. This is His purpose, as we saw when He rode into Jerusalem to ascend the cross so long ago on Palm Sunday and as we have seen repeatedly in the Gospel accounts of His

miracles. The expectation then was for Him to do something immediate, to bring an end to the political slavery of God's people to Rome. But His purpose went far beyond that: to bring an end to our slavery to sin and our slavery to ourselves and to free us for union with Him

Let us look beyond the moment of this time, Brothers and Sisters! It is God's good will to end the pandemic to be sure. But until He does so in His time, which is different from ours, He will use this affliction to bring many to Him. As His people, let us approach Him in humility; let us pray above all that His will be done; let us offer ourselves as His hands and His feet to lead others within their suffering to turn to Him in faith. Let His will to draw all people unto Himself be our one and only true expectation!

Fr. Elias

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