



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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<http://EntranceMission.org>

Selfishness or Sacrament August 2, 2020

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

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

But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."
(Matthew 14:16)

There was an article on Tuesday in one of our national newspapers that hit the nail on the head. In fact, it could have come straight from one of my sermons. The article was entitled, "The Cult of Selfishness," and the author observed that so very much that is wrong in our culture comes from our preoccupation with doing and getting what we want at virtually any expense, even when it hurts others. We want our freedom; so, we balk at wearing a mask to protect others from COVID. We want our way of life to continue as always, so we go out to the bars and restaurants against the advice of our medical professionals, never thinking for even one moment for the way in which we might be harming others. We want to preserve our selfish autonomy and the status quo that has favored those of our own racial identities, so we raise symbols of slavery or violence like the flag of the confederacy and tote guns to have it our way or else. We want freedom to do what we want, how we want, when we want, so we get rid of

“unwanted” children, aborting them or killing them as they are born after we violently “rip them from their mothers’ wombs,” to use the graphic imagery of Shakespeare. The cult of our selfishness has corrupted our lives and threatens to undo our entire civilization.

Any Christian knows this. We shake our heads at what we see in the news, the actions of people on all sides of the political spectrum, seeking to destroy the other, to lie, to cheat, to have their way at any cost. The most distressing thing to observe is the hypocrisy of so many Christians in public office, who should know what that black book they hold up says, but who ignore it to pursue their own ends.

In our Gospel lesson this week we see the alternative to the cult of selfishness. The alternative is to follow the example and instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ. St. Matthew tells us that the Lord had gone aside after hearing of the death of His cousin John the Forerunner. It was not yet time for Him to be glorified. As He goes aside with His disciples, He is followed by a great crowd. He heals their sick in mercy, showing the compassion that is part of the inmost nature of our God. Then, after He preaches, the time comes for the crowd to be fed. The disciples point this out to Him, but He responds in that mysterious way we have come to remember when we think of this great miracle. He says to them, “You give them something to eat.” This is where the miracle begins. A boy with five pitas and three fish, a boy’s lunch, provides the answer to the cult of selfishness. He offers it to the Lord. He gives what he had. Of course, he could have eaten it himself; after all, whose fault was it that the people came unprepared? He had taken the time to bring something for lunch; it wasn’t his fault that the others had not. Yet, he sees the need and offers it to Jesus. This is the beginning of the miracle. Christ accepts it, blesses it, and gives it to His disciples to distribute. Twelve baskets are left over after 5,000 men along with their wives and children are fed.

There are only two ways for us, Brothers and Sisters. Either we follow the cult of selfishness or we follow the example of that boy who offered what he had to Jesus for the good of others. Selfishness or Sacrament. These are the two ways.

Selfishness is what is tearing apart the fabric of our lives in the culture in which we live. But to offer what we have to God for the benefit of others – this always begins the miracle of God’s self-giving that happens in a sacrament. All of life for us who would follow Christ is sacrament. The word “sacrament” does not only refer to the Holy Mysteries that we name in Church, Eucharist, Baptism, Chrismation, Penance, Marriage, etc. But all of life should be sacrament. Life as sacrament is to offer to Christ what we have for the good of others; and, to receive in return His blessing of that offering returned to us, multiplied, just as He did in the miracle of the Feeding of the 5,000. There is and can always be enough for all, if we offer what we are and what we have to Him, just as the boy in the story did when he gave his lunch to the Lord for the good of others.

It's amazing how simple this is, and yet how the majority of human beings in our land on all sides of the political spectrum refuse to see it, to practice it or to at least recognize it. They seem hell-bent on continuing to pursue the cult of selfishness while the people around us sicken and die. Eventually, this crisis will lead to another and then to another after that. The cult of selfishness will continue until the people repent and return to the Lord. The only alternative is for us to return to the Lord, to offer ourselves to Him, and to allow Him to multiply whatever offering we make for the good of others, for the true life and salvation of the world. These are the two alternatives: selfishness or sacrament. The one leads to death; the other to Life in His Kingdom.

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