



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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Self-Sufficient or Christ-Sufficient? Which Will It Be? August 16, 2020

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

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

And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting. (Matthew 17:18-21)

There's a commercial on TV about some sort of pharmaceutical product that we are supposed to go talk our doctor into prescribing for us. A man in the commercial boasts about how he can do everything himself: he changes the oil in his car; he paints his own house; he hires no one to do anything for him; he strives in all things to be totally self-sufficient. He even decides to give himself an internal exam; but, that, of course, stretches the limit of his own self-independence. Eventually he relents, realizing that he needs the help of a medical professional to prescribe the medication necessary.

The Gospel lesson this week from Matthew relates our Lord's healing of an epileptic child. Actually, it relates how the father of the child came to the disciples for help. They could not cast the demon

out themselves. Eventually, they bring the child to Jesus, and he cures the child with a mere word. Jesus chides the disciples for their lack of faith saying that that sort of demon could only be cast out by “prayer and fasting,” and reminding them that if they had faith as little as a tiny mustard seed, they could move mountains. In the version of the story told by St. Mark, Jesus asks the father of the child if he believes; the man answers with those most memorable words, “I believe, Lord; help my unbelief.” All of the Gospels relate our Lord’s consternation over the faithlessness of the people, calling them a “faithless and perverse generation,” words, I would observe describe our own generation precisely.

We often think of faith wrongly, as if it were some sort of power that we must muster up in ourselves to make things happen according to our desire or will, as if it were something for us to rely on within ourselves. Faith, Brothers and Sisters, is reliance on the Lord. Either we go it alone, or we rely on Him; either we do what we want by ourselves, like the man in the commercial I mentioned above, or we rely on the Lord. Faith is relational; it is the condition of receiving all things from the Lord in humility; it is relying on the Lord with the trust of a child; it is union with Him. The disciples could not do what needed to be done to drive the demon out, because they tried to do so on their own, without looking to the Lord and relying on Him to do what would otherwise have been impossible.

Either we are self-sufficient, self-reliant; or, we are Christ-sufficient, Christ-reliant. Either we rely on ourselves, or we rely on Him. The choice is always before us. Either we strive to do our will, or we strive to do His; either we trust in ourselves or we trust in Him. These decisions must be made by us each and every moment, over and over again, as long as there is breath within us. Faith is looking to Him; it is relying on Him; it is receiving what it is always His good will to give for our life and salvation. When we pray, Brothers and Sisters, we turn out of ourselves to Him; when we fast, we purposefully turn away from our own passions, our own wants and desires, to Him. Prayer and fasting are expressions of humility, of our turning away from ourselves to the Lord, Who can do all things. Without Him, Brothers and Sisters, we can do nothing; but, with Him, through Him, in Him – all things are possible. Such was the teaching of the Lord to His disciples in the miracle healing of the epileptic boy.

If we would be His disciples, we must turn from ourselves to Him. Without Him we can do nothing. This is what the disciples learned in the lesson of our Lord’s healing of the epileptic boy; and, it is a lesson each of us must learn as well.

Fr. Elias

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