



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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<http://EntranceMission.org>

What is a Merciful Heart? October 25, 2020

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

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

And what is a merciful heart? The burning of the heart on account of all creation, on account of people and birds and animals and demons, and for every created being. Because of their remembrance the eyes fill with tears. Great and intense mercy grasps the heart and wrings it out, for he who is merciful is not able to bear or hear or see any harm of the slightest sorrow which takes place in the created world. This holds true on behalf of those who harm him. For these he offers prayers continually with tears for their protection and for their redemption. He does the same thing even for the snakes which crawl upon the ground. All of this he does out of his great mercy, which moves in his heart without measure, in the likeness of God. (St. Isaac the Syrian; Logos 91).

The words of St. Isaac the Syrian set a foundation for our understanding of our Lord's Word and the actions of His Divine Mercy. This Sunday, the 20th after Pentecost, we hear the miracle story from Luke, Chapter 7, which recounts our Lord's raising of the son of the widow from Nain.

As he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a large crowd from the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." And he came

and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise."
(Luke 7:12-14)

There are many things notable about this story, but one thing that stands out in it is the fact that our Lord was not summoned or even asked to bring the young man back to life. St. Luke merely reports that He met the funeral procession as it was on its way to bury him outside the walls of the city, and that He "had compassion on her."

These words stand out: "He had compassion on her." Unsummoned, unasked, He meets the procession of the dead with Life and raises the young man, who was the only hope of his mother's livelihood. She was a widow, and he was her only son.

The Gospel of Luke has often been referred to as the "Gospel of Compassion." Our Lord's actions reflect compassion at every turn. It is in St. Luke's Gospel that we hear the parable of the Prodigal Son, in which the father had compassion on his erring son; it is in St. Luke's Gospel that we hear the parable of the Publican and Pharisee, in which the sinner is justified before the proud and legalistic Pharisee through his humble repentance. St. Luke emphasizes the Lord's compassion at virtually every turn, and as such reveals the inner essence of our God in a way that many Church leaders miss entirely. Often, one gets the impression that we are about merely delineating the unassailable line between those on the "inside" and those on the "outside." This could not be further from the truth concerning what our Lord is like and what we as His people should and must become. We, Brothers and Sisters, should never be about delineations or wrathful condemnations of those on the "outside." We preach Christ Crucified, and we are to draw all mankind into His net, the net of compassion and mercy, apart from which no one would ever choose to be His.

St. Isaac of Syria understood this better than most. I ask you to reflect on this truth: that above all, God is humble in essence and filled with compassion for His sick and separated creation; and, that He bids us to follow His example in our lives, lives that should be filled with the same compassion that He revealed in His mercy to the Widow of Nain. This is a simple message, but I fear that there are many who do not accept it, understand it or teach it. We, Brothers and Sisters, must do so with our every breath and practice what we pray in every Divine Liturgy, that the Grace of the All Holy Spirit lead us to a "faith that is unashamed and a love that is unfeigned." Let us be the kind of people driven by compassion; and, let us not only ask what a "merciful heart" is, but show it and demonstrate it and practice it with our entire being!

Fr. Elias

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