



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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The Compassion of God Knows No Bounds – Even During a Pandemic! December 13, 2020

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

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

And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd, "There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day." The Lord then answered him and said, "Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So, ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath? And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him. (Luke 13).

The story about the woman who suffered so grievously with the spirit of infirmity is told in the thirteenth chapter of Luke and is our assigned Gospel lesson for this coming Sunday. It bears a message we should not forget, and it raises a question we must address forthrightly. The message is that the compassion of our God knows no bounds; nothing will stand in the way of God's love for His misguided and errant people. St. Luke reports that Jesus is teaching in the Synagogue when he sees the poor soul who was bent over for many years, unable to walk upright. Without any question or supplication on her part, He heals her then and there in front of the Pharisees and leaders of the Synagogue on the Sabbath. The Holy Fathers remind us that this miracle took place as a sign to those who opposed Him that God's

compassion was greater than the rules and regulations of the temple; God's love is greater. It is remarkable to me that He healed her without even being asked to do so. This is a sign that God knows our need, that He cares for our situation in this dark, veil of suffering and tears, and that His compassion is poured out in a never-ending stream. That is the message I wish to highlight in my thoughts about this lesson! Truly, God's compassion knows no bounds.

The question that must be addressed, however, is the one that so many believers are asking during the midst of this terrible pandemic: If God's compassion is limitless, how is it that so many people are suffering and dying? Why does He not simply put a stop to it? Surely, we have been praying for it; does He not hear our prayer? Will He ignore us forever? To even ask this question is to approach God in a way that I think is disrespectful and unworthy of us who are His servants. Yet, the question is asked by believers everywhere. Believers, not unbelievers, ask it, for the latter simply ignore the Lord. We, on the other hand, come before Him on bended knee each time we say our prayers, and like you, I too ask him with all my heart to bring an end to the pandemic. Why has He not yet done so?

The answer to this question is that He has heard our prayer and will indeed bring an end to it when the time is right. He allows us to suffer need and illness and all manner of disappointment in this life to show us clearly that without Him we can do nothing. Let me be clear: He does not cause the suffering; but, He does permit it, even as He permits the suffering of illness and death. He permits it in order for us to know that we cannot make things right on our own. It is because of our sin, our separation from Him, that terrible things happen in the first place. Now, in love and compassion for us, He permits us to taste the fruits of our sin, so that we turn to Him in supplication and true faith. He uses what we have brought upon ourselves – if not individually, then collectively – to teach us that He created us for Himself, and that we will be ever restless, ever unhappy, ever unfulfilled until we rest in Him (so St. Augustine observed at the beginning of his remarkable Confessions). So you see, the answer to this question is the same as the message of the story to begin with: He allows us to suffer want and need and illness and the pangs of death itself out of compassion - compassion that is so deep that He wants above all else to draw us to Himself in the kind of faith that bears the fruit of love and compassion for others.

This is perhaps not an easy message to digest, but it is one that each of us must indeed take to heart. Even as He healed the woman with the spirit of infirmity without even being asked to do so, His compassion overflowing like streams of living water, so He stands with us in our need, our illness and our death ready to uphold, to heal and to receive us in the same spirit of compassion with which He healed her. This, Brothers and Sisters, is our faith, and with that poor soul whom He healed, we too will rejoice for the wondrous love and compassion He showers upon us now, at the hour of our death and indeed eternally! To Him be all honor and glory forever! Amen!

Fr. Elias

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