



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

306 W. Main Street
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

The Rev. Fr. Elias Yelovich, Pastor

<http://EntranceMission.org>

Giving Thanks – The Basic Attitude of the Believer December 20, 2020

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

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

I was born a weak, defenseless child, but Thine angel spread his wings over my cradle to defend me. From birth until now Thy love has illumined my path and has wondrously guided me towards the light of eternity; from birth until now the generous gifts of Thy providence have been marvelously showered upon me. I give Thee thanks, with all who have come to know Thee, who call upon Thy name. (From the Akathist of Thanksgiving, written by Protopresbyter Gregory Petrov in a prison camp, 1940)

I give Thee thanks, with all who have come to know Thee, who call upon Thy name. These words from the first Ikos of the Akathist of Thanksgiving summarize the most basic attitude of the believer: thanksgiving to God for all things, in all circumstances. Fr. Gregory Petrov wrote these words while he was suffering grievously in a Soviet prison camp. People in general find them remarkable, for in the midst of the worst circumstances, he does not call upon God to merely deliver him, but rather to receive his sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise. They remind us of the equally remarkable words of the Holy Apostle Paul which he also wrote from his own prison cell, “Rejoice in the Lord always! Again, I say rejoice.”

The Gospel lesson for this Sunday recounts one of our Lord's most memorable miracles: the healing of the ten lepers. Leprosy was a truly dreadful disease. Caused by a bacterial infection, it destroyed the nerve endings in one's hands and feet, and people infected with it would be unaware of the way in which they became infected so that they were eaten alive by the terrible sores that infected their bodies. Lepers were ostracized and kept entirely separate from the community around them, having to announce their presence with the shout, "Unclean!" To be healed of this dreadful disease was a truly astonishing grace. Yet, when Jesus healed ten of them, only one came back to give thanks. Only one! "Where are the other nine?" Jesus asked.

We are now in the midst of a dreadful pandemic. All efforts to ignore it or to make light of it fail in light of the daily statistics of new cases and deaths. Hospitals are stretched beyond their capacities. People pretend it is not so terrible until the disease ravages their loved ones and ends the lives of so many they care about. Many believers pray for deliverance from the disease, not only on their own behalf but also on behalf of those infected. They pray for deliverance and for healing. We do so in our own little congregation after each and every Divine Liturgy.

However, I wonder how many of us give thanks to God in the midst of this time of trial? We need to learn the lesson of giving thanks and follow the example of St. Paul and of Fr. Petrov. In the midst of the pandemic, even as we pray for deliverance, we should, we must also give thanks to God. God has not caused the pandemic. His mercy and His love are without end. Even in the midst of this time of trial he gives us the means to reduce the suffering, to show love and charity to those infected. He gives us air to breathe, water to drink and food to eat. Through us, He provides for those in need and allows us to share the grace of service to others. We thank Him not for this or that separate gift, but for the very gift of life itself at His hand, for the way in which He grants us Life eternal and the promise of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the primary attitude each of us should manifest, the attitude of thanksgiving not only for His gifts, but most especially for the Giver Himself, Whom to know is Life eternal and salvation. Let each of us be like the one leper who returned to give thanks, and let each of us say with Fr. Petrov, ***I give Thee thanks, with all who have come to know Thee, who call upon Thy name.***

Fr. Elias

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717-817-0084