



**Orthodox Mission of the
Entrance of the Theotokos
into the Temple**

**306 W. Main Street
Emmitsburg, MD 21727**

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<http://EntranceMission.org>

Reflecting God's Mercy
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. (The Lord, from His Sermon on the Mount)

The Parable of the Last Judgment that we will hear this Sunday is the final parable that our Lord told prior to his entrance into Jerusalem. It is simple and surprising. Its simplicity lies in the Lord's teaching that there are basically two types of human beings when it comes down to it: those who are merciful, and those who are not. Those who are merciful minister to the hungry, the imprisoned, the ill, to anyone in need as if to the Lord Himself. Those who are not merciful ignore the plight of others and see to their own needs without regard for others. The surprise of this parable is that the criterion of our judgment is precisely this, and this alone: mercy. This is surprising to many Christians, as it was to many Jews during the time of Jesus, because we delight in over-complicating, over-legalizing, over-specifying this or that other thing as the criterion of our salvation. We delight in thinking we know more, we follow the rules better, we are more dutiful and faithful than our brethren. But the parable is clear. The one essential criterion is mercy.

St. Isaac of Nineveh in one of his ascetical homilies spoke of having a “merciful heart,” a heart that is “on fire” with love for the whole of creation, not only people in need, but animals, birds, even demons, miserable in their alienation from God. A person with a “merciful heart” offers up prayers continually for the suffering of all creatures, for the very earth itself, all of whom and all of which suffer from the sin of mankind. A person with a merciful heart prays for those who are enemies of the truth, even for those who cause them harm. A person with a merciful heart does this because of the “great compassion that burns without measure in a heart that is in the likeness of God” (St. Isaac).

The question is, of course, how we obtain or develop a heart that is merciful? There is only one way. We acquire this vital attribute of the Lord’s likeness by our relationship, our union with Him. We become merciful to the extent that we are one with Him, the source of all mercy. The closer we are to Him, the more loving and merciful we become. As we grow and progress in our likeness with Him, we grow and progress in the development of merciful hearts within us. The One Who is merciful to us allows us to reflect that mercy in hearts that reach out in compassion to others, hearts that weep for the sick and the suffering that give comfort to the dying, food to the hungry and friendship to the captive.

Brothers and Sisters: We stand at the threshold of the Great Fast. Rather than nitpicking over what foods we may or may not eat or drink, let us instead be meticulous in our discernment of the sin within us. Let us fast not merely from this or that type of food, but from our arrogance, self-righteousness, self-service, and all that separates us from the One Who was entirely the Man of God, the Man for others. Let us seek to join in faith to Him Who is the true Servant of All, for the closer we come to Him, the more we will reflect the Divine Mercy in our hearts. Through Him alone can we develop hearts that are truly merciful, and we too will gather with the redeemed at the right hand of God the Father in heaven.

Fr. Elias

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