



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

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

**The V. Rev. Elias Yelovich,
Rector**

<http://EntranceMission.org>

Put a New and Right Spirit Within Me!
October 16, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. (Psalm 50:10)

According to Holy Tradition, Psalm 50 was written and prayed by King David after he had sinned by taking the wife of another man by means of the arranged murder of that man. David was subsequently confronted by the prophet Nathan who told the King a moving story about a poor man who had one and only one beloved possession – a lamb, which he had raised from birth. That lamb, who was like a beloved child to the man, but had been stolen and killed by another who wanted it for himself. The poor man was desolate. When King David heard the story, he was horrified and asked Nathan who it was that had perpetrated such a terrible crime. Nathan, in one of those rare moments of uncontrived effective drama, pointed to David and said, “You are the man!”

After acknowledging his sin, David wrote Psalm 50, a Psalm of repentance, and we have been using it within the Church ever since. (Remember that the Church extends not only forward, but backwards in time to the moment when God called the first Patriarch, Abraham!)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me!

This part of David’s prayer of repentance is a succinct and powerful reminder of what God calls us to be – people who acknowledge the Self Giving of God, the Grace of the All-Holy Spirit within us. We are to act in ways that are

consistent with the presence of the Almighty and Merciful God in our hearts. It is not the outward, formal actions of liturgical piety or fasting or temple sacrifice that matter to God. It is for us to become, as the Holy Fathers tell us *like* Him. We are in fact created to become *like* Him, more and more *like* Him throughout the course of eternity. Yes, we have His Image within us, but we are also created with unlimited potentiality – the potentiality to become ever more *like* Him in the sense that we take on His attributes – mercy, humility, kindness, charity, forbearance, patience, service, altruism, self-giving for the other – in short, all those behaviors so clearly demonstrated by our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Our Gospel lesson from the sixth chapter of Luke is a summary of this behavior. It comes from St. Luke’s “Sermon on the Plain,” which differs in presentation from the more famous “Sermon on the Mount” of St. Matthew’s Gospel. There are a number of differences between these two sermons, but one of the main differences is that St. Luke describes the sermon as having been addressed not to the general multitudes at large, but to the Lord’s disciples in particular. It’s as if the Lord is saying, “If you would follow me – if you would be my disciples – then you must ask the Father to *create within you a clean heart, to put within you a new and right spirit.*” God is not particularly interested in your outward actions of sacerdotal sacrifice as much as He is in the transformation that leads you to behave in such a way that reflects His own attributes.

A clear and simple example is what we call the Golden Rule. Each semester at work as I present to my students some essential principles of Business Ethics, I begin with the Golden Rule, and am always upset that so very few of them even know what it is, much less Who taught it! To do unto others as you would have others do to you; to love your enemies and pray for them – these are not self-evident behaviors to the students of our time. And yet, they are basic and essential behaviors of all who would grow and the Grace of the Holy Spirit, the presence of God within us.

Love for enemies is to pray and to act in such a way that benefits them ultimately. It is to pray for reconciliation and to ask God to work with them and with you so that they become friends, not enemies. It is to do for them what is for their ultimate good. It is not to do what they “want,” necessarily, but rather what is for their eternal benefit. This takes some effort on our parts and is only possible once we have been ourselves reconciled to God through repentance and forgiveness. So, you see, the teachings of our Gospel lesson very much depend upon the prayer of St. David the King, for God indeed to *put a new and right spirit within us.*

Every sad and miserable behavior can and will be overcome by the fulfillment of this prayer from the heart, with tears and mourning for the suffering our human sin has brought upon the world. It is we, the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, who must be examples of charity and self-giving sacrifice for the benefit of others, what the New Testament calls *love*, that will bring healing to this world of darkness, sadness, violence, suffering and death. Brothers and Sisters: Let us reach deep within our hearts and allow the Holy Spirit within us to propel us each and every day in actions of charity and self-giving. This is what our Lord bids us to do in His Name!

Fr. Elias

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717-817-0084