



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

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***When You Look at Someone, What Do You See?*
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion (Luke 10:33)

When you look at another person, what do you see?

Do you see someone created by God, with the beauty of His image within them? Or do you see something else?

The man who entered the nightclub in Colorado Springs saw something else. The hate filled actions that he engaged in made it clear that he was propelled by prejudice. He categorized human beings into two groups: those worthy of his acceptance, and those not worthy. He judged and carried out the sentence. They were not people created in God's image to him, worthy of respect and care. They were vermin, to be disdained, to be extinguished.

What about the man who killed his fellow workers in at the WalMart in VA? He was a night supervisor there. More about him needs to be revealed to understand what drove him to kill five of his fellow workers. But clearly, whatever demons drove him to that action, he stopped thinking about them as

fellow human beings created in the beauty of God's image. Somehow, he categorized them as well according to the misdirection of his sick mind. The news reporter said he laughed before killing them. If you don't believe in the reality of demons, think again. At no time was there love or charity or respect for his fellow human beings. They were objects to be destroyed, to bear the brunt of his rage, his resentment or his anger.

When you look at another person, what do you see? A person to be categorized on the basis of your own belief system? On the basis of their actions, their choices, their predilections, their DNA, their dysfunctional upbringing? Do you categorize them on the basis of external qualities? Gender? Race? Level of intelligence? Ability to accept and articulate the precision of Orthodox Theology? Do you see their actions, their affiliations? Or do you see their hearts – hearts that were created with the infinite depth to hold that which is unholdable: the Grace of the Holy Spirit, filled with potential to become like God? Is that what you see? Or do you allow your passions to rule and put people into convenient categories and judge them?

As soon as I saw the lesson appointed for this Sunday I thought, "Well, there's a message that is clear!" We must be neighbor to all in need, just like the Good Samaritan. But then I went on to ask, "Why did Jesus make a Samaritan the object, the bearer of this message?" Clearly, He might have been able to illustrate mercy in some other way?

Jesus chose to illustrate his message by means of a Samaritan, probably because the very mention of that category of human beings would have filled most first century Jews with disgust. To those who lived in the time of Jesus, Samaritans were despicable people, who had somehow violated the purity of their faith by intermarrying with idolators and building a temple up north in their region to compete with the great temple in Jerusalem. The mere mention of the term "Samaritan" would have resulted in a pious Jew of that time spitting on the ground. To make a Samaritan the main character in His parable would have guaranteed that it would be heard!

Of course, Priests and Levites were different! Following the precise ritual purity laws of the temple in Jerusalem, they kept themselves separate from anything that could render them impure. Thus, they crossed the road when they passed by, so as not to be near a stranger bleeding on the side of the road. They were the so-called good and pure and obedient ones. Not like a Samaritan at all. And yet, they passed by; they failed to show mercy; they failed to recognize the man on the side of the road as one like them, created in the beauty of God's image, worthy of aid simply because he was a God-created human being.

This parable, Brothers and Sisters, is of course a strong, dynamic illustration of the fifth Beatitude: Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy! In many respects this is the most difficult of all the Beatitudes to live. This is because we think that those guilty of this or that quality, action or sin, deserve to be ignored, or disdained or judged. We think that if we show mercy, we are in some sense complying with their misdeeds or at least giving some sort of unintended acceptance of them. But remember what most of us were taught when we were growing up! We must always separate in our minds the sin from the sinner. True, we do not approve of many behaviors, particularly those blossoming in culture around us at the moment. But to be like Christ, which is what each of us is called to be, we must resolutely refuse to judge, and in every circumstance, we must show mercy, regardless of the sin or actions carried out those who are to be the recipients of mercy.

Our prayer, our concern, our actions may not be just for ourselves, Brothers and Sisters, for our

Christianity does not end with the final blessing at the Divine Liturgy. In a vital sense, it begins then, for each of us must carry back home to our families, our workmates, our acquaintances and friends precisely what we have been given ourselves: The love and respect of God who sees the truth of our own sin, our own selfishness, our own selves burdened by passion, and nevertheless chooses to love and save us. This, Brothers and Sisters, is how we are to be as well. We are to be Good Samaritans to others even as He has been Good Samaritan to us.

When we look at people around us, what do we see? Hopefully, we see them as God sees us, with no desire to categorize and judge. Hopefully, we see those created by God in the ineffable beauty of His own divine image with the infinite potential to grow evermore like Him. This is why WE show mercy; this is why WE refuse to judge! For we ourselves, sinful and unworthy though we are, have been given Divine Grace and Mercy without end!

To Him be all honor and glory forever! Amen!

Fr. Elias

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