



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

306 W. Main Street Emmitsburg,  
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***Pay Attention!***  
**August 13, 2023**

**Pentecost 10. August 13 (July 31). Church of the Entrance.**

**Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!**

**Brothers and Sisters in Christ:**

*Pay attention to what you're doing!*

Do you remember your father or your mother telling you that, Usually, with raised voice: "Pay attention!" Sometimes, I feel like screaming it to my students in class! Pay attention! Focus! And indeed I do remember saying this often to my children as they were growing up. "Watch what you're doing!" Before you dart out into the street, "watch, look and listen! Pay attention!" Or just as likely, "if you want to excel at what you are doing, pay attention! Focus!

This injunction to pay attention, so common to us in our lives as parents or grandparents or teachers, is very much the subject of today's Gospel lesson. A man with a son who is epileptic, who has a terrible disease causing the boy to throw himself on the ground, to writhe and have uncontrollable seizures – this man brings his son to the disciples of Jesus Christ. And they try to cast the demon out of the boy but fail to do so. Jesus comes and does so with a mere word. And He admonishes them: faith as a mustard

seed is all that is required, He teaches! Faith focused on God, with prayer and fasting, is required. The disciples, though certainly well-intentioned, needed to be taught. Whatever we do in the name of God requires focus. Prayer with fasting – focus. Attention! Pay attention to what you are doing when you apply yourself to the work of God!

We Orthodox Christians pride ourselves on fasting. It sets us apart. It makes it seem that we are one step above others who do not do it. It makes us special. And indeed, this is partly true, isn't it? Not that it makes us better: It does not! But that it distinguishes us from other expressions of Christianity. Still, I wonder if we really understand why we fast?

Sometimes, the key to understanding is to first focus on what fasting is not! It is not a way to earn God's favor, or to tickle His awareness of our need. He already knows what we need before we ask, and His favor cannot be earned. It is given freely to all. Neither is fasting a way to make the greatness of the need apparent to Him. We do not fast to twist His arm, as it were.

Fasting is a means of paying attention to what we are about in our prayer. It is a reminder that comes barging into our comfortable lives. We fast at certain times from everything that comes from an animal – meat, eggs, dairy. Remember that In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were given the seeds and fruits of the plants there to eat. We are reminded of this in our first Presanctified Liturgy every year. From Geneses 2:15-16: *The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden ...."*

Our discipline of fasting is a means of accommodation to God's original revelation, His original Will. We fast in order to live for a time according that that plan. Eating vegetables rather than animals – remembering that our primary role with the animals is to steward and guide them, not to consume. But we also fast as we heard in today's Gospel lesson to focus on what truly matters – to take our gaze away from ourselves and our comfortable, self-serving lives – to the focus on our prayer for others.

Prayer and fasting – Pay attention! – focus on the needs of others and beseech the Lord with attention and focus on asking for their help. That's what today's lesson reminds us of! Brothers and Sisters: Let us turn away from our wants and our desires – to the well-being of the world, the needs of others! With prayer and fasting let us intercede for those in need!

To Jesus Christ be all honor and glory forever! Amen.

Fr. Elias

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