



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

306 W. Main Street Emmitsburg,  
MD 21727

<http://EntranceMission.org>

717-817-0084

The V. Rev. Elias Yelovich,  
Rector

The Rev. Anthony Duvall,  
Assistant

***How to Follow Christ***  
**October 1, 2023**

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

**Brothers and Sisters in Christ:**

“Whosoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” This is the essence of our Christian life. But why must we deny ourselves? And what must we deny ourselves of? Isn’t there goodness in His creation that we can indulge in? Doesn’t Holy Scripture say that after the 6<sup>th</sup> Day of Creation, God looked at everything He had made, and saw it was very God?

We were created by the Grace of God. Everything good that we have in life is not solely due to our own efforts. Did we graduate from high school and college? God gave us our intellect. Do we have family whom we love? God granted them to us. Do we have food of which to eat? God created the animals and the plants of which our food comes from. We should live in constant gratitude for what God has given us, knowing that the things we have in life were not granted to us solely by our own efforts. Therefore, we must follow Christ’s command by denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Him, in order to rightly orient our lives.

What is the point of denying ourselves? It is to orient ourselves away from selfishness and towards God. It is to do the opposite of what Adam and Eve did in the garden. They saw the fruit which God told them not to partake of, saw that it looked good to eat, and disobeyed God by partaking of it. The fruit wasn't evil; it was their disobedience to God by breaking the fast He had commanded them to keep which was evil. Today, we fast to break our attachment to worldly pleasures which can disrupt our union with God. We do not fast to twist God's arm into giving us what we want. We shouldn't tell God, "I'm going to fast by eating only one meal per day for a week, so that you can grant me a promotion at work, a new car, less stress, etc." If we fast to twist God's arm into granting us what we want, we defeat the whole purpose of fasting. By doing this, rather than orienting ourselves towards God, we are orienting ourselves to our own wants and desires, no matter if we believe our wants and desires are "good". To deny oneself is to recognize, in our bodies, mind, and spirit, that our primary fulfillment is in union with God, not in worldly pleasures.

What does it mean to take up one's cross? Tertullian of Carthage rightly says that our cross is the anxieties and sufferings we are afflicted with in our own bodies. In Luke's telling of today's gospel reading (as today's gospel reading can be found in all three of the synoptic gospels), Christ says that we must take up our cross daily. It is a daily struggle which we must undertake.

Lastly, Christ tells us to follow Him. He is our source of refuge. We are made in His image and likeness. Whatever struggles we are dealing with in this life can and will be calmed by Him, whether in this life or the next. When a storm comes, we find refuge in our homes, knowing that the storm will soon pass. So too, when we encounter the storms of our daily struggles, we find refuge in Him, knowing that the storm will eventually pass.

This is what we must do in our daily life: deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him. This is the path to salvation. This is the calm haven from the storms of our life. This is where we find our ultimate fulfillment.

Fr. Anthony  
[FatherAnthonyDuvall@outlook.com](mailto:FatherAnthonyDuvall@outlook.com)  
240-285-4802

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