



Orthodox Church of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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Were not Ten Healed? Where are the Other Nine? December 17, 2023

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Were not ten healed? Where are the other nine? (Luke 17:17)

I grew up hearing this lesson every Thanksgiving Day. It was appointed to be read at a Service of Thanksgiving. And it was always a reminder to me of what the Day of Thanksgiving was supposed to be all about. Not turkey, feasting, football, pies and other treats. But thanksgiving: thanksgiving to God for His mercy and love without end, for the overwhelmingly good things we have in this land of milk and honey. It also reminded me about my responsibility to have the kind of gratitude that is the mark of the Christian disciple of Jesus Christ. Not gratitude for this or that thing, but gratitude for God Himself, the source of all gifts and graces, the ultimate Grace being the self-giving of the Incarnate Word. The word for gratitude is “evcharisteo” in Greek; or, as we pronounce it, Eucharist. The Eucharist is the great feast of gratitude: gratitude for what God gives so freely to us – the life-giving gift of Himself for the Life of the World.

The miracle of our Lord healing the ten lepers, however, has another equally powerful message to bear. Only one of the ten was grateful and returned to give glory to the Lord. St. Luke tersely summarizes the surprising action with the words, “... and he was a Samaritan.” A Samaritan! The observation would not have been lost on those who saw the miracle or heard of it in the decades that followed. A Samaritan was a member of a group of Jewish descendants who had left the mainstream,

intermarried with idolators and even set up their own temple in competition with the great temple in Jerusalem. They were despised by mainstream Jews of the time, and it was assumed that they were basically trash. No good could come of a Samaritan, it was thought. And yet, several times in His ministry, Jesus brought them to the very front of His preaching. The good Samaritan gave aid to the man who lay by the side of the road, even when both a temple priest and a Levite, passed by on the other side. The first to preach the Gospel in her land was a Samaritan woman, the woman at the well, who gave drink to our Lord when He was thirsty. And now, only the Samaritan returned to give glory to the Lord for having been healed! Truly, it is the case that we cannot judge one another on the basis of their appearances or external qualities of any sort. Their race, their gender, their appearance, their history. None of these “externals” matter. It is only our willingness to be one with Christ and give glory to Him that matters at all!

We need to hear this. It is a quality of our tradition, not our Holy Tradition, but of our cultural tradition as Orthodox Christians, to judge by externals at the expense of inner qualities of love, compassion, care, humility, self-giving and service. See our Vestments! Hear the quality of our singing! Notice how beautifully we vest our altar, the quality of our icons, the magnificence of our buildings. None of those things are essential. They matter no more than the racial identity of the Samaritan who came back to the Lord in gratitude.

It's no secret that I am getting old and ready to pass on the leadership of this parish to Fr. Anthony, to take my place not as his rector, but as his assistant. As such, I see very clearly where the future of this parish needs to take us. We should be less concerned with the external beauty of our vestments, our building, our appearance, and more concerned with developing the inner qualities of the Samaritan – gratitude, faith and love. We have ministries to the prison, to a little personal care home and to the people who gather here in the turmoil of their lives. This is what matters.

Brothers and sisters: Let us give thanks to the Lord for all that He has done and continues to do for the salvation of our souls! Let us focus on those inner qualities and turn from our preoccupation with externals that matter not at all!

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

Fr. Elias

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