



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

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

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Resentment or Emulation?
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Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'" (Luke 15: 25:32)

Sunday is the Sunday of the Prodigal Son. Prior to the beginning of the Great Fast the Holy Fathers have appointed three Sundays of preparation, each with a parable in our Gospel Lesson that illumines us with the spirit of the Holy Season about to begin. Last week's parable, the Publican and Pharisee, illustrates the way in which we should approach God: in humility, with true repentance, never in self-righteousness or arrogance. Next week we hear the Parable of the Last Judgment, the final parable recorded in the Gospel of St. Matthew, a parable about the fruit of our relationship with the One True God, the fruit of love, compassion and care for those in any sort of need; it is that quality above all others, the quality of self-giving love, that characterizes the disciple and that ministers better

than any other way possible to the Lord and the “least of His brethren.” This Sunday we hear the Parable of the Prodigal Son, or as I like to call it, the Parable of the Merciful and Waiting Father.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son illustrates so many qualities of the Kingdom that it is difficult to describe them all sufficiently. There is the selfishness of the younger son, who takes his inheritance and wastes it in prodigality, in reckless and loose living, coming to his senses only in desperate need and reasoning that if he returns to his father as a slave or hired servant, it would be better for him under those circumstances than for him to continue to suffer the extreme want and squalor into which he had fallen in the “foreign land.” He returns in repentance, a reminder of the most important quality of Lent, REPENTANCE. But in his return, he is surprisingly met not by a vengeful father, but by a loving and merciful father who puts shoes on his bare feet, a ring on his finger and arms of embrace around his shoulders. This, the way of the repentant prodigal, is the way we must be, repentant and humble in our approach to God. But the parable illustrates just as strongly that the way of the Waiting Father is the way of the LORD our God, Who waits eagerly to receive us and to embrace us upon our return.

It is somewhat perplexing, however, to turn to the third theme of this wondrous parable of our Lord, the theme of resentment, pride and jealousy, represented by the reaction of the elder brother in the field. It is perplexing, because it makes us wonder how he could have been so different from his father, who was so very kind and generous and merciful. And yet, the elder brother represents so many of us, perhaps all of us, at various times in our lives. The elder brother behaves nothing like his father, because he has been too busy, too preoccupied, with his own well-being, taking inappropriate pride in the work he does within the household of his father, not realizing that if it were not for his father, there would be no household at all. He is the very example of the man described by St. Paul in our study of Galatians, who takes pride in his own actions, his own works, and fails to realize that without his father, there would be nothing, and that above all things, he should strive not to resent the father’s actions, but rather to emulate them.

This is the way of so many of us. We want every good thing for ourselves. We give offerings and pray and prepare for the Divine Services by fasting. But we take pride in our own actions rather than in the One Whom we are supposed to emulate. The elder brother would have been less resentful and less proud and less jealous if he had looked not to his own self-righteousness but to the loving righteousness of his father. The elder brother would have been more accepting of his younger brother who returned from the misery of sin and prodigality if he had been more like the father: patient, merciful, loving and compassionate; waiting to receive the one who had gone astray.

Brothers and Sisters: The Holy Fathers bid us to prepare for the Great Fast so that we may become more like the loving father in this parable. We pray; we give alms; and, we repent so as to draw closer and closer to the One Who not only waits for us but for all humanity in this fallen world to return. He waits in patience and in love. And we must emulate Him. We must strive with all of our life and all of our strength to become ever closer in our union with Him so as for us also to become even as He is – loving, kind and generous, never resentful of the well-being of others, but always desiring of their return. There is no joy in salvation, Brothers and Sisters, if we alone are saved. We must follow the example of the younger son and come to our senses through repentance; and, we must strive with our entire hearts and souls and minds to be like the father, to be like our Heavenly Father, Who waits for the return of every human being with patience and mercy. This Parable is indeed a guide to the Great Fast soon to begin but not only for that short period forty days – it is in fact a guide for our entire lives!

Fr. Elias

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