



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

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

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Merciful Hearts
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'
(Matthew 25:37-40)

These words of the last of our Lord's recorded parables in the Gospel of Matthew were spoken shortly before our Lord turns His face toward Jerusalem and the cross. It is interesting to note that our Lord immediately demonstrates the power of His teaching by Himself showing mercy and compassion to one in need. He enters the house of Simon the Leper and eats with one who was considered "unclean," an outcast and a pariah. Matthew reports that while He is there, a woman, later identified by St. John as Mary of Bethany, anoints Him with very expensive ointment from an alabaster jar, a sign of His impending death on the cross, but also an act of her love and devotion. Such love can only be shown by one who understands not only Who Jesus is, but the power, the meaning of His actions. He Who healed the sick, gave comfort to the dying, raised the dead, blessed the outcast and showed mercy to sinners, He enters the house of one who is the very image of living death, a leper, a person whom no pious Jew

in that era would even look at or approach.

The Parable of the Last Judgment is in many ways a summary of our Lord's entire life and teaching. Of course, it demonstrates the ethical principle that to this day I still must teach my students in our discussion of basic Christian behavior – the *Golden Rule*: to “do unto others as they would have done unto themselves.” I am always surprised at how many of them do not know it. But the parable goes beyond the Golden Rule in two respects. First, it links our acts of kindness and mercy for others to the Lord Himself. We do unto others, not merely because we are commanded to do so by God Himself, but also because in so doing we show love and care and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is also the fact that those who did those acts of kindness, giving food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, comfort to the sick, the imprisoned and dying, were quite surprised when their acts of mercy were pointed out to them. “When did we do those things?” they asked. The righteous asked, because they had what St. Isaac of Syria called, “merciful hearts,” hearts that were temples of the Holy Spirit, hearts that automatically propelled them to love and to care and to help any and all in need. This, Brothers and Sisters, an important message. We are to become the kind of people who have “merciful hearts.” We are to become the kind of people who allow the Grace of the All Holy Spirit to enter in, to open the eyes of our hearts, so that it is Christ Whom we serve in love and devotion when we serve others, and so that we serve others without provocation or awareness. We are to become the kind of people that become Christ to our neighbor in need and that serve our neighbor in need as if our neighbor were Christ Himself. This is only possible if we begin that great journey which will last eternally with repentance and with humble supplication for Him to dwell in us, so that we become ever more united to Him. St. Gregory of Nyssa, perhaps my very favorite of the ancient Fathers, taught that this process would continue eternally. As we only begin that process now, we will grow from “glory unto glory,” he taught, always becoming more and more “like” Him in a never-ending process of eternal mystery and joy.

This Sunday, we approach the sacred season of the Great Fast. Remember: what we do, we do not for ourselves, but for the well-being of others. We will keep the Lenten fast from food according to the traditions of our Holy Orthodox faith; but above all, let us fast from greed and from hatred and from judgment and from all the terrible things that divide, so that we may abound in the rich mercy of a truly “merciful heart!”

Fr. Elias

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