



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

**306 W. Main Street
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Letting Go
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. (Matthew 18:21-22)

This is the Sunday of forgiveness, the day on which the Holy Fathers have prescribed a wonderful spiritual discipline for the start of the Great Fast. We will bow before one another after the Divine Liturgy on Sunday and ask for forgiveness, each to the other. Perhaps we have judged, or offended or spoken ill of a brother or a sister? Perhaps we have resented someone, or gossiped about someone? Perhaps we have been unkind or uncharitable to each other? If so, we begin the Holy Season earnestly repenting from the heart and begging forgiveness. We will say, "Forgive me my sins and my transgressions against you!" We will hear the reply, "God forgives!"

God forgives! How wonderful it is to hear that our Creator and Redeemer looks beyond our trespasses and our sins! How wonderful that He forgive us every breach of His divine commandments, every purposeful or ignorant lack of love! How wonderful that we are relieved of the burden of our sin when we truly repent and turn away from that which would hurt others and ultimately ourselves!

St. Peter asked the Lord how often he should forgive others who sinned against him; “seven times?” The Lord replied, “not seven times, but seventy times seven!” In other words, we must forgive others as God forgives us – with unlimited grace and love, with no thought of judgment or condemnation of the other. There is no salvation without the forgiveness of God for our sins; and, there is no sanctification without our unlimited willingness to forgive those who have sinned against us!

But “forgiveness” is one of those words that we scarcely think about, assuming we know what it means. I took the time this week to look it up again in my Greek Testament. I found that the Greek word for forgiveness is one that quite simply means “to let go” or, “to leave behind.” I also searched for the word “forgiveness” on Google, just to see what came up. I was surprised to see that one of the first hits to come up was an article from the Mayo Clinic on the medical benefits of “forgiveness.” People who refuse to forgive or let go of resentful feelings are often physically affected by feelings of depression, suicide and uncontrollable anger. To forgive is not only the highest of spiritual disciplines; it is also of profound value for keeping oneself mentally and physically healthy.

How do we forgive others who grievously hurt us? We let go of our anger and our resentment against them, remembering always that the Lord Jesus Christ did precisely that when He was nailed upon the cross, praying to the Father to “forgive them, for they know not what they do.” We let go of our anger and resentment by seeing those who hurt us as fellow human beings like us, who are held captive by the sin they carry out against us. In other words, we see all of our fellow human beings as creatures created with the ineffable beauty of God’s own image within them and with the potential to grow ever more like God. We see them as fellow pilgrims in this life in need of help, guidance and mercy, just as we are in need of help, guidance and mercy. This is how we let go; we pray for their salvation, even as we pray for our own.

Our Metropolitan in his pastoral letter for the beginning of Lent, said this:

It’s easy for us to look at someone else’s faults and judge, mostly because it takes the focus away from our own lives. The Christian, however, is called upon not to condemn the falls of their sisters or brothers, but to reach out a hand and help them back up when they stumble.

Each of us should take these words to heart! Each of us must see our fellow human beings as creatures for whom the Lord Jesus Christ died. Each of us must let go of the hurt and the anger and the resentment that we might nurse against those who in any way sin against us. Each of us must say to them, “God forgives!” even as each of us must beg forgiveness from them for any sin we ourselves have committed against them, “Forgive me the sinner!” This, Brothers and Sisters, is a worthy beginning to our season of repentance and preparation for the glorious joy of the Resurrection!

Fr. Elias

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