



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

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

The Rev. Fr. Elias Yelovich,

Pastor

<http://EntranceMission.org>

***Neither the Magnitude of the Transgression
nor the Multitude of the Sins...***
April 18, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

As Thou didst accept the prodigal son and the harlot when she came to Thee, so also receive me, who am as a harlot and a prodigal, O compassionate One. Turning to Thee now with a contrite soul, I know, O Savior, that no man hath so sinned against Thee as I, nor done the things that I have done. Yet this also I know, that neither the magnitude of the transgressions, nor the multitude of the sins surpasseth the great long-suffering of my God and His exceeding love toward mankind. But with the oil of compassion, Thou dost cleanse and enlighten them that earnestly repent, bounteously making them partakers of the light and communicants of Thy divinity. (St. Simeon the New Theologian. From a prayer before Reception of Holy Communion.)

Each week shortly before the beginning of the Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning we pray the Prayers of Preparation for the Reception of Holy Communion. The quote above is from my favorite of those prayers, the seventh of the nine that we typically pray together. It expresses

so very well the compassion of our God, who accepts us with forgiveness when we repent, regardless of the “magnitude” of our sins and regardless of their “multitude” as well. In our Saturday Zoom study time together last week we read together the first half of the story of St. Mary of Egypt, a saint whose life exemplifies the truth we express in this prayer. Above all else in that story, we hear that the Lord God eagerly awaits the return of a sinner and offers forgiveness to the sinner who repents, forgiveness for any and all sins, regardless of their multitude or magnitude.

St. Mary of Egypt tells her story to the hieromonk Zosimas whose experience must have been told and retold to many in multiple generations that followed. Later it was recorded in the form of the written story we treasure by St. Sophronios. St. Mary of Egypt left home when she was only a young girl, twelve years old, and entered a life of dissolution and pernicious fornication. How terribly her actions must have affected those who loved her, her parents, her siblings, teachers and friends. Only when she came to herself on the Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross as she stood outside the doors of the Church of the Holy Resurrection in Jerusalem did she understand the power of God’s love and forgiveness. In profound sorrow for her sin, she followed the guidance of the Holy Theotokos and went to the wilderness beyond the Jordan where she lived for many years in continual contrition and repentance. Her story exemplifies the meaning of Great Lent. This, Brothers and Sisters, is our time for repentance! This is our time to receive the forgiveness of the Great Physician of our souls!

We are sometimes afraid to admit our sins out of a sense of pride or embarrassment. But the truth of the matter is that we are all sinners. While we may have sinned differently than St. Mary of Egypt did, each and every one of us has sinned. Each sin is harmful to others and to ourselves; each and every sin is a sin against God, for He created us to live in holiness and in communion with Him and to love all people whom we meet and with whom we live in this life. There really is no thing as a small sin. As such, let each of us examine our hearts and discern how, when and where we have sinned against Him to the detriment of others and ultimately ourselves. Remember that when you do so, God is ever ready to forgive. There is no limit to His mercy. Indeed, it is the case that “neither the magnitude of the transgressions, nor the multitude of the sins surpasseth the great long-suffering of my God and His exceeding love toward mankind.” This, above all else, is what the wondrous story of St. Mary of Egypt reminds us of, and it is why we hear it at the very end of Lent as we stand at the threshold of that week which above all others is truly Great and Holy.

Fr. Elias

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717-817-0084