



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

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The Example Shown to Us by a Centurion
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

As he entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, beseeching him and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, in terrible distress." And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." But the centurion answered him, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard him, he marveled, and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth." And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; be it done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment. (Matthew 8: 5-13)

This passage from the Gospel of St. Matthew is one of three remarkable miracles that our Lord

performed immediately after He had preached His Sermon on the Mount. The essence of His teaching was followed by three actions that illustrate the essence of His earthly ministry. First, He extends His compassion to that most loathed of all unclean people, a leper. Then, as He is traveling in the region around Capernaum He heals the servant, in some translations, the “son,” of a Gentile officer, a Centurion, a Roman officer who commanded a hundred men. And, finally, He heals the mother of St. Peter’s wife. Each of these healings reveals the unlimited compassion of our God: He does not turn from the need of any man or woman, be they unclean, Gentile or otherwise in need.

The healing of the servant of the Centurion is especially remarkable, because it would have been so very shocking to any pious Jew of that time, a totally unexpected action of God’s mercy to someone outside of the faith. The Centurion was of course a Gentile, but more than that: he was in the service of the pagan empire that had conquered the nation of Israel and subjugated it. Amazingly, when that Gentile Centurion asks for help, Jesus not only extends mercy to him, but he subsequently praises his faith and contrasts it with the unbelief of those very pious first century Jews who would have been offended by His action.

There is much for us to learn from this lesson. Above all, there is the way in which the Centurion approaches the Lord, how and what he asks, and what he expects. The Centurion approaches Him with respect and humility. He asks for mercy and healing, not for himself, but for someone else, his son or servant. He demands nothing. Knowing that it would render any Jew, particularly a Rabbi, unclean for Him to even enter the Centurion’s house, he humbly affirms his unworthiness to even ask, and reveals his faith, a faith so pure and simple, that he says those most remarkable words, *Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.*

The Centurion is the very model of prayer. When we pray, we should keep the example of this Centurion in our hearts. We should approach God with respect and in humility. Our most important prayers should not be for ourselves, but for others. We should demand nothing, and we should realize, like the Centurion, that God owes us nothing. Everything He gives is a mercy; everything He does is done out of love; everything we receive from Him is undeserved. We should begin our prayers with praise and thanksgiving for all that He has given us already – our very lives, every breathe that He allows us to take, every beat of the heart within us that sends the purifying surges of blood to flow from organ to organ in our bodies. Then, in humility, after thanking Him, we should pray for others first. The great grace of prayer is that God allows us to participate in His love for the entire creation, not just for those we like or know or share our lives with, but for everyone and anyone in need. Then, and only then, should we pray for ourselves, understanding that the essence of our prayer for ourselves should always be that His Will be accomplished in every moment and aspect of our lives, in all of our thoughts, words and deeds.

It is neither necessary nor wise for us to attempt to twist His arm. In my priesthood over these many years, I have seen many people try to cajole or bribe Him. “*Maybe if I show Him how worthy of His attention I am – maybe then, He will do what I want.*” No! That is not the way any

of us should ever approach our Lord! We should come before Him always in humility, understanding that nothing we could ever demonstrate to Him would ever make us worthy in His sight. He knew that the Centurion was unworthy, and He knows that we are unworthy! As such, we should come in the realization that everything He deigns to give is a mercy. He already knows what we need before we ask before we even open our thoughts or our mouths to do so, but in His mercy, He allows us to ask anyway. Thanksgiving, humility, compassion for others and then an earnest and simple request that His Will be done in our lives. These are the elements of prayer that the Centurion demonstrated, and they are the very qualities that our Lord praised.

And then – we wait, in humility and patience, we wait. But we wait in faith, knowing that God above all else is love, *“love divine, all loves excelling,”* as a beautiful hymn expresses it. We wait, knowing that God will accomplish all things for the Life and benefit of the world, but that He will do so in His time, at the right time of His own choosing. This, Brothers and Sisters, is what the remarkable miracle of our Lord’s healing of the Centurion’s servant shows us so clearly. And my prayer on this day is that each of us may truly follow his example!

Fr. Elias

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