



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

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

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The Last Enemy and the Cult of Death
October 10, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Corinthians 15: 21-26)

Each week or so I travel to Pittsburgh to take my daughter for her chemo treatments at the women's hospital in Oakland. She has dropped down to 91 lbs., but the new chemo treatment she has recently been receiving has successfully diminished her cancer markers significantly. It is amazing to see how aggressively her doctors and nurses at that remarkable hospital treat her cancer. They use every medical tool at their disposal and help her to fight against the disease that has ravaged her body. The medical enemy they fight is cancer, but in a deeper sense, it is death itself that they are fighting. They understand implicitly that her condition is wrong; it is not one that our good and merciful God would have ever created. For them, as for us, the

enemy to be defeated is death, the fruit of our ancestral separation from the One Who is truly our only life and salvation.

As we travel from my daughter's home in the outskirts into the heart of the city, I have been struck recently by how prevalent what I call "the cult of death" has become in our culture this time of year. I remember that when Matushka and I were children, October bore the promise of cooler weather and the coming joy of getting together with our friends to go begging from house to house for candy and treats. The next day at home, though, my mother would light candles to remember the lives of those we loved who had fallen asleep in the Lord. All Saints Day and the remembrance of the souls no longer with us would take precedence in our family culture. Then, we would begin to think about Thanksgiving and the cold days ahead until the Feast of the Lord's Nativity, the "Light of Winter," would come at the end of December. In our time, however, all of this has given itself over to the "cult of death." In our time, yards are decorated not only with signs of harvest, but with gruesome images of graves and bodies. It's as if people no longer understand that death is not something to be celebrated but overcome - overcome with the only power that can overcome it - that of the Lord's own Victory which we celebrate as Christians on the Feast of Feasts when we cry, "Christ is Risen!"

All around us people in our godless society forget the truth, covering it up with the great lie that they are in some sense immune. Death, they seem to think, is for others; I am young; it will happen to others, but not to me. They forget the need to remember for our own spiritual benefit, what St. Benedict said in his Rule: "Keep death daily before your eyes." He said this not as a sign of what will happen to others, but as a daily remembrance of what will happen to us! Remember that it is indeed the "last enemy," the enemy that can only be overcome by Christ, Whose Victory over Death is stamped clearly on each segment of our Sunday prosphora that is transformed by the Holy Spirit into the body and blood of the Master at Divine Liturgy. IC XC NIKA it says. "Jesus Christ is the One Who Conquers! His is the victory!"

The Cult of Death is despicable as we see it in the yards and on the porches of unbelievers this time of year in our culture. Yet, it can remind us to trust in the One in Whom no one trusts in vain. The doctors, nurses and support staff at the wonderful women's hospital in Pittsburgh know this. They spare no effort to fight against it to help the women there who suffer from cancer, that dreadful disease that takes the lives of so many innocents away. They implicitly know what we should all remember. Death is the last enemy - the enemy that Christ has crushed beneath His feet. It has been overcome by the Victory of our God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit! And we should remember it, not because we will be immune, but because the Victory He has won is ours as well.

Fr. Elias

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