



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

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

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<http://EntranceMission.org>

***The Holy Unmercenary Physicians*
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men. (Colossians 3:23)

It is a very useful action for us to read the lives of the saints. But depending on our source, we may get the wrong idea about what it means to be a saint, “holy unto the Lord”. Some writings about the saints that I have read (called “hagiographies”) describe the saints about whom they are writing as if they were born entirely free of original sin, or with sanctity already in place at the time of birth. I typically turn away from such exaggerations, well-intentioned though they may be. I very much prefer those lives of the saints in which the writers (“hagiographers”) tell it like it is, describing people who, within the contexts of their lives, devoted their lives to the fulfillment of the Will of our Father in heaven. Such people who do so are recognized as saints by the Church, “glorified,” on the basis of the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives of action and service to the Lord. Whatsoever they have done, within the time and place of their lives, they have done “heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men,” as St. Paul said in his epistle to the Colossians.

One of the most interesting and illuminating categories of saints within our Holy Orthodox Church are those whom we call the “Holy Unmercenary Physicians.” On this Sunday upcoming, we commemorate two saints within this category, Saints Cosmas and Damian. Along with them are Saints Hermolaus and Panteleimon. And every Sunday as the priest prepares the discos with representations of the entire Church on it, there is a special particle of the prosphora on the discos to represent them as one of the nine ranks of the saints.

The Holy Unmercenary Physicians were saints who used their skill to heal. They were physicians, trained in the science and knowledge of their time. They typically apprenticed with practicing physicians of their time and place and learned how to apply medicines and oils for the purpose of healing. Saints Cosmas and Damian, like St. Panteleimon, lived in the third century, during a time of persecution in the Roman Empire. And what distinguished them from other physicians is that they practiced their skill as physicians without accepting payment. Thus, they were called “unmercenary.” They gave witness to their faith in the Great Physician Jesus Christ by proclaiming in word and deed that they were not the ones who healed those who got well, but that the Lord Jesus Christ was the One Who healed all who were sick; it was they who applied the treatments, but it was the Lord Who healed.

We often have the mistaken notion that saints were some sort of “supermen” or “superwomen” who were born with miraculous abilities from the time they came out of the womb. This could not be further from the truth. We have people today in various Orthodox groups that teach such nonsense and that tell their congregations or dioceses that people may not get vaccinated or take medicines of one sort or another. They tell people to turn away from medical treatments and trust in God to heal them, as if God would somehow forbid us from doing what we know can and should be done to treat or prevent sickness and suffering. The lives of the Holy Unmercenary Physicians teach us otherwise. They used their knowledge and their healing oils and medicines as they were trained to relieve suffering. Of course, they knew and proclaimed that all healing comes from God, but they did not “tempt the Lord our God” by refusing the medical arts of their time. They knew God could and would and did heal by virtue of their application of medicines and oils. That is why the icon of St. Panteleimon, for example, shows him holding a box of the very medicines and oils that he would have used according to his training to relieve the sick and suffering. The great point to remember, however, is that they applied them without cost. He used his skill without accepting any payment. He was an “unmercenary healer.”

The Holy Orthodox Faith, Brothers and Sisters, is not superstition. God is real. He created us and all that exists out of the action of His Love, poured forth into our hearts with the beauty of His

own Divine Image, with the potential through our cooperation with the Holy Spirit, to grow eternally every more unto His likeness. This is our faith, the faith of transformation and growth, to go from “glory unto glory” as St. Gregory of Nyssa, one of the great Cappadocian Saints, taught clearly. Those who teach that we may not be treated to prevent illness by means of vaccines or that we may not take medicines developed by medical science of our time are misleading their flocks and should be silenced. We believe that all healing comes from the Lord, but He uses the hands and the skills of those whom He created to do so. The Holy Unmercenary Healers did so in their own time and place. They used their knowledge and skill to serve Christ by serving the Least of His Brethren in need. They were not “supermen” or “superwomen.” They were human beings who devoted their lives to relieve suffering in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. They did so in charity, in the sacrificial love that characterizes the Self-Giving of the Lord of Love. And this is what we should do as well! Whatever our context, our skills or our place in life may be, let us offer “whatsoever we do ... heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men!”

Fr. Elias

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