



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

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

**The V. Rev. Elias Yelovich,
Rector**

<http://EntranceMission.org>

***The Age of Selfishness*
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." (Mark 8: 34-38)

The great British poet W.H. Auden in what is perhaps his most famous work characterized our time, our era, as the "Age of Anxiety." Written in 1947 shortly after the end of World War II and at the start of the Cold War, he observed the main problem of our time: our turning away from our religious roots and our embrace of materialism in its place. Notice, I did not say *one of the main problems of our time*, but **THE main problem of our time**. We have seen repeatedly in our Sunday Gospel Lessons how the Lord taught in His parables and demonstrated in His miracles this very truth: This past Sunday we heard how a man was healed after the man's friends lowered him through the roof to get His attention in a crowded house. Jesus did not wave a magic wand and heal him; instead, He pronounced forgiveness of sins, and through that forgiveness, the man was reconciled to God and healed. All that is wrong in this world is the ramification of our willful separation from God; all is made right only through our reconciliation with

Him. Thus, Auden hits the nail on the head. The fruit of our materialism, the ramification of our separation from God, is anxiety; for without God, the foundation of our lives is built on sand, not on rock; it can and will sink inevitably.

As a priest, I would characterize our era in this time and place not only as the age of anxiety, but as the *Age of Selfishness*. Everything in our economy, our politics our family and personal struggles seem to be about having more, wanting more and wanting it now, holding back from support of the common good, finding personal comfort and security for ourselves and for ourselves alone. The motivation that drives us is, “Me, Myself and I.” We turn a deaf ear to the suffering of people throughout the world, a blind eye to the less fortunate, a cold heart to those who lose their homes, their loved ones, their livelihood wherever we see them – in places of war to be sure, but also on the streets of those cities in which we live. Politicians rail about lowering taxes, so that we can have it all for ourselves, about closing borders so we can keep the poor from other lands from entering the vast wealth of our country. It’s our country, we hear them say; if we let others in, we will have less. We need to keep what we have for ourselves, lest the foundation of our insipid and soul-destroying selfish lust of materialism is somehow diminished.

If our era is indeed the *age of anxiety* and as I also suggest the *age of selfishness*, then the counterpart, the precise opposite, is shown in the cross of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ. This coming Sunday, the Sunday of the Adoration of the Cross, and we are reminded of the Word and Action of our Lord, Whose very life was one huge, immense act of selflessness. The Word of our Lord in the Gospel Lesson from St. Mark states it clearly: *“If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it”* Our search for meaning, and security and fulfillment will never be found in the acquisition of wealth or power or recognition. Only when we bow before the Lord Jesus and open the eyes of our hearts to the Descent of the All-Holy Spirit can we begin to experience that which alone satisfies our deepest longings; only then can we cast aside our materialism, our selfish lusts, what the Holy Fathers call the “passions,” and find ourselves in the denial of self-service and the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. It is He, the Holy Spirit, Who unites us to the Lord Himself and in that union to one another in the very selflessness that God Himself demonstrated when He gave Himself for the Life of the World on the Cross.

It is now the Third Week in Great Lent, Brothers and Sisters! Let us embrace the three pillars of this holy season. Let us turn from our own selfish desires in fasting; let us turn to the aid of others, particularly the children and broken families in war-torn Ukraine; and let us pray for the salvation of all, especially those who hate us, our enemies! This is how we can observe a Lent that is truly Great and Holy, and it is the only way we can escape from both the Age of Anxiety and Selfishness.

Fr. Elias

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717-817-0084