



**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>

“... and the Last First”
June 19, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

But many who are first will be last, and the last first. (Matthew 19:30)

One of my very favorite books by C.S. Lewis is the little book that he first published in 1946 called, “The Great Divorce.” The title refers not to a divorce between two people in marriage, but to the way in which it is necessary to “divorce” or “separate” the concepts of Heaven and Hell. The title reminds us of our Lord’s Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, where Abraham speaks of a great chasm between those who are in Hades and those who are not. The two places, or states of being, are completely different: the one is a place of self-centeredness; the other is a place of God-centeredness.

C.S. Lewis tells his story as if he were the one experiencing it. He wakes up after he dies in a place that he describes as the “grey town.” It is a depressing place in perpetual twilight where the people who wind up there know that they are dead, but their souls wander about in a kind of tepid attempt at normalcy. They have meetings, they go to places for entertainment; they can even meet with clergy and other leaders of Church and state who have wound up in the “grey town” with them. They know that they are not in heaven and realize that where they actually are is a kind of holding place, a place where they can stay in the dim shadows and go about a somewhat depressing and self-serving existence if they choose – but only until the final moment when God will be all in all. Until then, however, there is a bus that comes and takes them to heaven. Once they are there, they have a choice to either stay in heaven, that place of light and brightness with the redeemed, or, if they cannot adapt, to return to the depressing temporary “normalcy” of the “grey

town.” To stay in heaven, however, they must adapt; this means giving up any and all behaviors that are incompatible with the Will of God. C.S. Lewis does not preach in this little book; however, it is clear from the telling of his story that this is what is meant.

C.S. Lewis is guided through heaven in the story by one of his most respected spiritual acquaintances. As they go from place to place and see many different types of people and witness how those people adapt to heaven, there is one experience that stands out in my recollection. Although I cannot remember the details of most anything else in this little book, I will always remember this one. As C.S. Lewis and his guide walk through the beautiful hills of heaven, they come upon a great procession. It's one of dazzling brightness and glory. A woman is led in procession, adorned in bright gold and shining light. She is attended by a multitude of people and animals. Those in the procession sing hymns of praise to God and look lovingly on the woman who is so honored. C.S. Lewis asks his guide, “Who is that great Lady so honored? It's not *HER* (the Mother of God) is it?” The guide says, “No. But it is a woman who is equally honored here in heaven. In life, she was nobody. No one even knew her name. Yet, she showed kindness to all whom she encountered: man, woman, child, animals in need. All were recipients of her charity.”

I won't tell you how this story ends. Go read it yourself and enjoy it and learn from it as have I. “The Great Divorce” by C.S. Lewis has many truths to convey, foremost among them being what our Lord said in today's Gospel lesson from the 19th chapter of Matthew:

But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

This Sunday the Orthodox Church commemorates all those saints who have been among the “last,” like the woman in the little book who had been unknown in life by other people, but highly honored in heaven. Saints who have been officially “glorified” by the Church are those whose actions of service, and love, and Christ-like behavior were seen and recognized by many. Those who have been so recognized and officially “glorified” are on the calendar of Saints. We commemorate them every Sunday and place a morsel of the Prospora on the Diskos for them by name during the Proskomedia. On All Saints Sunday, however, we commemorate all of the many others who have been unrecognized by the Church, but who nevertheless were Saints recognized by God. These include all who put God first in their lives and struggled to submit to His Divine Will in everything they did but were unseen or unrecognized by the multitudes around them in life. Although their actions may never have been formally recognized, their lives of service and love of God and neighbor are recognized by God, and by us on this Sunday.

These are the people we honor on All Saints Sunday, and I remind you that you too are called to be among them. How can you join their membership? Seek those things that are above! Turn the eyes of your hearts to the Lord; ask for help to do His Will, His Will as revealed in the Commandments, the Prophets and most particularly the Life, Teaching, Actions, and Self-Giving of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ. Will you be recognized by the Church? Most probably not. Will you be recognized by God? Absolutely! The Lord will know and will see that in time, in the age to come, you will be with Him in the glory of His Kingdom in the midst of those saints who have been officially “glorified.” This is the promise of our Lord in the Gospel Lesson for this Sunday. And remember that the only reward necessary for those who love Him is to hear the voice of Him saying to us: “Enter into the Joy of your Lord!” May each of us be among them!

Fr. Elias

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