



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

**306 W. Main Street
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<http://EntranceMission.org>

“Blessed are the Poor in Spirit ...”
July 3, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.

Almost each Sunday we sing these words at the beginning of the third antiphon. We recognize them as the First Beatitude. They begin the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount recorded by St. Matthew in chapters five through seven of his Gospel. We don’t know if Jesus preached this sermon all at one time, multiple times or in bits in pieces that were brought together by St. Matthew. Matthew emphasizes the setting of the sermon which he says took place on a hill. This would have been a powerful reminder to those who read the Gospel that Jesus was delivering a new and vitally important set of standards. Just as the great prophet Moses had done before, Jesus ascends a mountain in like fashion and delivers the standards of God’s Kingdom. Moses had brought the Ten Commandments, Jesus the Beatitudes and the rest of the Sermon on the Mount.

Most of the Ten Commandments begin with the Jewish word “*lo, (לֹא)*” the word that indicates “Thou shalt not.” But the new standards of the Beatitudes begin with the word “*makarios, (μακάριος)*,” or blessed. It actually means something like “joyful, fulfilled.” How joyful, how fulfilled are those who are poor in spirit; how joyful, how fulfilled, are the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers. In a sense they are not commandments at all, but an expression of the inner meaning of the Law and the Prophets that had been given to the entire Jewish people so many years earlier. In a sense they illustrate how it is that the

Law can be fulfilled – without threat, without effort, without fear of retribution.

In our passage from the sixth chapter of Matthew, Jesus points out that there are only two ways, and nothing in-between those ways. Either we strive to serve God, or we strive to serve Mammon; Mammon was a false god of the Chaldeans, an idol representing riches or wealth or greed. To serve God is to put aside our struggle for wealth, for greed, for treasures on earth, where moth and thief can destroy them, and instead, to gather and store treasure in heaven. How does one do that? By allowing the “eyes of our heart” to see the true light, to be enlightened by the dwelling of the Holy Spirit, to have the darkness of our self-centered, self-concerned anxieties extinguished by the presence of God within us - to turn first to God for all that we need, great and small.

The Sermon on the Mount emphasizes many aspects of true blessedness, but two things stand out. First, no one is too lost to be found; no one is too degraded or too sinful or too unrighteous to be saved. Those who recognize that their situation is completely hopeless apart from God are the ones who are blessed. The expectations and struggles of fallen humanity are overturned by the Lord’s preaching: the poor in spirit are blessed, for they have nothing in themselves to present before God; the meek will inherit the earth, not the powerful and boisterous and violent; peacemakers will be the true sons and daughters of God, rather than warmongers and bullies. And the second thing that stands out is the clear message that when one is united to God, when the eye is open to the Spirit so that light can enter and enlighten the heart, all of the commandments will be fulfilled, and fulfilled automatically. Then we will rise from the need to be overly anxious about even our smallest daily needs, such as food and clothing, knowing that ultimately all things will in fact work together for good for us who love Him. We will treat one another as we ourselves want to be treated, not because we are commanded to do so, but because we want to emulate and live the essence of the One Who treats us in love and compassion.

Remember these simple truths from the Sermon on the Mount! In my view, the words of these three short chapters in the Gospel of Matthew should be among the very first things covered in any basic catechetical class and should be read and reread repeatedly by everyone who names the Name of Jesus as Lord. For as our Lord said in the concluding words of this sermon: *Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.* May each of us be among those who build our lives upon the rock of Christ!

Fr. Elias

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