



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

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The Daily Manifestations of Sanctity
July 17, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

This I command you, to love one another. "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; ... But all this they will do to you on my account, because they do not know him who sent me." (John 15: 17-21)

These are the words of our Lord on the night of His Last Supper with the disciples. We typically hear them only when we gather for the Matins Service for Great and Holy Friday in the reading of the twelve Gospels on Great and Holy Thursday. They are also appointed this Sunday as we commemorate the remembrance of the Holy Passion Bearers, Tsar St. Nicholas, SS. Alexandra, Alexis, Marie, Olga, Tatiana and Anastasia, the royal family of the last Tsar of Russia, who together with their companions and close family, friends and servants were killed by the militant atheists. The whole story of how the government and rulers of the Russian Empire came to its end can be read in any number of excellent histories. But from the perspective of the Church, it is referred to simply in its entirety as "The Assault Upon Heaven."

The glorification of the Russian Royal Family took place relatively recently in the year 2000. When it was announced publicly, most Americans who have no interest in God or His ways at all, scarcely took notice. But I and my family had been Chrismated about thirteen years earlier and were very much interested and so very glad that the Church had recognized the sanctity of these true Passion Bearers of Christ finally. The Church stipulated that they were not precisely *Martyrs*, but *Passion Bearers*. A Passion Bearer is one who faces death in a Christ-Like manner because of their allegiance to Him. To follow Christ is to be ready to expect the world to react against our discipleship with equal hatred and animosity. Jesus made this very clear to His disciples on the night of His Last Supper with them:

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I was very young when my mother told me about the terrible murder of the Royal Family. She had grown up in a remote area of Slovenia, and she just shook her head and said, "What a terrible thing; such a beautiful family." When I grew up, I read just about everything I could get my hands on to figure out why it happened. What I discovered is that Tsar Saint Nicholas was a good and humble man, who had the task of ruling over the most gigantic area of the world, the Russian Empire, in a time when many of his advisors were incompetent and kept him in the dark about the problems that were leading to revolution. It seemed that at almost every turn, every major decision, was made without knowledge of the inevitable march toward the destruction of their empire. Even advice from the Church was often given by those who were interested in their own careers rather than the integrity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Of course, there were exceptions, such as in the persons of St. John of Kronstadt, one of the Royal Family's confessors, and family members like St. Elizabeth the New Martyr, who had founded a monastic order of Nuns dedicated to serving the poor in Moscow, a city which at that time had one of the largest and most abject populations of beggars and homeless in the world. But the sheer weight of the empire's problems coupled with food shortages, strikes and non-believing intellectuals who led a battle to overthrow the government of the Tsar, were too great. The *Assault upon Heaven* was to play out exactly as our Lord had predicted it. Those in service to Him were slaughtered in the thousands, the tens of thousands. The theocracy of the Third Rome was overthrown by militant atheists, and the Royal Family and their friends and family were murdered. They were dutiful and conscientious in their service to Christ to the very end, practicing their faith openly in clear defiance of those who were the enemies of Christ. They were not perfect, to be sure! But they bore the weight of the sin of so many others with love toward one another and forgiveness in their hearts. They were true Passion Bearers – accepting their end not with resignation, but with faith in the Living God.

This story has always fascinated me and continues to fascinate me. I return to it again and again, because I think the message it brings is one that we need to hear and contemplate. Sanctity is dutiful faith in the Lord, lived in actions of love and patience. It is not always a matter of exceptional bravery or courage, as we like to depict it, where those who follow Christ give up their lives knowingly and willingly at the hands of their executioners; sometimes it is, to be sure. But usually, it is quiet faith in the daily, momentary, decisions and actions that follow the Will of the Lord within the context of whatever situation or circumstance life has brought upon us. I remember reading the private diary of St. Alexandra of Russian years ago and noting that one of her most powerful entries observed the need to be faithful in little, as well as big, decisions. The great battles in our Christian life, she observed, are preceded by the small ones. Faithfulness, love, adherence to truth in the many actions and decisions of day-to-day life is where sanctity is born. As Jesus said, "He who is faithful in little things is faithful in big ones."

This is what the life and example of the Holy Passion Bearers of Christ means to me. They show us that we may be faithful to Christ in the exercise of daily duties and in lives of love to those whom God has given us in our lives to care for. This is true for all of us, not just for great leaders, politicians, clergy, or monastics. It is true for all of us. Like the Royal Passion Bearers such as the Russian St. Tsar Nicholas and his family, we practice lives of sanctity insofar as we follow the Will of Christ in the everyday decisions to do our duty as men, women, and children for the sake of the Love of Christ and one another. This is the human side of sanctity: to seek and to follow the Will of the Master in every situation life brings upon us, and to do so for the Love of Christ and one another.

Holy Passion Bearers of Christ: Pray to the Lord our God that we may choose to follow His Will in every circumstance of our lives; pray that our souls be saved!

Fr. Elias

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