



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

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

A Four-Step Spiritual Ladder
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Bless those who persecute you; bless, and do not curse. (Romans 12: 1-2, 14)

The book of Romans is perhaps the most comprehensive presentation of the Christian faith and life that came out of the first century. St. Paul explicates his teaching that we are justified by grace through our oneness, our faith, in Jesus Christ. The righteousness of God is manifested in the gift of grace, His own self-giving, to us who are not righteous. As we pray in the Divine Liturgy: He loves the righteous and shows mercy to sinners. As such, it is no longer necessary for us to engage in the Temple ritual of animal sacrifice; instead, as we will hear in Sunday's Epistle lesson, we present *ourselves* as a living sacrifice to Him, having been transformed by His grace. St. Paul summarizes the fruit of that transformation. In and through and because of our faith, our oneness with Him, we live our lives for the good of the Body, for the well-being of the whole. We use our talents to contribute for the common good: prophecy, service, teaching,

acts of mercy, contributions in liberality. We contribute to the needs of the saints, all members of the Body; we practice hospitality. And following the teachings of our Lord, we bless those who persecute us; we do not curse them.

It is perhaps this last exhortation of St. Paul that we find most difficult, isn't it? It's one thing to pray for our enemies, if we even manage to do that at all, much less in the way in which the Holy Fathers tell us: to pray for their well-being, for their eternal repentance and salvation, just as we pray for these same things for ourselves. But to bless those who persecute us? This seems too difficult. And yet, it is one of the primary teachings of our Lord, which for us to follow is to do the very thing that He did when he was nailed upon the cross, praying for those who drove the nails into His immaculate hands and feet, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

I spent some time this week rereading the down to earth teaching of the Elder Zacharias on this basic exhortation of the Christian life. It was way back in 2018 that the deacon and I went to NYC to hear him speak. On our way home we read in its entirety one of his most beneficial writings, "The Enlargement of the Heart." Therein he answered a series of questions put to him by people who attended one of his talks in the UK. The question was, "How is it possible for us to obey this commandment – to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us?" Remember his simple and straightforward answer? He said there is a basic four-step process that each of us can do when we are offended, insulted or persecuted. He spoke of it as a sort of four-step spiritual ladder.

- First, when we are insulted, offended or persecuted, the very first thing we must do is to bear it in silence and in patience. We must not answer the insult back in any way. We bear it for the sake of the One Who bears our sin in patience.
- Second, we should pray earnestly and sincerely for the one who insulted or persecuted us. We should pray for that person's salvation and for every good thing to be given to him.
- Third, insofar as we can do so, we should view that person with compassion. Compassion, because everyone who commits sin against us is bound by that sin.
- And fourth, we who are spiritually mature, should rejoice that we have been found worthy to experience humiliation, for in our humiliation we share in a small way in the humiliation of the One Who suffered humiliation on the cross for us.

This simple four-step spiritual ladder is a clear outline of how we can follow the prescription of St. Paul in the Epistle Lesson from the twelfth chapter of Romans. It gives us a practical methodology for living our faith active in the love even for our enemies. "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse!" Each of us, Brothers and Sisters, are able to do as the Elder Zacharias suggests in fulfillment of this profound exercise in love.

We cannot solve the big problems of war, violence, hatred, vengeance and discord throughout the world. But we can take action in our individual lives to live out our oneness with the Lord

Jesus Christ in acts of charity, hospitality and humility. Remembering that the way to peace and concord begins with our own actions, let us pray for those who hurt us, and in that prayer bless; let us back away from vengeance or repayment of violence with violence. But trusting in the Lord, let us pray for those who hurt us the same way we pray for ourselves: that they, like we, may walk the path of eternal repentance and salvation.

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