



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

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***Temples “Not Made With Hands”***  
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**Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,**

**Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!**

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are. (I Corinthians 3:16-17)

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit. (I John 4: 11-13)

I wonder if the people in Corinth understood what St. Paul meant when he wrote the words I quoted above, from our Sunday morning epistle lesson in I Corinthians 3: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” The congregation that St. Paul had founded during his second missionary journey proved to be difficult. There was immorality among the people and a variety of disagreements, “party spirit,” in which the people took sides between St. Paul and other leaders. Later in the epistle we read that people vied for status, pitting their spiritual maturity against one another, their ability to “speak in strange tongues,” as signs of status. St. Paul countered this competition between the people with the wondrous hymn of love in chapter 13 of the epistle: “Love is patient, love is kind....”

St. Paul apparently wrote this first epistle to the Corinthians from Ephesus a number of years after he had founded the Corinthian congregation. He had the intent to address these problems, and at the outset, he focusses on one of the central dogmas of our Holy Orthodox Faith. God does not dwell in some sort of building “made with hands,” he says, a building in which we go to make sacrifices as a restitution for our sins. No; God dwells in the temple “not made with hands,” the temple of our body. The one and eternal sacrifice to the Father has been made on the cross, and now, through the Grace of the Holy Spirit, poured out on Pentecost, we ourselves are temples, for the Spirit dwells within us, and it is we, not a building, but we ourselves who are holy.

The old rituals that centered around the temple building in Jerusalem are now gone, a part of the past. The present and the future is for God Himself to dwell within our own bodies, not within a building. God has taken the final step toward His rebellious people by putting on their humanity and by joining His divinity to our humanity. It is no longer a sacrifice of the blood of animal sacrifice that God seeks, but the sacrifice of a changed heart, a heart that is the receptacle of God’s presence, made manifest by our love for one another. And remember that “love” is not so much a feeling as it is the will to seek and to do what is always for the best of the other. The love that characterizes our discipleship, our holiness, is the love of self-giving, the love of compassion, patience, understanding, the love that always seeks the lowest place, the place of greatest need, just as water flows to the lowest place first.

There is often a lack of understanding about this teaching among Christians in general. Some pit the liturgical functions of the Church against the need to help those in need; others choose one or the other, focusing exclusively on the Divine Services to the exclusion of social ministries; or, focusing exclusively on social ministries with disregard for the Divine Services. The truth is that both go hand in hand. St. John made this very clear in his first epistle: “We love, because He first loved us.” Without the experience or the realization of His love for us, our acts of social ministry will be self-serving and limited. Without the Divine Services and the Holy Sacraments, we will be empty vessels, driven ultimately by our own self-concern. It is only in the realization of His own immaculate self-giving for us that we can become the sort of people that He created us to be, people who are driven by the same Spirit of compassion and charity that He has so generously shown to each of us.

I am sure that there were many people in Corinth who understood St. Paul’s reminder, just as I am sure that there were many who did not. The reminder of these two great apostles Paul and John come to us with the same power and urgency that they came to the Christians of the first century. If we would follow Christ, then we must open our hearts to the indwelling of the Spirit, given freely to all of us in the Holy Sacraments, and we must strive to live lives of holiness, realizing that it is we ourselves who are the “temples not made with hands,” the dwelling of His presence with us. And we must allow His presence to drive us, “to constrain us,” as St. Paul said, to love those in greatest need, always seeking out the lowest place, those for whom all hope has seemed to vanish. This is the way that we fulfill our discipleship, by being Christ to any and all in need.

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