



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

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Perfect Love Casts Out Fear
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. (1 John 4:18).

One of the joys of being a grandparent is visiting with our grandchildren. In our case, Matushka Bonnie and I have been married for over 50 years with 5 children and 10 grandchildren, ranging in ages from 2 years old to over 20. It's especially the young ones that tickle us! When we see a couple of them that we haven't seen in a while, they sometimes hide from us, because they don't immediately recognize us; they don't know who we are. It makes us laugh to ourselves particularly when we see them hide their eyes, as if that would somehow make them unnoticeable. They think that because they hide their eyes, they are in some sense unseen by us.

Whenever I hear a lesson like the one we heard today from the 8th chapter of Luke, I am reminded of this action that we sometimes see in very young children. The people who lived in the region of the Gadarenes were normal people, going about their lives on the eastern shore of Lake Galilee. They must have known about the man who was possessed by the legion of

demons, but there would have been very little they could do. They ignore him and go about their lives, fishing, herding, planting and harvesting. As good Jews they would have known the commandments and the need for them to follow them, to make the necessary pilgrimage treks to Jerusalem each year, to make the appointed sacrifices in the Temple at prescribed times in their lives. They would have had an understanding of their relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that was defined by rules, regulations, duty and the endless striving to be separate from Gentiles, to become and remain pure and righteous before God. But like so many people even in our own time, they think of Him as distant, as somewhere up there, away and separate from their lives. They do their duty but hide their eyes from Him and react in fear when He reveals His power and His might before them – just like the people in our lesson today.

Keeping God at a distance always leads to the reaction that we read about in today's Gospel lesson. Having been confronted with this great miracle of Christ, the people in the region of the Gadarenes turn away in fear, and even as Him to leave. One might think that upon witnessing this great miracle, they would raise their hands to the heavens and give honor and glory to the One Who had freed the man. But St. Luke reports that they did not do that. Instead, upon witnessing the great miracle, they were seized with "fear." I went back to the Greek text and looked at it. The word for "fear" means "fear," not awe, but "fear." In fact, St. Luke, who is a master of language, accounts that it was "great fear."

I think this is astonishing! At least until we think about how they and so many people around us today understand their relationship with God. Many people know **about** Him, but they do not **know** HIM personally, intimately. In the case of the story from today's Gospel, we must remember, this all happens before they had heard most of the teachings of our Lord, before His forgiveness of those who crucified Him, before His Resurrection, before His promise to come again, and most importantly, before He sends to them in fulfillment of the ancient prophecy of Joel to pour out His Spirit upon all flesh on Pentecost.

They did not know God as we know Him in His Church through the revelation of the Life and Death and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ that comes to us so clearly and vibrantly in His Church. They did not know Him, and as such when He revealed His loving power before them, they were afraid. They perhaps knew their duty, and perhaps gave lip service to Him as the God of future vengeance. But, they did not yet know Him as the God of love.

St. John in the fourth chapter of His First Epistle succinctly summarizes this truth when he says that "perfect love casts out fear." How could the people in the region of the Gadarenes or anywhere else for that matter have known what God is really like before the outpouring of the Father's Spirit? To them, religious life was about rules, laws, regulations and duties, the performance of which were considered necessary for God's favor. But we know better. St. Luke Gospel has been called the "Gospel of Compassion," because over and over again he emphasizes precisely those teachings and actions through which the Lord shows compassion to those in need. "The Sabbath," the Lord teaches in Luke chapter 6, is "made for man; not man for the Sabbath." The Golden Rule in that same chapter is what should drive our actions, so that we treat people the way we want to be treated. It is in Luke's Gospel that our Lord touches the

dead man, the son of the Widow of Nain, and raises him with a mere word. He eats with the unclean, the sinner. It is in Luke's Gospel, chapter 17, that He comes into the presence of the Unclean -Lepers – and cleanses them. On and on, teaching after teaching and example after example, Jesus demonstrates the Love of God for all people, sinners and righteous, pure and impure, faithful and unfaithful, Jew and Gentile alike. He pronounces forgiveness, brings people to reconciliation, not through their own actions, but through the invitation of the God of Love, Who shows that we are not to be afraid of Him, for that we may, we can, we are able to love Him. And through our love of Him, freed as we are from our own demons of selfishness, we are able to reach out to those around us in like fashion, in compassion and love of all, even those who hate us and mistreat us.

This is one of the central messages I take away from our Gospel lesson today. We no longer need to hide our eyes in fear in the presence of God like little children. Instead, we may come to Him in any situation, with any burden of difficulty or sin, knowing that He stands ready to forgive and to receive us back in perfect reconciliation, to accept the sinner even as He and we reject the sin - not because we have somehow proven ourselves to Him, but because He is kind, compassionate and merciful, of great goodness, and indeed as the Psalm (135) says, "His steadfast love endures forever!"

To Him be all honor and glory forever! Amen.

Fr. Elias

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