



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

**306 W. Main Street
Emmitsburg, MD 21727**

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***When Others Look at You, What do They See?*
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Therefore, gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." 1 Peter 13-16

A couple of weeks ago I began my sermon with the question: *When you look at someone, what do you see?* Today, I turn to the counterpart of that question: *When someone looks at you, what do **they** see?* The way others might answer this question to a very large extent depends on how we answer the first question, *When you look at someone, what do **you** see?*

This past week those of us who follow the news heard about the criminal charges brought against a man who entered a gay nightclub in Colorado Springs and killed as many people as he could. He was convicted not only of murder but of a hate crime. He looked at the people there and saw vermin, people not worthy of his respect or acceptance. If we categorize people on the basis of their external appearance, their race, their gender, even their actions – we are equally

guilty, aren't we? As Christian believers, we know better. Every human being is created in the beauty of God's own divine image, with infinite potential to become like Him. This is what we should see in others: people who struggle, who sometimes take the wrong path in life, whose actions are often self-defeating and hurtful to others to be sure, but people nevertheless! People created in God's image, for whom we should pray, and for whom we should sacrifice our time and our effort to help, and most importantly lead to Jesus Christ!

So, do people see this in us? Or do they see something else? It's not an unimportant question, is it? We bear the name of Christ. We are His servants, His representatives, His disciples. They see us and judge Him on the basis of what they see in us. Do they see people who are Christlike? People who care deeply about others, especially about others who are in some sense ostracized or weak or in need? Are we people who reflect the self-giving sacrifice of the One Who came to save us by giving His life for the Life of the World? Or do they see something else. Do they see people who are self-absorbed, worried about what they want, filled with unchecked prejudices and hatreds of others? People centered upon their own comfort and well-being to the exclusion of others?

For some time now I have thought that this season, what Western Christians call Advent and what we in the Orthodox Church call the Pre-Christmas fast, is perhaps the most important of the fasting seasons in our Orthodox calendar. It is during this time, like no other time of the year, that God calls us as Orthodox Christian disciples – clergy and laity – to stand apart. To be holy as God is holy. We do this by refusing to participate in the endless parties, festivities, self-serving and unlimited consumption that takes place all around us prior to the Nativity of our Lord. It's hard to escape if one lives in the world. One gathering after another, one treat after another, one party after another, and then the endless exchange of merchandise on Christmas, so important to our culture that it has become a mainstay of our entire economy! This is not about us following rules and regulations, but about attitude.

We are called to stand apart from all of the hyper-celebration that takes place this time of year and to prepare for the arrival of God Incarnate in the Birth of the Savior Jesus Christ. We do abstain and we do fast, privately, in secret, not to please God or to earn His favor; that would not be possible. We abstain and we fast, first to emphasize our need, our dependence upon Him, and second to accommodate ourselves to His original intent. We fast from animal products, because God did not create the animals for us to consume; he created them for us to steward, to guide and to teach. By giving up what others around us consider necessary, we show in our lives that our intent is to follow His will and to rely on Him for all things.

The other seasons of fasting of course have the same purpose. But this season is so very important, because of the push of our culture around us to forget about God and to treat ourselves endlessly until the last sweet is eaten and the last gift opened. Advent – the Pre-Christmas fast -, sisters, is about our dependence upon God, our standing apart to be holy, as He is holy! So the question remains for us to answer: *When others look at us, what do they see?* Do they see people so devoted to Christ that they try and live Christ-like lives of charity and love for all people, regardless of their mistakes, their actions, their sin? Or do they see people

that are self-absorbed, ready and willing to judge? This season is our time of renewal – a time to limit ourselves, to abstain, to increase our prayer lives, to be concerned for others, not for ourselves. And then on the Great Feast of the Nativity – if we prepare – we will be ready to celebrate with joy the Birth of God Incarnate!

To Him to honor and glory forever! Amen!

Fr. Elias

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