



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

**306 W. Main Street
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Less is More
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Have you ever heard the phrase, “Less is More?”

I once had a student whose face I can still see who was brought up in a pious family. As I recall, he was one of a number of siblings in a large family, and somehow, his parents had successfully taught him the virtue of gratitude. He was one of those rare people who seldomly complained, who applied himself to his studies diligently and discussed matters with an open mind. How very rare! He sought not to impose his opinion, but to allow us, his teachers, to help form it. And the rarest of qualities was that he did not present himself with all the popular accoutrements of his generation: New phone, new computer, popular styles, etc. He was just a normal young man, who allowed himself to speak openly about his faith journey and to hear others as they spoke of theirs. He was, in short, not filled with himself. And at times during the course of our conversations he would remark about a principle his father taught him: “Less is more.” The more we acquire for ourselves, the greater the burden. The more we can live without an abundance of possessions, the greater will be our sense of peace and contentment.

Less is more.

We heard today the story of a man named Zacchaeus. The biblical account of this story is in the Gospel of Luke, and for us Orthodox Christians, this Gospel Lesson is a harbinger of the nearness of Great Lent.

Next week begins the *Triodion* and a three week-period of what we might call “pre-Lent.” We hear the story of Zacchaeus every year at this time, for Zacchaeus whose life up to that point had been filled with wealth and actions of self-service until he came to himself and the realization that “less is indeed more.”

St. Luke tells us that Zacchaeus was a short, wealthy man, a publican. Somewhat surprisingly, we get the impression from the story that he had already begun to realize the emptiness of his life. Why else would he seek out the Savior who was just passing by along the road to Jericho? And when Jesus calls him down and invites Himself to the publican’s house, Zacchaeus indicates that his repentance has already begun. He began to realize even *before* Jesus came to Him in the flesh, that he was in need of repentance, and had already embarked upon the road of change: “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold.” Take note of the fact that what Zacchaeus says is not in the form of a promise, but a fact. He does not say, I “will” give half of my goods to the poor,” but, “I give half of my goods to the poor” – in the present tense. Zacchaeus had learned through his repentance, through the experience of the Holy Spirit within his heart, that “less is more.” When Jesus encountered him, his repentance had already begun.

The story of Zacchaeus has been appointed for our hearing by the Holy Fathers on the Sunday before we begin the *Triodion*, our book of texts and rubrics for Great Lent and the short period before. We hear it as a reminder that our own reclamation must begin the same way as it did for Zacchaeus. We, like him, need to realize the emptiness of our lives, if we spend our lives in the acquisition of wealth and possessions and personal comfort. We, like Zacchaeus, need to realize that less is indeed more, and that the first step of our reclamation is the realization of our sin, our selfishness, our insistence to have our own way and the expense of others. In other words, we, like Zacchaeus, need to come to repentance.

We Orthodox Christians need this message, for it reminds us of something that we easily forget - that repentance must precede confession. We come to confession rightly only by first looking within our hearts and seeing the sin and selfishness that is nestled there. Only when we see it, can we turn away from it, like Zacchaeus, and welcome Jesus into the home of our Heart. According to Holy Tradition, Zacchaeus became one of the 70 Apostles, sent out to announce the advent of the Kingdom. Later, in his maturity, he was appointed Bishop of Caesarea by Peter and died an elderly man, content and in peace.

Less is indeed more, Brothers and Sisters. Like Zacchaeus, look inside, see the emptiness and futility of sin and self-service, and allow yourself to be diminished for the good of others. Repent, as we have heard during the past weeks as we celebrated the great feast of Theophany: *Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!*

Fr. Elias

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