



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

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

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How to be Saved
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

A pious Christian man once asked the emperor of Byzantium how to be saved. And the emperor, because he was also a pious Christian, told him:

“If you want to be saved, you must do this: At the beginning of the day, fill a container with oil and go down to the city. And I will station beside you two soldiers with swords. If you let a drop of oil out, they will cut off your head! If you do not let a drop of oil out and go around inside the city and return without letting any pour out, then you are saved!”

The day came and the man did as he had been told. He took the container with oil – it was full of oil to the top – and started go down to the city, but he was very careful, so much so that not a single drop of oil dripped out!

When he returned to the palace, the king said to him: “What did you see in the city?”

“I didn’t see anything!” said the man.

“Why not?” asked the emperor. The man replied, “Because I was careful not to spill the oil....”

The emperor smiled and said, "That's what you have to do to be saved! To see the oil of salvation of your soul that you are holding, and not to see whatever others are doing. Let each one see this as their salvation, to see how they will be saved and not to see what others are doing. A good Christian sees himself, he does not see others..."

Our Gospel lesson today spoke of two men, one who followed this advice and the other who did not. The Pharisee was so judgmental and critical that he could not even look at the sinful publican; in his pride he only saw what he thought was his own spiritual superiority. We call that "hubris" or more specifically "prelax." Pride, arrogance, delusion that one is better than or superior than others, seeing the speck in his brother's eye while ignoring the log in his own.

The other man, the publican, knew his place before God. He saw only his own sin and the need for his own repentance. He was the first to pray the Jesus prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me the sinner."

We are to emulate the publican, not the Pharisee. This is a difficult lesson for many of us to learn, isn't it? We want to look at others and criticize and find fault with what they say or what they do. Throughout my many years as a priest, I have often heard more about others than about the sins of the one coming for confession.

When I ask, "What do you need to confess?" I often get a rundown of the sins of someone else rather than the sins that plague the soul of the person coming: "Father, he said this about me; she did this to me." But what are your sins, I ask? What have you done or said that has turned you away from following God's will?

God will not ask us about others when we come before Him on the Great and Glorious Last Day. He will only ask us about ourselves, and in His presence, we will have no choice but to speak the truth. Like the pious man in the story I told, like the publican in the Gospel lesson - our salvation is a matter of paying less attention to the faults of others, and much more on our own faults and sins.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ: The season of repentance is upon us. Let us look within; let us turn away from the example of the Pharisee and emulate the publican, praying from the heart, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me the sinner!"

To the Lord Jesus Christ be all honor and glory forever! Amen.

Fr. Elias

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