



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

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

**The V. Rev. Elias Yelovich,
Rector**

<http://EntranceMission.org>

The Parable of a Merciful Heart
February 19, 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

It has been a difficult several weeks in the news. We have heard of the suffering of countless people and families in the war in Eastern Europe and seen pictures of so many new wooden Orthodox crosses now covering the cemeteries in Ukraine and Russia. We have witnessed the terrible suffering and heard about the massive numbers of people who have been crushed to death in Turkey and in Syria. And once again, we have heard several reports of people going into public places like schools and shopping malls with weapons which they fired at innocent people there, killing them for reasons that are inexplicable. These reports of shooters are now no longer exceptional; we hear them almost every day.

In the midst of all of this reporting, we occasionally also hear about people who push themselves forward to save those in danger. And often when they are interviewed by reporters or TV news people, they say something interesting. They say that they merely sprang into action without any thought; they acted almost instinctively, sometimes putting themselves in harm's way without thinking about what they were doing. They simply acted to help others – sometimes putting themselves in danger to pull a child out of the rubble, pushing someone out of the path of bullets or even tackling a shooter to stop them. I find it interesting that such

people admit that they did not weigh their actions, but acted quickly, as if propelled by something deep within.

We all know the parable we heard in today's Gospel lesson. We have come over the years to refer to it as the Lord's Parable of the Last Judgment. But I have often thought that a better title for this final parable in St. Matthew's Gospel would be, the Parable of a Merciful Heart. Those who helped others in need – feeding the hungry, ministering to the captive, visiting the sick – acted without even realizing that they were doing anything extraordinary: "Lord, when did we see thee hungry, or thirsty, or in need?" they asked. Likewise, those who were apathetic to those in need were not aware of their insensitivity, and asked pretty much the same thing, "When did we see thee in need and not minister to Thee," they asked.

We often think that it is our works, our deeds, that God judges. But a central teaching of our Holy Orthodox Faith is that it is not our works or our deeds at all, but our heart, that God sees and judges. For the purpose of our lives is for us to become ever more "like" God, to take on His characteristics, to become as loving, kind, forgiving, patient, humble and merciful as He. The great spiritual Father, St. Isaac of Nineveh, called this having a "merciful heart," a heart that cares deeply for every creature, a heart that forgives wrongs and seeks the good of those in any need. This kind of heart can only develop within us to the extent that we submit to the will of God and seek to become ever more fully one with Him, and evermore "like" Him. Thus, in our Holy Orthodox faith, it is participation in the Divine Services, self-examination and repentance that matter more than external deeds, because we know that the external deeds will flow freely, unsolicited, from a heart that is merciful.

Brothers and Sisters: there are many layers of meaning to everything our Lord taught and preached. Today, the Parable of the Merciful Heart reminds us that we can only be transformed into the kind of people who care about the needs of others to the extent that we allow the Holy Spirit to draw us into union with the Lord, Jesus Christ. To that extent, we too will say as we automatically perform deeds of mercy, "When, Lord, did we do such wondrous things? For we sought only to be like Thee!"

To Him alone be all honor and glory forever. Amen.

Fr. Elias

Orthodox Church of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

306 West Main Street

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

<https://EntranceMission.org>

717-817-0084