



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

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

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***Take Up Your Cross and Follow Jesus!***  
**March 19, 2023**

**Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,**

**Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!**

I had a professor in seminary who would say things in a way that was unexpected and therefore memorable. Once when lecturing on the central dogmas of Christianity, he said this: that whatever else we can and must say about Jesus is the central observation that Jesus Christ was entirely the man for others.

The man for others. This description has stayed in my mind all these years and I am sometimes surprised at its power. Of course we learned about the development of the dogma of the Holy Trinity, about Father, Son and Holy Spirit, about how the Second Person of the Trinity is the Incarnation of God made flesh, about how He is God and man, two natures in one undivided person. We studied the Greek terminology, the meaning of the technical terms “Physis,” and “Hypostasis,” and why those terms were so very important in the development of our faith. But there is something remarkably simple and yet stunningly profound about his observation the we so often take for granted, that together with all of those things Jesus Christ was entirely the man for others.

The simple phrase is on my mind today as we ponder the meaning of the Gospel lesson we heard from St. Mark’s Gospel, on this Third Sunday in Lent, the Sunday of the Adoration of the Holy Cross. It’s interesting, isn’t it, that this account does not describe one of Jesus’ private meetings with His disciples. The lesson begins with St. Mark saying that Jesus called the people, all the people, to Himself. Everyone

was summoned to hear these words. And it's significant that He called them to hear these words after one of the greatest of His miracles, the feeding of the 5,000 with only 2 fish and 5 pita loaves of bread. The miracle must have been amazing to behold! And undoubtedly, it would have attracted many who were there or who heard about it to His following. But immediately after it, our Lord announces that He is not some sort of magician who comes to wow the people with power, but that He had another purpose. He said that He would be turned over to the religious authorities in Jerusalem, be rejected and killed, and only then, rise again. St. Peter is horrified, and says, "God forbid!" But Jesus rebukes him and they says the words we heard at the beginning of the lesson today: *If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*

To take up one's cross is an action that must be freely chosen. It is not a duty or a responsibility, like earning a living and taking care of your family. It is a choice, an action of the will, that one must choose freely – just as Jesus chose it for the good, for the benefit, for the Life of the world. The Cross, our spiritual Fathers insist, was embraced by Jesus purposefully and without constraint. This is first mystery of the cross for us to understand: that it was something Jesus took upon Himself willingly, voluntarily. He took up His cross as a sign of His, of the Godhead's, immeasurable, incalculable, ineffable love for the crown of His creation that had gone astray. He took up the cross to be the One, Eternal and Perfect Sacrifice, the Sacrifice that could be made only by God Himself, the Sacrifice of His Own limitless self-giving. He took up the cross as a sign and symbol of that which alone gives fulfillment and meaning to life, the action of sacrifice for the benefit of others.

We often focus on the miraculous in our faith, as the people did who were present at the feeding of the 5,000. We often think that God is, as I've said so many times before, some sort of genie – a genie in heaven rather than in a bottle, who will do us favors if we rub the bottle with the proper words or with sufficient faith or rightness of belief. But that is not what the scriptures tell us at all! They tell us that God in His essence is entirely like God in His incarnation: He is entirely the man for others, and if we would follow Him, we must be like Him, we too must be men and women for others.

This means so many things that there would be no time to list them all. But it's really quite simple. If we would be fulfilled in our lives, able to contemplate the end of our earthly lives with peace in our hearts, then we need only follow His example: to give comfort where there is distress, to render aid where there is weakness, sickness or death, to look beyond our own needs to those of others. To be Christ to our neighbor is to be men and women for others ourselves. This aspiration goes far beyond the constraints of duty or responsibility. It is an aspiration of pure altruism, based on the self-giving of the One Who Himself was, is and every will be the Incarnation of Love, the man for others.

So, this, Brothers and Sisters, is the message of today's lesson. Like Jesus, let **us** be men and women for others as well. Let us freely take up our cross and follow Him. Glory to Thy Long-Suffering, O Lord, Glory to Thee!

Fr. Elias

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