



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

306 W. Main Street Emmitsburg,  
MD 21727

<http://EntranceMission.org>

717-817-0084

The V. Rev. Elias Yelovich,  
Rector

The Rev. Anthony Duvall,  
Assistant

***Standing Apart***  
**July 23, 2023**

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

**Brothers and Sisters in Christ:**

The words of St. Paul to Timothy:

*But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, fierce, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of religion but denying the power of it. Avoid such people. (1 Timothy 3:1-5)*

Who could deny that we live in the very times described by St. Paul to his spiritual son, Timothy? I always resist allowing myself to be drawn into conversations with people who say that “the end is near.” That time, when the Lord and His angels will return to bring about a new beginning cannot be identified; even Jesus cautioned His disciples not to speculate, for, He said, “only the Father knows the day and the hour when that will happen.”

Nevertheless, reading St. Paul’s admonitions to St. Timothy strike a sharp chord. In the last days, we will

know times of stress, the Apostle writes; men will be “lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, fierce, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of religion but denying the power of it.” Just think of how the mainline churches have succumbed to the whiles of the world and the devil, allowing all sorts of abominations, celebrating them with “pride,” sanctifying everything that is self-serving. If these are not the end times, then I cannot imagine other times being more like them.

Biblical scholars refer to these letters of St. Paul as “Pastoral Epistles,” epistles that have the purpose of encouragement for those living in enemy territory. One of the scholars I consulted devoted an entire chapter to what he called “Navigation of Alien Landscapes.” Here we are, so few of us together, observing the Holy Days, reminding each other of the importance of keeping the Divine Commandments, living according to the canons of the Holy Orthodox Church of Christ, while virtually everyone else around us lives out their lives as examples of what St. Paul described as life in the end times. People are selfish, lovers of self, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure. That is the very essence of our culture; it is what we Americans have exported to the world at large through our TV shows, our movies and our music. Only those who have heard the call of our Lord to follow Him even discern it.

I looked up this passage from 1 Timothy after I read the gospel lessons for the past two weeks. In both weeks the presence of our Lord brings forgiveness of sins and healing. Last week, He confronts a man with palsy, not with some sort of Hollywood miracle, but with the forgiveness of sins. This week, he recognizes the faith of the two blind men and heals them. Where Jesus is, there is Life and salvation. This is what St. Matthew is conveying in his re-telling of these events to his community.

It’s important to remember that faith is not mere belief or even purity of doctrine. The devil believes in God, and it knows Who Jesus is. But it refuses to accept God as its Lord; the devil and its minions refuse to be united to Him and to strive to be like Him. The miracle stories we heard these past two weeks remind us that above all things, it is our reconciliation with God that takes priority. Everything in life is secondary to that.

We live in a time in which most people go about their lives without so much as a thought about God and His Will. Not only do they not seek forgiveness, but they have forgotten about God entirely. They are consumed by their consumption. They seldom think of faith in the Lord. Instead, they think only of themselves – what they want and how to achieve it. They are the very image of what St. Paul wrote to Timothy about regarding the last days. The people of our time are “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,”

I do not know if the end times are just around the corner or if they will come about long after we are dead and gone. But I do know what the culture around us is like. And we need to take notice, resist it and stay together in our Churches to “navigate the alien landscape” around us. There is no other alternative. We must stand apart. As the Psalm reminds us, we must not trust in “princes, in sons of men,” in politics, or secular ideologies of any sort. We must trust only in God; we must seek to follow His will and to stand apart from the acceptance of any and all thoughts, words and deeds that depart from the revealed will of God. This, Brothers and Sisters, is who God calls us to be. Others around us may not understand or care that Jesus begins His healings with the bestowal of forgiveness and recognition of trust in Him. But we understand. For the only hope, the essence of all that matters and is vital, is for our continued reconciliation with the Father, and this can be accomplished only through the Grace of the Holy Spirit Who unites us with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

To Him be all honor and glory forever. Amen!

Fr. Elias  
Pentecost 7, 2023

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