



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

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### *Legion* November 12, 2023

**Brothers and Sisters in Christ:**

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

When a person is made a catechumen in our Church the priest prays four prayers of exorcism. The rubrics direct the priest to impart the breath of the Holy Spirit upon the person by breathing in the form of a cross upon his mouth, brow, and breast. “Drive out from him/her every evil and unclean spirit hiding and lurking in his heart. This, the priest is directed to do three times and then to add in the fourth prayer of exorcism: “The spirit of error, the spirit of evil, the spirit of idolatry, and of all covetousness, the spirit of lying and of all uncleanness, that operates according to the instruction of the devil.”

It is assumed by these prayers that a person about to be baptized is beginning a new life, a life in union with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is also assumed that the person is willing to cast off the evil actions of his past and to embrace the new life in Christ. Every gesture and every word is meant to free. The priest mediates the power of God to the person about to be illumined and freed from evil.

The terrible and frightening power of evil is highlighted in today's Gospel lesson, the miracle of our Lord's cure of the man possessed by a multitude of demons. The man's own psyche, his soul, has been so overwhelmed by them that when Christ addresses him, it is the demons who answer, not the man. “We are legion,” they say; so many that they cannot be individually distinguished. After they are cast out of the man the Lord allows them to enter a herd of swine, an animal that is considered so unclean,

that to this day no pious Jew will eat of it. The swine dash off and run headlong over the side of a cliff, forever reminding us that participation with evil is always self-defeating.

The Orthodox Church takes the reality and power of evil seriously. We do not treat evil merely as a philosophical concept. Evil is not merely the absence of good. It is personal; it has intelligence; and, it is always hostile to the crown of God's creation, man. The goal of those who participate with evil is to separate us from God, to drive us ever farther away from our only hope, union with God through Jesus Christ. Those who carry out evil actions are not in themselves evil. All creatures on this world have been created by God; even those who rebel against God, bodily creatures and bodiless creatures, man and fallen angels, are in and of themselves good, because they were created by God, the source of all that is good. But in their actions, they take on the qualities of those actions that rebel against God and His will. They become ugly, despicable parodies of what God in His love originally created. And the evil that they do, the actions that are meant to divide, to harm, to do violence and to separate others from God – those actions are what we pray to remove and to prevent in one who is baptized into Christ.

The Holy Sacraments bring our souls face to face with our God of love and mercy. As such, those who are baptized cannot be possessed by evil spirits against their will. But even those of us who are baptized can and often do cooperate with people and spirits who seek to divide us from Christ. Thus, God has given us the Grace of reconciliation through repentance, bestowed in the Sacrament of Holy Penance.

It is vital for us to remember that God is more powerful, more loving, more merciful, more wise, more compassionate as we heard last week, more forgiving, more patient and long-suffering than anything or anyone who seek to harm us or divide us from Him. This, above all, is the main point of the lesson we heard today. And close with it is the realization that evil actions, sin, always separates us from God, and is always, always, always self-defeating. Brothers and Sisters, let us turn to Christ in repentance and seek only what He provides to us freely: the Grace of Divine forgiveness and Divine mercy!

To Him be all honor and glory forever. Amen!

Fr. Elias

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