



Orthodox Church of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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The Humility of God: the Woman at the Well in Samaria *June 2, 2024*

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Christ is Risen! Indeed, He is Risen!

There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (John 4:7)

The story of Jesus at the well with the Samaritan woman is recorded by St. John the Apostle and Evangelist, and quite early in His Gospel. With the observation that Jesus had begun to allow His disciples to baptize more people than John the Forerunner, St. John turns his attention to this remarkable and theologically rich narrative of Jesus and the Samaritan woman. It is certainly the case that an entire Bible study could be conducted on the meaning of the various elements in this story. Of course, the early Christians of the first and second centuries would have immediately been drawn to the Baptismal imagery in the language: "If you knew with Whom you were speaking," Jesus says to the woman, "You would have asked, and He would give you streams of living water." Living water in the common vernacular is of course "flowing water," the kind of water that wells up in a spring, fresh, vibrant and clear. But Jesus of course speaks of Living Water in its spiritual meaning, the water that gives Life – Holy Baptism.

And then, of course, there are the other elements of the story that cannot be ignored. Jesus sees, as He sees and knows all things, the mess that the Samaritan woman had made of her life, her many adulterous relationships, her many activities of fornication with men that were and are not her husband's according to Jewish or Samaritan law. He sees and relates all to this woman, who then takes

the revelation and speaks of it openly to those in the village where she lived. The Samaritan woman thus becomes one of the first evangelists of our faith – going forth to share the Gospel – the “Good News” openly with the people where she lives.

So much more could be pointed out as well: conversations that take place on two levels: concrete and physical as well as spiritual – not merely with the woman but even with His disciples. They think Jesus is speaking of physical food and drink when He says He has food to eat that they do not know of; but, He is, of course, speaking of His fulfillment of the Will of the Father.

The element of this story that stands out to me, however, is what happens at the very beginning of the narrative. Jesus sits on the rim of Jacob’s well at the 6th hour, in other words, high noon. One can only imagine the heat of the day and what He and the disciples would have been feeling after their long journey to Samaria. He sees the Samaritan woman drawing water, and quite unexpectedly speaks to her of His need: “Give me a drink,” He asks her. To even speak with her was something that would never have been expected, for He, a Jewish Rabbi and a male, would never have been expected to engage in a conversation with a woman, much less a woman of Samaria – a region up north that was inhabited by people who had descended from those who had intermarried with their pagan Assyrian conquerors some seven hundred years earlier.

But Jesus does speak with her. And, once again quite unexpectedly, reveals His need, His human need, to her by asking her for a drink of water. He not only goes into a region where the inhabitants were considered to be lower than the low, heretics of sorts, by the Jewish establishment in Jerusalem, but He lets His human guard down and asks for help from her, with whom even the disciples are surprised that He spoke at all.

One of the central themes of our Lord’s ministry and vocation is thus revealed in this story, related by St. John so very early in His Gospel. Jesus goes precisely into those places that others avoid. Furthermore, He does not hesitate to share His human weakness and need with those whom He meets there. A quality of His entire ministry is to draw near to people in their need, and to invite them, to entice them, to draw near to Him. This our Lord does not by lording it over, or sharply correcting, or threatening; instead, it is God way to enter into a relationship with others humbly.

One of the favorite of contemporary saints among many of the Orthodox peoples is St. Silouan, the Russian monk of the last generation from St. Panteleimon Monastery on Mount Athos. St. Silouan, in his book “The Monk from Mount Athos,” emphasizes one of the central attributes of God, His humility. This sometimes surprises readers; for, when we think of God, we often think of His fearsomeness, His supreme power, His promise to come again in judgement. But it is more important in terms of our relationship with Him to think not only of those things, but rather of His humility. For it is His humility, His refusal to push, to threaten, to condemn, His eternal patience and love, that draws us into a relationship with Him.

I think it is the case that we often forget this vital quality of our Lord’s Life and Ministry, both a laity and as clergy. We need to remember that the Lord invites us into a relationship of trust, the kind of trust that holds tight to His promise of forgiveness and Life Abundant, as St. John called it. Of course we must come in repentance, for to come into relationship with Him Who is All-Holy, Pure and Without Sin – while we still hold onto our own sinful ways – is untenable to be sure! But He invites us; He holds

out the Hand of His Divine Majesty which is in-with-and under His humanity – two natures, but one person – in order that we might come to Him the same way that He comes to us – in love, service, charity and self-giving.

This, among other things, is what the story of our Lord in Samaria with the woman at Jacob's well shows us so very clearly!

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Fr. Elias

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