



Orthodox Church of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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“Follow Me!”
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Christ is ascended! In glory!

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The Gospel Lesson today is the first Gospel Lesson in the part of the Liturgical year that Roman Catholics call “Ordinary Time.” The major Feasts of Pascha, Ascension and Pentecost are over. It is now the task of those of us who belong to the Church of Jesus Christ to implement the meaning of those Great Feasts into our ordinary, or everyday lives. And it all begins with the Call of Jesus Christ to two sets of brothers: Andrew and Simon Peter, and, James and John the sons of Zebedee. All four of them were hard-working fishermen, most likely under the leadership of Simon, who was married.

The Gospel lesson simply reports that Jesus said, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” The Lord apparently did not say, “Follow me, because you are special; or, follow me, because you have a certain degree of knowledge or education. The Lord did not meet with Andrew or Peter or James or John and test them, or psychoanalyze them, or find out how their personalities might be compatible with their vocation. He simply said, “Follow me!”

Often when I speak with young people at the university or wherever else they speak with me, there is almost always a presumption that they are in some sense unique, special, that they have special gifts

or talents or qualities that need to be figured out and nurtured. Choosing a profession, a job, or if they have a more sophisticated understanding, a vocation, seems to be a matter of figuring out their special qualities, and nurturing them.

But there is no sense of that in this little passage that we heard from Matthew, is there!? Jesus did not somehow mystically discern special qualities in these first of the Apostles called by Him to follow. He simply called them, and they responded. He accepted them as unlettered fisherman and called them to do more than fish in Lake Galilee. He called them to follow Him. And as they followed, and heard what Jesus preached, and saw what Jesus did, and witnessed His kindness, His charity toward all, His life-giving touch, they would have gradually come to understand Who He IS. And then, when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them on Pentecost, they would have received all the help and strength and guidance and knowledge and special gifts they needed!

This is the way God always treats us. He calls us to follow Him, not because there is anything special about us. Yes, each of us to some extent is indeed unique, but none of us are special in any way that would make us worthy of God's call. He calls us first, and then when we follow, He empowers us; He does not call us because we are special; but when we follow, He makes us to be who we need to be.

How do we follow? What is that Call that He makes to us? First, to submit to His authority as our Lord. Second, to turn away from behaviors and attitudes that are contrary to what He has revealed in the Law, the Prophets, the Beatitudes, the Parables, and every word and action of His Life on earth. Third, to go about our lives in whatever circumstances we find ourselves as His representatives in a world torn apart by selfishness and evil. This does not require any special talents; it is only a matter of submission to Him as Lord. That is why the scripture say, "All who call upon the Name of the Lord will be saved." For to be saved is not a matter or receiving some sort of reward, but it is about living and acting in such a way that reflects His Divine love for all creatures.

So, today begins the part of our Church year often referred to as ordinary time. What makes it ordinary is that we live our lives in our time and our place as countless generations have before us; but, we do so with our hearts grounded in the love of God and bodies in service to one another in the Name of the One Who calls us to follow Him!

To Jesus Christ alone be all honor and glory forever. Amen.

Fr. Elias

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