



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

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"I Tried"
July 21, 2024

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Have you ever thought about what you would choose as your epitaph? Years ago, it was common for people to choose a phrase or a verse from Holy Scripture or a poem or piece of literature to have inscribed on their tombstone. It's interesting to wander in old cemeteries to see some of them from early days. Earlier this year Matushka and I visited the old and famous Sleepy Hollow cemetery outside of New York City. There we saw many epitaphs carved into the old marble tombstones, intended to say something about how the person buried there had lived, what was important in life and how they wanted to be remembered.

A good friend of mine, an Orthodox priest, tells me that his epitaph would be simple; only two words: "I tried."

I tried. I served dutifully. I preached from the heart to help and to enlighten and bring people to faith in Christ.

I tried to help people understand that life is more than the acquisition of money or goods; it is about love of God and love and care for one's neighbor.

I tried to have those under my care to live what Marley's ghost tells Scrooge: "Mankind is our business, the common good and welfare of all is our business!"

I tried to enable people to think about the ramifications of their actions, to control their passions, to learn silence and faith active in love for others.

I tried.

The Sundays after Pentecost are devoted to the remembrance and commemoration of the Saints of God. First, All Saints, then the Saints of one's homeland. Since we follow the typicon of the Slavic Churches, we commemorate the Slavic saints; but, we might just as well commemorate our own American Saints, of which there are actually quite a few. The week before last, we commemorated the Saints of Mount Athos; last week the New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke; this week the saints of Pskov, and so on.

We often think of saints wrongly. First, they do not exist merely for our benefit. I have said many times to you that they are not genies in some sort of magic bottle waiting to fulfil our desire. We should not treat them as such, as if they were at our beck and call for any reason. To do so, is to afford them the highest disrespect. Second, they are human beings, born in sin as are we; they are not perfect, and they are not always right. What they say and teach must be met with a proper understanding of the Holy Scriptures on your part. Christ and His teachings are above those of any saint, for the glory of any saint of God is to point to Him and lead others to communion with Him.

So, if they are not our genies, and if they are sinful human beings like us, what are they?

They are those who recognized their sin, their separation from God, and repented. They are those who struggled to follow the Lord's example and teaching in all things. They are those who tried and who lived as witnesses of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We should see them above all as examples, lives to be emulated. We should try to do as they did.

Our epitaph should be the same of my priest friend. "I tried."

I tried to turn away from my sin, to repent of my wrong against God and others, to follow the Way of the Lord Jesus, to put into action His service, His sacrifice, His acceptance and love for all human beings. May each of us follow the example of the Holy Saints of God. Let each of us say in word and in deed, "I tried."

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

Fr. Elias

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