



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

Leading by Example, Not by Words July 28, 2024

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Every morning I have a definite routine. I wake up around 5 AM, drag myself out to the kitchen, put on coffee and begin the process of feeding and walking my two dogs. I typically begin with the bigger of them, "Buddy," because if I let him in his kennel while I feed the other one, he barks, whines and protests as if I had abandoned him. So, I take two handfuls of kibble, put it in a bowl and plop it down in front of him. This ritual takes place every morning and again at supper time. He usually looks at me for permission to eat. Then, upon receiving it, he digs in. But sometimes, he takes that big paw of his, smacks it down on the bowl of kibble and makes a mess. Of course he quickly cleans it up, but whenever I see him do this "naughty" thing, I raise my voice and say, "What are you doing? ... Stop it! See what a mess you've made!" He looks at me fully understanding my consternation, but ignores me. And both of us realize as we move on in our day that he will do it once again, over and over, regardless of how often I object.

I find that people treat one another regularly the way I treat my dog when he does something

wrong. They voice their concern or warn them about the inappropriate nature of their actions. Sometimes they threaten them, or hold a grudge against them – especially if they are their children, or close friends or siblings.

I know that there are times this kind of action is appropriate. We pull a child away from a busy street filled with dangerous traffic. We warn our children about the ramifications of bad decisions, and so on. But this methodology does not always work, does it? More often than not we become frustrated and irritated because we cannot change them, especially if they are close to us.

It's interesting, is it not, that in today's Gospel lesson, Jesus did none of these things. He did not rail against the man who was possessed by multiple demons at all. He did not say: "I told you so! You engaged in actions that brought evil upon you! You have no one to blame but yourself! Clean up your act!"

In fact, He did not even address the man at all. He spoke directly to the demons that possessed him. "What is your name?" He asked - not of the man, but the demons. Jesus knew that when we engage in immorality, or rebel against God's Will, or sin against the Lord, for every sin is a sin against the Lord! – He knew that when we sin, we become slaves to sin.

Instead, He drove out the demons – demolished the evil, and picked up the pieces of the man's shattered life that had been freed.

There is much to learn from this! First, when we are slaves to sin, it is not always possible to free ourselves. We must turn to the Lord for His help: "Lord, help me! Please, Lord, give me the strength and guidance I need to be free!" And the Lord will hear that prayer and send the Grace of His All-Holy Spirit to free us.

But it is also the case, that we can learn from this miracle how to treat others around us who are going in directions we do not like. Sometimes we do have to correct them. But It's not always enough to correct them. If that's all we do, then more often than not they will react the same way my dog acts when I correct him. He will stop for the moment, but then go on doing what he wants again.

No, we must do more: We must pray for them and allow our lives to be transparent to them. It is not what we say to them that will matter nearly as much as what we do, how we live ourselves, how we show mercy and love and care for the least of those around us. They will see, and that, and that alone, will influence them. There have been times to be sure that I have been told how to behave by those in authority over me: my parents, teachers, religious leaders, etc. But what has truly influenced me and guided my behavior has been what I have seen in the lives of those around me with good will.

This miracle is a memorable one to be sure! But remember our Lord's behavior with the man possessed by the demons. Rather than chastising, He blessed and freed and showed mercy.

This, Brothers and Sisters, is the way of God, for our God, the One True God, is the God of salvation, the One Who saves!

To Him be all honor and glory forever! Amen.

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