



Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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Hope in the Midst of Hopelessness May 11, 2025

Christ is risen! Indeed, He is Risen!

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley; it was full of bones. And he led me round among them; and behold, there were very many upon the valley; and lo, they were very dry. And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, thou knowest." Again he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. (Ezekiel 37: 1-15)

Today is the fourth Sunday of Pascha. The past five weeks have passed by with a flurry of liturgical activity that really has no equal in any other Christian tradition. Lazarus Saturday, Palm Sunday, the Bridegroom Matins, Holy Unction, Remembrance of our Lord's institution of the Holy Eucharist, the reading of the 12 Passion Gospels, the Lamentations at our Lord's tomb and His funeral procession, the Little Resurrection Service on Saturday morning, and the great proclamation of His Resurrection at midnight on PASCHA. There is nothing like it in any other Christian tradition!

I could describe it all as "memorable," but that word is far too weak, isn't it! It is vibrant, heart rending, emotionally draining, and at the end, which is really the beginning, joyous beyond all expectation – a joy that has no equal, for the proclamation that death has been defeated by the self-giving death of the Lord, is the very essence of joy and hope and the fulfillment of all longing!

It's not really fair to pick out only one part of it and say that that part of what we experienced is the most powerful and memorable part of our Paschal celebration, but for me, it takes place at the Matins Service on the evening of Great and Holy Friday. We have sung the Lamentations at the Tomb of our

Lord. All hope is gone; He has been cruelly put to death, and all that remains is the darkness of the tomb. We walked with His immaculate Body in the funeral procession that lays Him in the tomb, and one would expect that it would be over and done with. Time to wait and pray.

But before we go home on that most memorable of all days in Great and Holy Week, before we leave in silence, the priest has one more thing to do. He picks up the book and reads the most amazing of all prophecies, from a Temple priest named Ezekiel, who is departed into exile with his fellow Judeans to the center of all pagan and idolatries in the ancient world, Babylon. He prophecies hope in the midst of hopelessness, utter and devastatingly horrible hopelessness.

Hope in the midst of hopelessness is the theme of today's Gospel. A paralyzed man cannot move himself to get into the water where there is a chance for him to be healed. There is no hope for him, until he encounters the Lord Jesus Christ. "Do you want to be healed?" Jesus asks? It seems like a foolish and insensitive rhetorical question. "Are you kidding? Do I want to be healed? Of course!" "But it a vitally important question, in some sense, the most important line in the lesson. For we cannot be healed until we realize that we are ill, that we need the life, the health, the wholeness, the healing that only God can give. The reason why so many in our time have fallen away from the Church and seem not to care about God at all is that they do not realize that they are spiritually ill. They think all is well, as long as they have their retirement funds, their entertainments, their personal luxuries. They forget that the very hand that touches the remote control of their televisions will someday cease to move; that it will lie with the rest of their bodies rotting in a grave.

But those who see the truth and confront the seriousness of their situation - **they** know that there is nothing they can do to make it better. They are hopeless to reverse death, to cure cancer, to bring an end to the idiocy of our federal government with its incessant lies, to make things right.

So, the same question that our Lord asked the Paralytic in today's lesson is addressed to each and every one of us: Do you want to be healed? Yes, Lord, heal me! For without YOU, all is hopeless! Forgive my transgressions! Send your Spirit into my heart so that I become as loving a caring and self-giving as you. And hasten the day when I too will experience the fulfillment of the ancient prophecy that we heard on the most hopeless of all nights, when we placed your sacred Body into the dark tomb.

Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you home into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken, and I have done it, says the LORD."

Fr. Elias

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