



Orthodox Church of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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God be Merciful to me the Sinner: Notes on the Publican and Pharisee February 9, 2025

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

- To forgive a sinner does not mean that you accept the sin.
- Publican – a tax collector or owner in more modern times of a place of ill repute
 - Such a person was to be avoided, not part of one's circle of friends
- Pharisee – a religious leader of respect and integrity.
 - Such a person was to be emulated.
 - Pharisees stood for everything that was considered honorable and right
 - They fasted, followed the commandments to the letter, stood for the way of life God had revealed in His commandments, enforced purity in their lives, and taught by means of words and examples the people to stand apart from the corruption in the Roman (Gentile) world
 - The corruption was real. Just like it is in our time. There is so much that is wrong. From sexual activity to violence; from selfishness to the hatred of people whom

we think are beneath us. Times in this respect have not changed, except for the potential each of us has to kill and to destroy in the gun culture of the United States.

- For Jesus to hold up the Publican as an example was unthinkable.
- Yet, He does.
 - The Publican knew where he stood before God. He was a sinner, period. There was no prayer he could pray other than, “God be merciful to me the sinner.” The same prayer we all pray in our silent recitation of the Jesus Prayer: “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner!”
- Jesus cuts to the quick.
 - There are only two types of people in terms of their relationship with God:
 - Those who know their true place before Him, like the Publican
 - Those who think they have fulfilled righteousness before Him, like the Pharisee
- The Pharisee was not bad or evil. The Publican was not good or pure. But it was the Publican who was “justified” before God, because he grasped hold of the mercy of repentance.
- Without God we are nothing. Without the mercy He gives, we are all doomed. Obviously, we think of sin as relative. Some sin is in our minds greater than others. I cannot deny the truth in this, but before God we are all sinners in need of repentance.
- If we think our lives in the Church save us, or if we dare think that our actions in this life as law-abiding citizens will in any way save us, we are mistaken.
- Only the mercy of God can and will save us. This is what the publican realized, but the Pharisee did not.
- The season of repentance is here. Let us look within our own hearts, not within the hearts or words or actions of anyone else. And let us realize that without mercy, there is no hope for any of us. Our prayer, each day, each hour, each moment should be that of the Publican:
 - ***God be merciful to me the sinner!***

Fr. Elias

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