



Orthodox Church of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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The Peace that Passes Understanding December 15, 2024

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Some years ago, I came to know a man who was very serious about his faith. I can't remember how he had been reared, perhaps in one of the many small protestant communities that are spread throughout the southern states. But in his seeking, he had become interested in the teachings of the Buddha and eventually entered a Buddhist monastery. He contacted me because he had seen some of the spiritual teachings of the Orthodox Church and was interested in seeing if our Sacred Tradition might provide the answers to what he was seeking.

We began a series of telephone conversations about Orthodox Christianity; he read the right books, studied the Gospels under my supervision, tasted the wisdom of the Holy Fathers and met with me over the telephone for the better part of a year. But no matter how much he read and studied, he could not find what he was seeking.

I asked him repeatedly: What is it you are looking for? And always, he answered the question with the same answer: I am looking for peace. Inner peace. Over the months that we met he

never altered his answer. No matter how much he read, how many podcasts he listed to, how much advice he took from the *Philokalia* or Scripture, he could not find the peace that he sought. He thought of peace as some sort of religious magic; an elixir of which he might be able to partake in order to give him what he sought. My response was always the same: You will find peace not when you seek it in and of itself; you will only find it when you seek the One Who is the source of all peace, the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ; only when your heart rests in Him, will you discover that which you seek.

In today's Gospel lesson we find just such a man as this. St. Luke says he was a "ruler," and as such we may surmise that he was rich. He came to Jesus asking about salvation. How can I be saved? Jesus told him: Obey the commandments! He said to Jesus that he has done so from his youth on. Jesus said in response: "One thing you lack: Turn from your wealth, give to the poor and follow me! The peace, the salvation that you seek, cannot be found in anything you have, in anything you do, and anything you read. It can only come through me."

We have all sorts of ways to seek what we want, don't we? The wealth of the country in which we live is so great that we think we can buy happiness, that we can find peace in what we own, what we see in the movies or on television, what new bright thing we discover in the stores, what promising medication we may talk our physicians into giving us. The choices are myriad. But none of this can ever lead to the one thing that is so impossible to find on our own, not of this can lead to that peace that passes understanding, as St. Paul called it. Only our trust, our faith, in the Lord Jesus can give us what we seek. The peace that passes understanding can only be ours when we look to Him for every need, when we trust in His promise to be with us through the close of the age, when we know in our hearts that he will indeed be there to enter the darkness of our last resting places and raise us from the dead. As St. Augustine said, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are ever restless until they find their resting place in Thee!"

Sadly, the rich ruler in our Gospel lesson turned away; and sadly, the young man who so desperately wanted peace like the rich ruler could not embrace the one source of inner peace either. But the words of our Lord that close out the lesson of this day are the ones we should remember above everything else: "Truly, truly I say unto you: What is impossible for men is possible for God!"

To the Prince of Peace be all honor and glory forever! Amen!

Fr. Elias

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