



Orthodox Church of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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What Makes Us Orthodox? October 13, 2024

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

What makes us Orthodox? Is it the vestments? The icons? The sophisticated theology? Perhaps the catechism? Maybe the wonderful singing, Byzantine tonality, Russian 8-part harmony? The glorious churches? Holy Tradition? Local traditions, like colors and language?

During the past several months I have been conducting catechesis at the prison. Every so often, someone there realizes the horror of their situation and seeks to find some meaning, some future in their lives. One middle aged man that I see has completed the 250 questions and answers that come with the Orthodox prison ministry booklet. He has worked diligently; memorized the Creed, asked questions and wonders when he will be ready for confirmation into the faith.

Today's parable of the Sower and the Seed speaks about sowing the Word of God. It is a

statement on the part of our Lord of the absolute love and care of the Father for those who sow the Seed of the Word of God in difficult times, difficult circumstances.

Although it may look like nothing is growing, miraculously the seed takes root, and produces fruit a hundred-fold. Such a message would have been an encouragement to the early Apostles who labored in a hostile environment. Criticized by the Religious Authorities in the Temple, and pursued by the secular authorities, they surely must have felt that their task was hopeless. But this parable tells them in no uncertain terms that it was not; the seed will take root, and the Word will prosper.

But still, the question remains: What is the form that our sowing of the Word of God in our time should take? Is it a matter of academic purity? We are Orthodox because we get it all right? Is it as I suggested early something else? Beautiful Liturgy, wonderful vestments, glorious churches? Deacons and priests who sing like Pavarotti?

The Holy Fathers suggest that it is something entirely different! I posted a quote this week on Facebook from the preaching of St. John Chrysostom. It was a simple quote, straightforward and clear: "A good example," he said, "is worth a thousand sermons."

None of us are in a position to preach before multitudes as St. Peter did on the Day of Pentecost. But each of us are in numberless situations in which we can show a good example. Patience, kindness, long-suffering, refusal to judge and condemn, silence instead of always trying to be right and first, submission, service. We can practice these things, even if we keep our mouths shut. Our children and grandchildren, our coworkers and neighbors: they will see and understand what God is like through our actions, or they may never understand Him at all. We live in a time of violence and turmoil. Lies are told repeatedly by one of the candidates for office in this election. So brazenly, that we assume it's ok to lie. It's not. But people around us have no chance of understanding the love, service, self-giving of God, unless they see it in our actions. And If they see it, then the promise of the parable today, that the seed will grow and prosper, will indeed become a reality.

"A good example is indeed worth a thousand sermons." To be Orthodox is to understand and practice this simple piece of spiritual wisdom. It is not about externals, singing, artistic beauty, clever teaching. It is about living the life, the love, the charity, the kindness, the patience of God. Doing these things will indeed produce fruit a hundredfold, for the Lord promises that it will be so!

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