**The Meeting of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in the Temple**

 Today we celebrate a great feast of the Church that speaks directly to the spiritual challenges that we all face on a daily basis. For today we celebrate the presentation of the infant Jesus Christ, forty days after His birth, in the temple.  The Theotokos and St. Joseph bring the young Savior there in compliance with the Old Testament law

            Every day of our lives, in all that we say and do, we have the opportunity to join ourselves more deeply to Christ, to become more fully “partakers of the divine nature” whose lives are constant offerings to the Lord.  He created us and all that is, and His salvation is the fulfillment of the entire universe. All that we must leave behind is our corruption, our sin and its sickening effects.  Even as the person with a broken bone wants to get past the resulting pain and disability in order to regain health and strength, we want to do the same thing in every dimension of lives.

            A very important aspect of this healing is the strength that we find through participation in the full liturgical life of the Church.   By that I do not mean coming to the Divine Liturgy on Sunday and major feast days whenever possible, which is a fundamental practice of the Orthodox Christian life. Instead, I want to draw your attention this morning to the two other services that we celebrate virtually every weekend, Great Vespers on Saturday evening and Hours on Sunday morning.

            These services, along with others, are conducted daily in monasteries, but most parishes understandably serve them only on Saturday night and Sunday morning.  We do so because of the great glory and dignity of Sunday as the day of resurrection, the day in which we celebrate Christ’s resurrection. And when we receive Communion, we are united with God in the most profound and intimate way possible.  His Body and Blood truly become our own.

            As we all know, deliberate preparation is in order each time that we receive the Eucharist.  We must say the prayers of preparation; we must fast from food and drink; and we must take Confession on a regular basis and especially when we have a guilty conscience or are aware of having committed grave sin. Whenever you have questions about anything related to taking Communion, just let me know.

            Participation in Great Vespers is also very helpful preparation for the Sunday Divine Liturgy.  It is actually the first service of Sunday, for in biblical times the day began with sundown the night before.  Vespers is much simpler and less ornate than the Divine Liturgy, as it consists of prayers, hymns, readings and Psalms that recall our creation, our fall, and the shining of the “Gladsome Light” Jesus Christ Who rose victorious from the tomb.  Portions of the service focus on the distinctive themes of that particular Sunday and prepare us to meditate upon them in preparation for Liturgy.

          If something is important to us, we prepare for it.  The more we put into something, the more we get out of it.  Attending vespers and Hours prepares us to share in the great blessing of the Divine Liturgy and especially of receiving Communion.  It will also strengthen our parish as a community, for at the very heart of the life of the Church is our worship, which is not limited to an hour and half on Sunday mornings.  As your priest, I ask you to do what you can to strengthen your spiritual life and our collective entrance into the Heavenly Temple by coming to vespers and Hours whenever that is possible for you.  You will find it to be a blessing in your life and not a major inconvenience.

            Of course, some have health problems, transportation issues, and work schedules that make it impossible for them to do so with regularity; if so, pray at home.  Most of us, however, could attend either service at least once a month.  Rest assured that this is not some kind legal requirement and no one is taking roll; instead, it is an invitation to join ourselves as fully as we can to Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest Who wants us to share with Him in the joy of the Heavenly Temple.    Sts. Simeon and Anna were prepared by years of prayer and fasting to meet Him in the Jerusalem temple, and now He makes it possible for us to meet Him in the Temple of Heaven, and even to dine at His table.  There is no question that we all need to prepare for that, for we want the eyes of our hearts to be as open as possible to the “light to enlighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel,” our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory and honor, together with His Un-originate Father and the All-Holy, Good, and Life-Giving Spirit, always, now and ever, and unto ages

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