

Resisting Royal Temptations

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.

The Gospel and Epistle readings for December 17 both include some well-known verses.

In Luke 14: 1-11, Jesus has gone on the sabbath to dine at the home of one of the rulers of the Pharisees. As usual, they are "watching Him" to see what He will do and whether He might make a mistake. But Jesus is also watching them, and He notices how they choose the places of honor at the table. As a result of His observation, He tells them a parable.

The parable cautions against taking a place of honor at a wedding feast, and then having to give it up when a more eminent guest arrives. Rather, you should humbly take the lowest place, and the host will honor you by moving you to a higher one. Jesus' final words in the parable are, "For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The Epistle reading is Galatians 5:22-6:2. Here Saint Paul lists the fruits of the Spirit, and then writes words that form the basis of fasting: "And those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

On this same day, the Church commemorates the prophet Daniel, who as an exile in Babylon had to deal with proud foreign kings. Daniel resisted the temptations these strong-willed royals put in his path, by living up to both the verses we read on this day. He humbled himself, and put away the "passions and desires" of the flesh.

In Daniel 2, King Nebuchadnezzar has had a troubling dream, and promises great rewards to whoever can interpret it. But none of his wise men can tell him what he dreamed, or what it meant. Furious, he threatens that they must find the answer, or be "torn limb from limb." The threat includes Daniel.

God reveals the dream and its meaning to Daniel, who then comes before the king with the tempting chance to gain untold riches as the great interpreter. Instead, he tells Nebuchadnezzar that no wise men can find the answers, but that "there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries." Daniel goes on: "...not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living has this mystery been revealed to me, but in order that the interpretation may be known to the king" (2:30). Daniel directs Nebuchadnezzar's attention to God, and humbly refuses to claim special insight.

In Daniel 1: 1-15, Nebuchadnezzar favors Daniel with the offer of the same rich food that his courtiers consume. Daniel resists this temptation, and persuades the steward to let him observe the Jewish dietary laws. After ten days, seeing how much "better in appearance" Daniel is than the youths who eat richly, the steward begins giving them all vegetables and water. Daniel's fasting thus benefits the whole court.



Kontakion - Tone 3
When your pure heart was purged by the Spirit
you became a vessel of clear prophecy;
you saw things far away as though they were near at hand.
When cast into their den you tamed the lions.
Therefore, we honor you, blessed prophet, glorious Daniel.

Our temptations may not come from royal sources, but we can still use them, as Daniel used his, to glorify the God we all worship.