

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church
971 St. Clair Rd, Johnstown, PA 15905
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The Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee
(02.09.2025.)

Luke 18:10-14

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. **(KJV)**

The current Gospel is a lesson in the benefit of humility. The publican recognized his personal sinfulness and acknowledged it before the Lord. The publican did not praise his own goodness. He sought God's mercy.

Today is a time for honest personal self-examination. Now is the time to accurately judge and acknowledge personal sinfulness before the Lord. Great Lent is approaching. It is time to improve the condition of the soul.

Caring for the soul and seeking purity of the soul is a life-long necessity. Sinfulness enters daily life and must be fiercely addressed. The Lord God is present to help believers cleanse personal sins.

The publican is a lasting example of how to turn to the Lord and seek forgiveness. The Pharisee is an example of what not to do. The Pharisee focused on what he considered his goodness. He did not see his own sins.

Believers grow in Christ when seeing and taking responsibility for their personal sins. Growth in Jesus Christ is unlimited for those willing to vigorously root out and repel personal sin.

God's Holy Church proclaims the Gospel of the Publican and the Pharisee each year for believers to think carefully about personal sin. The soul benefits from the forgiveness possible in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ welcomes believers seriously seeking forgiveness of personal sins. Jesus Christ is present to forgive and blot out personal sins. Jesus Christ will cleanse and brighten the soul.

The Pharisee had a high opinion of himself. He was blinded to his own shortcomings. The Pharisee did not see sinfulness as a part of his life. He looked down on others including the Publican.

Each believer has sufficient work to do on his or her self. Believers do not benefit by judging others or comparing the self to others. The standards for the Christian life are clear in Jesus Christ and in Christ's teachings.

The lives of the saints and martyrs demonstrate the value of personal humility and waging war against personal sin. Wise believers heed the lessons of the present Gospel. Wise believers honestly seek to root out personal sin.

The Gospel shines light on the condition of each soul. Jesus Christ shines through the Gospel to each heart, mind and soul. God's Holy Church offers the loving environment for cleansing of the soul.

Mindful believers heed the content of the Gospel. Attentive believers apply the Gospel to personal life and seek to grow in Christ. Jesus Christ's Light and Life shines through the Gospel to those with eyes to see and ears to hear.

Each Divine Liturgy is an opportunity to grow in Jesus Christ. Each Divine Liturgy is direct experience with Jesus Christ. The Gospel provides Divine nourishment for each heart, mind and soul.

Hearers of the Gospel of the Publican and the Pharisee respond in their individual ways. Adhering to and following the teachings of Jesus Christ rests within each heart, mind and soul.

God's Holy Church proclaims the Gospel for the benefit of all willing to listen. Peace and joy await willing listeners to the Gospel. Fullness in life and eternal life awaits those heeding the Gospel teachings.

Thank God for the humility and honesty of the Publican. Thank God for the Church proclaiming the Gospel. Now is the time to seriously pray for God's mercy and forgiveness.

Thank God for mercy being available to sinners. Thank God for the opportunity to repent of sins and be renewed in Jesus Christ. Each moment is an opportunity to repent and begin anew in Christ.

Each Divine Liturgy offers newness and growth in Christ. The Church stands against the wiles of the devil and the evil of the world. The Church offers God's goodness, mercy and forgiveness.

The time of life comes only once. Moments of life are not repeated. Believers choose whether to willingly live the life in Christ. Sinfulness has no place in the life in Christ.

Each believers embraces Jesus Christ at Baptism. Following Jesus Christ is intended for the time remaining in life after exiting the Baptismal font.

It is always timely to repent of sin to follow Jesus Christ.

The Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee. Transfer of the Relics of St. John Chrysostom. St. Danilo of Karlovac. January 27/February 9, 2025. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The blessing of a home is one of the most beautiful and profound traditions of our Orthodox faith, deeply connected to the Feast of Theophany. On this day, we commemorate the baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Jordan River, where He sanctified the waters for the salvation of mankind. The Church blesses the waters on this holy day, as a powerful symbol of spiritual cleansing and renewal. Just as the holy water blessed on Theophany represents the sanctification of all creation, the blessing of our homes with this same holy water brings God's blessing, peace, and divine presence into our lives.

Saint Luke of Crimea, a great archbishop and surgeon, taught us that "Where there is prayer, there is peace, and where there is peace, there is God." Just as Christ's baptism sanctified the waters, the blessing of our homes with this same holy water grants us the grace of the Holy Spirit, bringing peace, protection, and God's presence into our homes. By receiving this blessing, our homes become places where God's grace dwells, reminding us to live in harmony with His will.

We invite you, dear brothers and sisters, to open the doors of your home to God's blessing this Theophany season. Schedule the blessing of your home and allow the prayers of the Church, the sanctified water, and the presence of the Holy Spirit to fill your home with light and peace. Father Dragan Vukovic is available for this sacred act and can be reached at 814-244-4063.

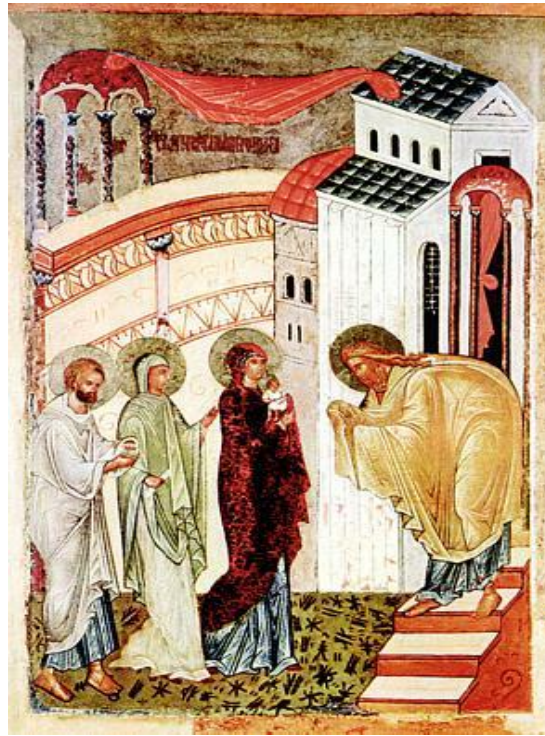
May the blessing of the Holy Spirit be with you and your families, granting you health, love, and spiritual joy.

With love in Christ,

Yours in the Lord,

Fr. Dragan Vukovic

HOMILY ON THE MEETING OF THE LORD



What a tender scene the Meeting of the Lord shows us! The venerable elder Simeon, holding the infant God in his hands, on either side of him are the righteous Joseph and the Most Holy Mother of God. Not far away is the Prophetess Anna, an eighty-year-old faster and woman of prayer. Their eyes are all directed toward the Savior. Their attention is absorbed by Him and they drink in spiritual sweetness from Him, which feeds their souls. You can judge for yourself how blessed was the state of these souls!

However, brethren, we are called not only to think about this blessedness, but also to taste it in reality, for all are called to have and carry the Lord in themselves, and to disappear in Him with all the powers of their spirit. When we have reached that state, then our blessedness will be no lower than that of those who participated in the Meeting of the Lord. They were blessed who saw it; we shall be blessed who have not seen, but believed. Pay attention. I will show you briefly how to achieve this. Here is what you should do.

1. First of all, repent. Remember that nothing must be done in spiritual life without repentance. No matter what anyone endeavors to seek, let the beginning of it be repentance. Just as a house cannot be built without a foundation, nor a field be sown or planted without first being cleared, so also without repentance we cannot begin our spiritual search; anything begun without repentance was begun in vain. Thus, first of all, repent—that is, weep over everything bad that you have done, and resolve to do only what is pleasing to God. This will be like turning your gaze and your whole body towards the path of meeting the Lord, and taking the initial step upon that path.

2. Next, keep this state of repentance constant; establish for yourself a manner of life and conduct that would make every step or movement something directing your attention to our Lord and Savior. Such an order of life will establish itself naturally, if: a) you do everything that you do for the Glory of the Lord and Savior, for Christ's sake. Here we mean not only great deeds, but all deeds. For, seeing and hearing, silence and speaking, food and drink, sitting and walking, work and rest can all be dedicated to the Lord and sanctified by His All-Holy Name. There isn't a minute when we are not doing something; so, by thus dedicating your activity, you will be meeting the Lord minute by minute, directing all of your activities to His glory. You can even more conveniently do this and reap fruits from it if you also: b) insert into the order of your daily activities the practice of prayer—both in church and at home; and in general make it your rule to be a strict fulfiller of all the rules and order of the Holy Church to the last iota, without vain elaboration and distorted commentary, and with simplicity of heart. As the content of all prayer is the Lord and our turning to Him, by doing it and participating in it you will be meeting the Lord through your heart's sympathy and delight. If after this: c) you fill all your interim time with reading the Scriptures about the Lord, listening to talks about Him, or with your own contemplation of Him and the great work of salvation that He wrought on earth, then you will see for yourself that nothing will remain within us or outside of us that does not bring remembrance of the Lord, bring Him to your attention, or carry your spirit to meet Him.

3. Just the same, you should not forget that all of these labors and occupations are only preparation. You should not stop at them, but rather strive onward. Just as food taken in rough form later imbues refined elements needed for life, so must these occupations performed visibly and tangibly turn into a spirit of a very refined inclination or striving toward the Lord. Namely, the labor of consecrating all our activities to the Lord should have the quality of reaching with our whole soul's desire only for the Lord; when we do all our prayers or attend the Divine services, a feeling should form in our hearts of accord only with the Lord and what is His. Underlying our reading and hearing the Holy Scripture about the Lord should only be the eager directing of our mind's attention toward the Lord alone. These labors are that very working of the field, and these strivings are the growth of what has been sown. The first are the stem and branches, the latter are the flower and fruit. When these inclinations come up in us, it will mean that our spirit has gone out with all its consciousness and disposition to meet the Lord. Since the Lord is everywhere, and He Himself seeks to meet with our spirit, their mutual meeting will then come about by itself. From that moment on, our spirit will begin to taste the blessedness of Righteous Simeon; that is, it will begin to bear in the embrace of its powers a striving for the Lord, Who is its complete satiety and satisfaction. This is what is called tasting the Lord, rest in Him, mentally standing before the Lord, walking in the presence of the Lord, and ceaseless prayer—the object of all God's saints' labor, desire, and seeking.

I wish that all of you who celebrate the Meeting of the Lord be vouchsafed this blessing. If anyone complains that he would like the fruit but the labor it takes to get it is too hard, the answer is: Good. There is an easier method, a method simpler than the one laid out. Here it is! Repent; then, with zeal for keeping all of God's commandments, walk unfailingly in the Lord's presence, striving for Him with all your mind's attention, all your heart's feelings, and all your will's desires.

If you thus dispose yourself, you will soon meet the Lord. He will come down to you and abide in you, as in the embrace of Righteous Simeon. There is no other way to lighten the labor needed to seek a meeting with the Lord. The Jesus Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me*, is powerful and strong to help in this work. Again, however, not by itself; but under the condition that all the strength of our spirit be directed toward the Lord! *Be sober, be vigilant* (1 Pet. 5:8). *Seek those things which are above ... and your life is hid with Christ in God* (Col. 3:1, 3). Then, having become one in spirit with the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 6:17), you will behold and embrace the Lord, *and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you* (Jn 16:22), neither in this age, nor in the age to come. Amen.

St. Theophan the Recluse
translated by Nun Gornelia (Rees)

Services this Week

- **Wednesday (02.12.2025.)**
 - **Synaxis of the Three Holy Hierarchs; Holy Hieromart. Hippolytus of Rome**
 - ***Divine Liturgy starts at 09:30 AM.***
- **Saturday (02.15.2025.)**
 - **The Meeting of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ in the Temple**
 - ***Divine Liturgy starts at 09:30 AM.***
- **Sunday of the Prodigal Son (02.16.2025.)**
 - **Holy and Righteous Simeon the God-receiver and Ana; *St James of Serbia***
 - ***Divine Liturgy starts at 10:00 AM.***

Donations February 2, 2025

Offering – \$1,410.00 Candles – \$103.00 Dues – \$50.00

Building Fund

**George and Millie Moncilovich – \$200
St. Sava Donation – Eli Cvijanovich – \$50**

Large Candles

**IMO Lazo & Bosa Vuckovich from Helene Gleason
IMO John & Millie Pavich and Daughter Connie Bartis from Olga Bulich
IMO Brother Joseph Kondas from Richard Kondas
IMO Jeffrey Smith –41 years of marriage from wife Mariam Smith
IMO Dorothy Thomas from John & Patricia Pavich
IMO Joseph & Amelia Kondas from Richard Kondas**

Our New Library!

We will be offering a selection of books for our parishioners to borrow for your enjoyment. All reads will be recommended by Father Dragan. At this time we have two available, "Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy: Finding the Way to Christ in a Complicated Religious Landscape" and "Memory Eternal: Living with Grief as Orthodox Christians" - These titles are available in the Candle Room. Please feel free to sign one out and return when completed. If you have any suggestions, please speak with Father Dragan.

Nut, Apricot, and Poppyseed Rolls are still available!

**Get your Subs Today!!!! \$15
(Choir Fundraiser)**

SARMA FRIDAY!!!

**Join us this Friday morning at 9:00 AM
(and/or possibly Saturday)**

To make Sarma for our upcoming fundraisers

UPCOMING EVENTS

Lenten Fish Fries

Friday, March 7th to Friday April 11, 2025

Lenten Vespers

5th Sunday of Lent – St. Mary of Egypt

Sunday, April 6, 2025 – 5:00 PM

***Palm Sunday – Sunday, April 13, 2025**

*** PASCHA! – Sunday, April 20, 2025**

*** St. Nicholas Anniversary Celebration–**

Sunday, May 18, 2025

*** Polka Fest – May 30, – June 1, 2025**

*** Band of Brothers – July 2025**

*** Taste of Serbia – Saturday, August 9, 2025**

*** Johnstown Slavic Festival –**

September 19–20, 2025