

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church
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The Sunday of the Prodigal Son
(03.03.2024.)

Luke 15:11-32

And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found. (KJV)

The present Gospel is proclaimed each year as Great Lent draws near and encourages believers to return to God. The Gospel intends for believers to come to themselves repenting of sins and wasting life's blessings.

Personal honesty is necessary to admit personal sins. A thorough and honest look at personal life reveals failed use of life's blessings. Every believer is a prodigal son or daughter able to benefit from this Gospel lesson.

Serious examination of the heart, mind and soul reveals the great distance existing between the God-pleasing life and the actual life lived. God welcomes believers repenting and choosing to return and begin life anew.

Returning prodigal sons and daughters experience God's love and joy. Accounts of returning prodigal sons and daughters through the centuries serve as evidence of God's immeasurable and constant love.

Skepticism of God's welcoming love and acceptances are overcome by turning to God in repentance. God knows when the heart, mind and soul desire change and are ready for God.

When life feels a mess and broken, it is time to return to God. The Psalmist said: "a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Ps.50/51:17) Faith, trust and courage are necessary to return to God.

God's welcoming love is reassured in the present Gospel. The loving father welcomes the returning son. St. Luke's Gospel records the joy in heaven when a sinner repents. (Lk.15:7

The Lord Jesus Christ said: "I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly." (Jn.10:10) The abundant life originates and continues in Jesus Christ.

Believer take up the abundant life at Holy Baptism. Sin creeps into life following Baptism either intentionally or inadvertently. The solution to sin is to repent and return to the life in Jesus Christ.

The Church offers the way of repentance. The Church teaches the way to remain united with Christ. The account of the prodigal son is proof that believers need not remain in despair.

Jesus Christ is the way out of despair. Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth and the life. (Jn.14:6) Jesus is ever-present for believers. Jesus is present in the hardest and most difficult moments of life.

It is best to try to always remain in Christ and to live in ways pleasing to Christ. Even with best efforts, believers will fall into sin. With Jesus Christ's help, believers recover from sin and grow in Christ.

Believers choosing to continue to live in Jesus Christ take the lesson of the prodigal son to heart. Serious believers hearing this Gospel lesson seek to be fully reunited with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Faithful believers want always to live fully in Christ. Sin and distance from Jesus Christ have no acceptable part in the life of faithful believers. Constant unity with Jesus Christ is the desired goal.

Hunger in the soul yearns for constantly unity with Jesus Christ. The prodigal son recognized the hunger in his soul. He recognized hunger for the life with his father.

The Church provides the nourishment necessary for the soul's hunger. The Church offers the Gospel and the Precious Body and Blood to the believer. Wise believers heed the lesson of the prodigal son and return to God.

**The Sunday of the Prodigal Son. Holy Apostles, Archippus, Philemon and Apphia.
February 19/March 3, 2024. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic**

The Great Blessing of Water and the Home

The Great Blessing of Water in our homes takes place after the Feast of Theophany, the Baptism of Christ, bringing the holy water & prayer in which Christ was baptized to our homes, as a blessing upon our families.

Traditionally, in most Orthodox parishes, the priest personally visits all his parishioners each year to pray with them in the place where they live, and to bless their surroundings with the newly sanctified water of Theophany (January 19).

We also bring the blessed water to our homes to use throughout the year to bless our homes and to drink whether we are ill or as part of our daily prayer life.

"There are many occasions in family life when a sip of holy water can help to remind us of the blessing that was given 'to bestow sanctification', 'unto healing of soul and body', 'to be a fountain welling forth unto life eternal', as the priest prayed in the litany of Epiphany day."

Weaving Christ into Our Lives

The blessing of homes by these holy waters maintains the spiritual association between the 'family church' and the parish, as well as again providing for the sharing of God's spiritual gifts. ... This annual blessing is not as elaborate as the blessing of the new dwelling, but because of this it should not be overlooked, for it is in this way that the grace of God is extended to individual dwellings.

When the children are present, they have the opportunity to see the parish priest in a different and personal situation. If the priest permits, they can lead the way through the house, or hold a candle. They can show him their rooms or pets or favorite toys. They receive a blessing with water. For children, the house blessing shows the connection of the Church to the home. This is a perfect time to introduce your small children to having their bedrooms blessed as a 'shield of armor' to protect them when they sleep and all the fears they may have as children do so often.

In Summary

What does it mean to ask God to bless something? All things in the world have been spoiled right along with us. God must bless His world again in order for it to be the way that He wants it to be. For this reason God sent His Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit to the world: to bless everyone and everything that He made, to make all things good again. When the priest comes to bless our homes, he asks God to have mercy on the house, to rid it of every evil and to fill it with every blessing.

***What a wonderful way to begin the New Year!
Schedule your Visit with Fr. Dragan Vukovic directly
by calling your parish priest 814-244-4063
God bless you all!***

Sunday of the Prodigal Son

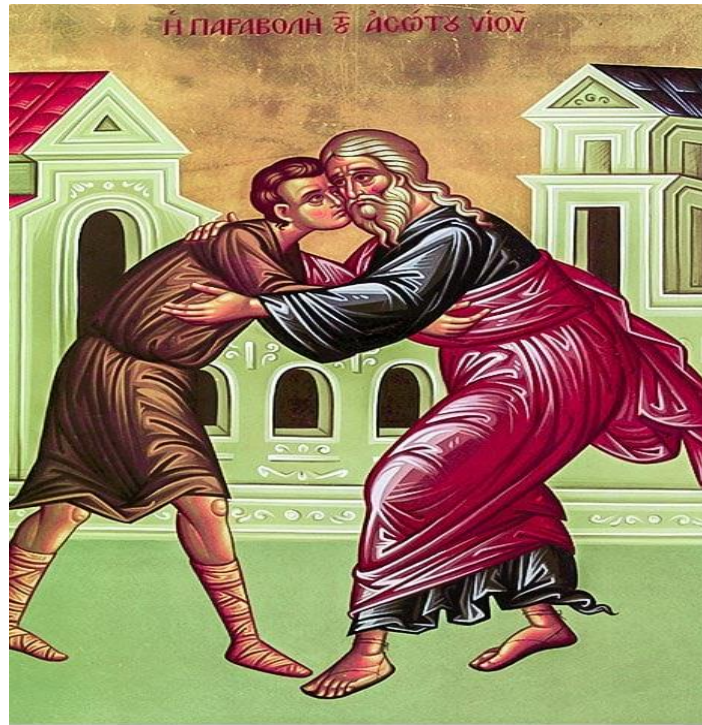


Introduction

The Sunday of the Prodigal Son is the second Sunday of a three-week period prior to the commencement of Great Lent. On the previous Sunday, the services of the Church began to include hymns from the Triodion, a liturgical book that contains the services from the Sunday

of the Publican and the Pharisee, the tenth before Pascha (Easter), through Great and Holy Saturday. As with the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, the theme of this Sunday is repentance, and the focus on the parable of the Prodigal Son leads Orthodox Christians to contemplate the necessity of repentance in our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Biblical Story



The name for this Sunday is taken from the parable of our Lord Jesus Christ found in Luke 15:11-32. The parable is the story of a man and his two sons. The youngest of the sons asks his father to give him his inheritance. The father does this, and soon after the son leaves and journeys to a distant country (vv. 11-13).

After the younger son arrives, he squanders all of his possessions with “prodigal” living. Within a short period of time, he wastes everything. A severe famine comes, but he has nothing and falls into great need (vv. 13-14).

He is able to find work feeding swine, but this does not improve his situation. The Scriptures say, “He would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, but no one gave him anything” (vv. 15-16).

The parable says that in the midst of his dire conditions, he came to himself. He realized that his father’s hired servants have enough to eat and food to spare, while he perishes with hunger. He says,

“I will arise and go to my father and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants’” (vv. 17-19).

He arose and returned to his father. But as he approached, his father saw him at a great distance. The father had compassion on his son, ran to meet him, embraced him, and kissed him. The son admitted his sinfulness and his unworthiness to be called a son, but in his joy at the return of his son, the father called his servants to bring the best robe, a ring for his son’s finger, and sandals for his feet. He also called for the fatted calf to be killed for a feast. He exclaimed, “For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (vv. 20-24).



While they were feasting and celebrating the return of the prodigal son, the older son comes and inquires about what is happening. He is told that his brother had returned and that his father has received him with a feast. The older brother becomes angry and will not go in to the feast. The father comes out and pleads with him, but the older son answers by saying he has been faithful to his father for many years and yet the father never gave him the opportunity for such feasting. He expresses his anger and jealousy over his brother who was received in such a manner after he squandered his inheritance (vv. 25-30).

The father responds by telling his oldest son, “You are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found” (vv. 31-32).

The parable of the Prodigal Son forms an exact icon of repentance at its different stages. Sin is exile, enslavement to strangers, hunger. Repentance is the return from exile to our true home; it is to receive

back our inheritance and freedom in the Father's house. But repentance implies action: "I will rise up and go..." (v. 18). To repent is not just to feel dissatisfied, but to make a decision and to act upon it.

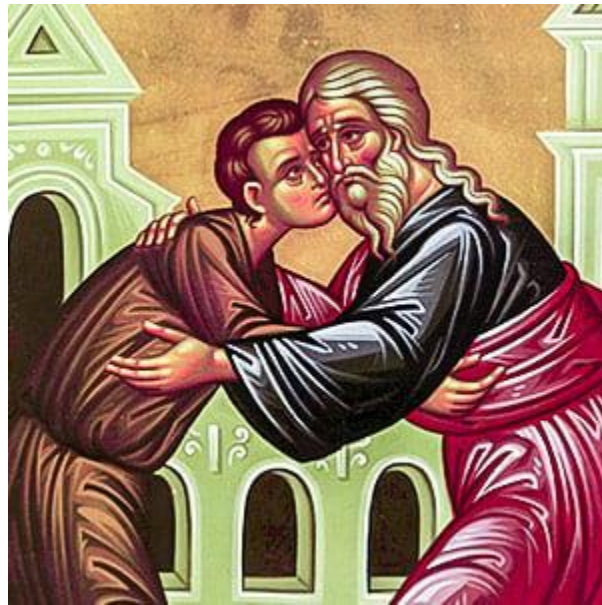


In the words of our Lord, we also learn of three things through this parable: the condition of the sinner, the rule of repentance, and the greatness of God's compassion. The reading of this parable follows the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee so that, seeing in the person of the Prodigal Son our own sinful condition, we might come to our senses and return to God through repentance. For those who have fallen into great despair over their sins thinking that there is no forgiveness, this parable offers hope. The Heavenly Father is patiently and lovingly waiting for our return. There is no sin that can overcome His love for us.

Finally, this parable offers us insight into the world in which we live. It is a world where the activities of people are disconnected and not ordered toward the fulfillment of God's divine purpose for life. It is a world of incoherent pursuits, of illusory strivings, of craving for foods and drinks that do not satisfy, a world where nothing ultimately makes sense, and a world engulfed in untruth, deceit and sin. It is the exact opposite of the world as created by God and potentially recreated by his Son and Spirit. There is no cure for the evils of our age unless we return to God. The world in which we live is not a normal world, but a wasteland. This is why in the Slavic tradition of the Orthodox Church the reading of Psalm 137 is added to the Matins service for this and the following two Sundays. This nostalgic lament of the Hebrew exiles states: "By the streams of Babylon we sat and wept as we remembered Zion. On the willows we hung our harps, for how could we sing the Lord's song in a strange land" (Psalm 137).

Here we can see the challenge of life in this world and the alienation from God that can happen when sin reigns in our lives. As a result of sin in our lives, we lose the joy of communion with God, we defile

and lose our spiritual beauty, and we find ourselves far away from our real home, our real life. In true repentance, we realize this, and we express a deep desire to return, to recover what has been lost. On this day the Church reminds us of what we have abandoned and lost, and beckons us to find the desire and power to return. Our Heavenly Father is waiting and ready to receive us with His loving forgiveness and His saving embrace.



Icon of the Feast

The icon of the Sunday of the Prodigal Son shows the prodigal being received by his father upon his return. We are presented with an image of a warm and loving embrace, the son showing his need for his father, an attitude that represents repentance, love, and hope for renewal and restoration. The father is shown full of compassion for his son, having born the burden of his sin and suffering, but now filled with joy that he has returned.

Orthodox Christian Celebration of the Feast of the Prodigal Son

The Sunday of the Prodigal Son is celebrated with the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, which is preceded by the Matins service. A Great Vespers is conducted on Saturday evening. The hymns of the Triodion for this day are added to the usual prayers and hymns of the weekly commemoration of the Resurrection of Christ. The naming of the Sunday is related to the reading of the story from the Gospel at the Divine Liturgy.

Scripture readings for the Sunday of the Prodigal Son are: At the Orthros (Matins): The prescribed weekly Gospel reading. At the Divine Liturgy: [1 Corinthians 6:12-20](#); [Luke 15:11-32](#).

For the week that follows the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, fasting is observed on Wednesday and Friday. This is the last week that meat is allowed on non-fasting days. The next Sunday is the Sunday of the Last Judgment, also known as Meatfare Sunday. It is the last day that meat can be eaten prior to the fast of Great Lent.

Hymns and Prayers of the Feast of the Prodigal Son

Kontakion (Tone Three)

When I disobeyed in ignorance Thy fatherly glory, I wasted in iniquities the riches that Thou gavest me. Wherefore, I cry to Thee with the voice of the prodigal son, saying, I have sinned before Thee, O compassionate Father, receive me repentant, and make me as one of Thy hired servants.

Services this Week

- **Friday (03.08.2024.)**
 - 1st and 2nd Finding of the Honourable Head of St John the Baptist– *Divine Liturgy starts at 09:30 AM*
- **Saturday (03.09.2024.)**
 - St Tarasius, Archbishop of Constantinople (Memorial Saturday) *Divine Liturgy starts at 09:30 AM*
- **Sunday of the Prodigal Son (03.10.2024.)**
 - St Porphyrius, Bishop of Gaza (Meatfare) *Divine Liturgy starts at 10:00 AM*

Donations February 25, 2024

Offering - \$ 760.00 Candles - \$130.00
Dues - \$100.00 Donations - \$200.00

Large Candles

IMO Mary Ellen Locher-Byrd from Helene Gleason
IMO Mike & Mildred Tumbas from Milica Knepp
IMO Grandparents Amelia & Pete Mastovich from Rick Kondas
IMO brother Joseph Kondas from Rick Kondas

UPCOMING EVENTS

FISH FRIES

Friday, February 16th thru Friday, March 29th.
Huge thank you to our, Nikki Ribaric and Amelia Ribaric for their hard work at this week's fish fry!

**Sunday, March 10th - Meatfare Sunday
Luncheon following Divine Liturgy**

**Sunday, March 17th - Cheesefare Sunday
Luncheon following Divine Liturgy**

**Sunday, April 21st - 5th Sunday of Lent
Lenten Vespers at Our St. Nicholas
Speaker Fr. Stefan Djoric - 5 PM**

Sunday, April 28th - Palm Sunday

Sunday May 5th, PASCHA