

SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON



Icon of the Prodigal Son

Reflections on the Scripture Readings for this Weekend

On this third weekend of our preparation for the Great Fast, we hear readings from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians and St. Luke's Gospel. This weekend derives its name, Prodigal Son, from one of Jesus' most profound parables.

The message from these two readings is, in my estimation, absolutely uplifting. It declares in a most elegant way God's great love for us.

We hear this from St. Paul:

You must know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within - the Spirit you have received from God. You are not your own. (1 Corinthians 6:19)

When you think about the significance of these words, you realize that they proclaim that God is indeed within us, sharing His life-force with us. Astounding are the real implications of this statement! God is sharing with us His powers to imagine, create, think, freely act and love. He shares these with us out of love for us. We have the true potential to really be His children. It is only ours to desire and work to achieve, with His help. We are not slaves or mere objects in His creation. We are beings that can freely obtain, if we choose to cooperate with His grace, the status of sons and daughters.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son, which I prefer to see as the Parable of the Loving Father, recapitulates this loving relationship between our Heavenly Father and us. Think about the parable. It depicts the Father waiting day and night for the return of His son. He does not judge the son but, rather, welcomes him back with love into his household.

Now the interesting thing about this parable is that neither the prodigal son nor the older son really had any real comprehension of the father's great love. Neither truly understood the



love that the father had for them, even though the father tried to express his love for them.

Ask yourself this: *Do I truly understand the great love that God has for me? Do I understand that all He truly desires is that I will freely return His love?*

Over the years I have come to the conclusion that many Christians truly do not have a real understanding of God's love for them. He has been cast, unfortunately, by many Christian leaders as a severe "judge" who only desires absolute obedience and robot-like performance.

We often do Him great injustice, I believe. We try to make Him in OUR IMAGE and LIKENESS. I think we do this because we can't accept His love is for us!

Understanding Our Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church

I have been considering the history of the major feasts of our Church and the factors that have caused them to be established. In more recent weeks I have been sharing information about the Marian feasts of our Church.

The Feast of the Annunciation. Which celebrates the announcement that Mary was to become the Mother of Christ, is the next to be considered. Unfortunately the feast's origin is completely obscure, but we do know that it had become widespread by the seventh century. As this was only a short time after Emperor Maurice's decree concerning the Dormition, the rationale for adopting the Annunciation was very much the same. In 612 the Nestorian Church of Persia formally rejected the term *Theotokos*. The military situation had intensified by this time as well. The schism between Monophysitism and the True Faith, weakened the Empire in its struggle with Persia and therefore prompted a concerted government attempt to reconcile the Monophysites. The time was ripe for the institution of this feast, which, according to John of Damascus in his work *The Orthodox Faith*, marks the reception of the Divine Word. As an Orthodox feast, then, the Annunciation celebrates the actual moment of Mary's becoming the *Theotokos*.

And yet Dix, one of the prominent authors who has written about the establishment of our feasts, would have us believe that the Annunciation



is really a feast of Christ. While this may be the case in purely theological terms, history suggests that the feast had a different meaning for the people of the time. Among its oldest names are *sanctae Virginis festum* and *festivitas gloriosae Matris*. These would suggest that the contemporary mind focused on the Virgin's role in this feast, rather than on Christ's. Indeed, since the fifth century the Virgin loomed ever larger in popular Monophysite devotion, to the point of almost rivaling Christ Himself.

There seems to have been a calculated escalation from the ambiguous Presentation to the theologically less important but wholly Marian Dormition to the Annunciation which glorifies Mary's all important role in the history of mankind's salvation. To what extent these feasts also dealt with secondary theological issues is not important here. What is important is that the Marian Feasts, like those dealing directly with the nature of Christ, did not arise from popular devotion but were devised in opposition to heterodox doctrine which threatened to divide the Empire. They are the logical successors to the earlier feasts.

The Divine Liturgy and Our Worship of God

We have reached the point in the Divine Liturgy when the COMMUNION PRAYER is recited. Hopefully all who recite this prayer think about what they say since it is a very powerfully prayer.

Much like the NICENE CREED that is recited during the Liturgy, this prayer begins with these profound words: "O Lord, I believe and profess". So these words cannot be said without thought. When we say these words, we say that we truly believe them and make our belief public.

This prayer has us say that we believe that Christ, the Son of the living God, is the one that we will receive. Do you truly believe that Christ, the man Jesus recorded in history, is present in the bread and wine that you receive? This is a very important belief! It defies our imagination how this can be true! It is important, however, that this same Jesus is present with us in the transformed bread and wine.

The prayer goes on to ask God, in the Person of Jesus, to accept us as partakers of His mystical supper. This truly means that we believe that in some mystical way we are with Him at the Last Supper and that we partake of the transformed bread and wine as the first Apostles did.

The prayer then puts these words into our mouths: "I will not reveal Your mystery to Your enemies, nor will I give You a kiss as did Judas." So, as we partake of the transformed bread and wine, we assert that we will not betray Jesus or desert Jesus as did those early disciples.

The prayer then has us remember the words of the good thief who was crucified with Jesus. We say: Remember me, O Lord, O Master, O Holy One when you come into Your kingdom.

For the good thief who originally asked Jesus to remember him as he was dying with Jesus, we must seriously reflect on these words. The man was dying and wanted Jesus to truly remember him in death. Do we want Jesus to remember us? It

is important that we say these words with sincerity. Think about what you are asking Jesus when you say these words.

After asking Jesus to remember us, we ask God not to judge us for taking the gifts insincerely and ask that they may be for the healing of our souls and bodies. These are not idle words. When you stop to think about them, you realize that they are quite profound. We must not just rattle them off without thought.

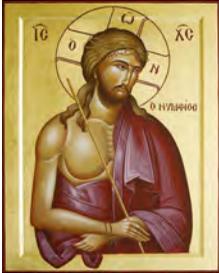
I beg you to think about what you pray!





St. Michael's Parish News

A Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in Dearborn Michigan



PRE-GREAT FAST

I am sure that, on this weekend of the Prodigal Son, many might think that the focus might be on forgiveness. This, however is not the

case. These weeks before the Great Fast are meant to remind us of the various dimensions of Metanoia (change of heart and mind). In order to truly embrace Metanoia, we must desire to “return from exile” or, even, “alienation from God.” We must desire to be more closely and intimately joined with God, feeling that this world does not offer us a sufficient understanding of the meaning and purpose of life. Only deeper union with God can truly give us an understanding of the meaning of this earthly existence. This earthly existence must cause within us a deep desire to truly live in God’s Kingdom - a place where love of neighbor abounds. It also reminds us that we must be the ones who desire to live in His Kingdom.

**Life is like a game of chess.
To win you have to make a move.**

CALLED TO HOLINESS

I am sure that my readers, if they have followed this particular article, have come to realize that the “call to holiness” is, in fact, a call for us to realize the potential for which



God created us, that is for union with Him and for allowing His Spirit, planted within us, to be the guide of our lives. It is a call to *Theosis*. This is a very simple concept. The core of the Good News of the Gospel is that we are called to share in the very life of God. Salvation is much more positive than it is negative. It means “actualizing” God’s image in us - helping us to truly become more like Jesus Christ, the human likeness of God. Christ helps us to fulfill our potential, which is to become like God in Christ and to share in His life.

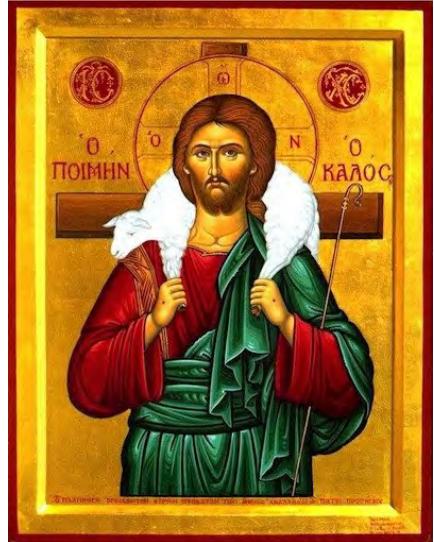
St. Gregory of Nazianzus defines the human being as “an animal in the process of being deified - in Greek *zoon theoumenon*. This is what sets us apart from the rest of creation, that is, our calling to become “partakers of divine nature”, gods by grace, partakers of God’s glory. This is what defines an authentically human life. Created in the image of the Triune God, we find our true selves

(Continued on page 8)

Acquiring the Mind of Christ

While the Eastern Church sees Christ as the One Who gave His life as a ransom for many, it sees it in a different way than the Western Church. St. Athanasius the Great states that Christ is the ransom that was paid to death. Taking Hosea 13:14 into consideration, Athanasius states that “the ransom was offered to death on behalf of all so that by it He once more opened the way to the heavens.” In stark contrast, the Anselmian doctrine asserts that the debt was paid to God the Father to satisfy His infinite wrath, a byproduct of offense to His justice and honor. This doctrine of Atonement also states that sin is an affront to the Divinity, for which mere man cannot make reparation; it regards sin as a transgression in the legal sense rather than the Eastern perspective of an illness of the heart and will. In this light, Anselm’s assumption is that a “divine honor” has been wounded and is in need of “satisfaction.” This necessitates a legal transaction by which Christ pays the Father with His own blood the debt incurred by man’s sin. The Resurrection of Christ does not occupy a central place in man’s redemption.

If God then is infinitely offended by our sin and is therefore in need of some infinite “satisfaction,” many can rightly (unfortunately) begin to equate this God with a sadistic image of a father compelled by honor to inflict punishment. Thus God is made subject to justice. By subjecting God to this law of necessity and ascribing to Him human characteristics such as vengeance and anger, we make it appear that it is God who is in need of healing, and not man. *[Is man so powerful that he can, in any way, so grievously offend an infinite God that that God demands some sort of satisfaction?. This approach seems to have been*



heavily influenced by the kings of the Western world in olden days.

However, God never changes, for it is not God that is at enmity with man; but man who is at enmity with God. The foundation of a proper understanding of salvation is that God does not change: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). Thus the Eastern approach seeks to heal man, and not God, recognizing sin as a refusal of the Love of God, the entrance of death, and, of course, the deconstruction of the soul.

It is important that we reflect upon how we truly understand the actions of Jesus, our Savior.

Gaining a Deeper Understanding of Our Faith



The attribution of the title of *Theotokos* was the only doctrinal decision taken by the church concerning Mary. However, the New Testament (NT), particularly Luke, had already proclaimed her eminent position in the *economy* of salvation (“henceforth all generation will call me blessed” Luke 1:48), and, since Irenaeus and Justin, the theologians had discerned her role as the New Eve. Indeed, as Eve in paradise had, together with Adam, freely accepted the offer of the serpent, so Mary freely accepted the archangel’s announcement, making possible a new “recapitulation” of humanity in the New Adam, Christ.

Preachers, poets, artists and hymnographers, using not only direct theological language but also biblical symbols and analogies, glorified her as “the earth unsown,” the “burning bush”, a “bridge leading to heaven,” “the ladder which Jacob saw” and many other words and phrases. Innumerable churches were dedicated to her and icons of her became the most prominent part of popular piety, especially in the East.

The very emotionalism and exuberance of Marian piety were undoubtedly expressing a spiritual discovery of the human side of the incarnation mystery. The role of that simple woman, who conceived in her womb the new life (her virginity was a sign of this “newness”), was a reminder of the humanity of Jesus himself, and it gave in a new form the message that free fellowship and communion with God were the true expressions of authentic human nature. One of the biblical analogies of this fellowship - that of the family - was fulfilled in the particular role of Mary, as the mother not only of Christ but of all the members of his Body, the Church.

It is important to note, however, that the piety and theology of the early church never tended to separate the veneration of Mary from its Christological context. There was no doctrinal definition of her position except that of her divine motherhood. Her exaltation, after Ephesus, did not mean that he belonging to spiritually undeveloped humanity was forgotten. Well known passages by John Chrysostom, by far the most popular and authoritative father of the Greek Church, continued to be read and copied. Chrysostom frankly recognized Mary’s human failing and imperfections. She was seen, within the mystery of salvation, as the representative of humanity’s need of salvation.

Schedule of Services

Sunday, February 12 - Weekend of the Prodigal Son - Tone 6
10:00 AM - John Bliss; Wife Anna & Family (25th Anniversary)

Week of Meat Fare - Tone 7

Monday, February 13 - Martinian, Venerable
No Liturgy Scheduled

Tuesday, February 14 - Death of Cyril, Apostle to the Slavs
No Liturgy Scheduled

Wednesday, February 15 - Onesimus, Apostle
No Liturgy Scheduled

Thursday, February 16 - Pamphilius & Others, Martyrs
No Liturgy Scheduled

Friday, February 17 - Theodore the Recruit, Great Martyr
No Liturgy Scheduled

Saturday, February 18 - Leo the Great
No Liturgy Scheduled

Sunday, February 19 - Weekend of Meat Fare - Tone 7
10:00 AM - Olga Hlauska; Liz Reaume

St. Michael the Archangel
Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church
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Pastor

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LITURGY SCHEDULE

Sundays @ 10:00 AM
Ukrainian & English

Weekdays @ 8:00 AM
English

SACRAMENTS

Penance
By Appointment

Baptism & Matrimony
*In most instances membership
required for six months*

Funerals
*Membership of an immediate
family member required*

Parish Life Council

Bob & Corinne Boyko
734.451.1893

John & Janet Dicky
313.563.5509

Daria Drobny
313.791-0292

Robert Krokosky
248.431.9554

Leo & Mary LaDouceur
313.278.7378

Gordon Malaniak
734.564.9817

Leonard Mier
313.584-6795

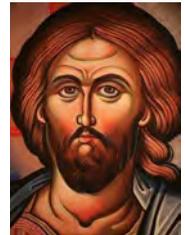
Greg & Esther Petrovich
734.453-4354

Rafic Vawter
313.624.9867

(Continued from page 5 - Called to Holiness)

in the image of the Triune God. Some have rejected this ancient Christian doctrine of *theosis* as unscriptural and a product of pagan Hellenic influence. Modern research has shown, however, that despite a Hellenic precursor, *theosis* in the thought and teaching of the Greek Fathers is thoroughly Christian and scripturally highly defensible and sound Christian thought.

Several scholars have written that it is easy to confuse Christian *theosis* with some of the very pagan notions that preceded it, such as *apotheosis*, and to therefore dismiss the former because of the undesirable nature of the latter. But the Fathers of the early Church were not so easily confused, probably because they were close to the sources of confusion and were therefore forced to clearly enunciate the differences.

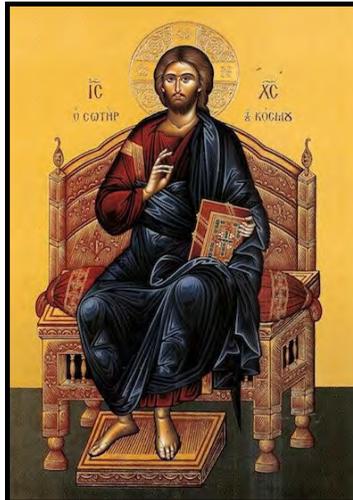


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Gaining a Deeper Understanding of the New Testament

In the last issue of this article I began sharing thoughts about the Gospel of Mark. I shared that it was written in Greek and raised the question why it was written in that language.

The most probably reason is that from the time that Alexander of Greece conquered the Mesopotamian world, three centuries before the time of Jesus, Greek was the language of educated people. In fact, in the time of Alexander, the Jews translated their Bible into Greek. They called it the Septuagint (*meaning seventy*) because they developed a legend that seventy scribes had been asked to do the translation in isolated cells and all came up with identical words, thus proving the inspiration of God. Educated Jews knew



the Bible in Greek as well as in Hebrew and Aramaic. There is good evidence that when the evangelists quote or refer to the Jewish bible, they are following the Septuagint.

Mark's Gospel is not written in fluent Greek, however. Indeed, it contains numerous "Semitisms," that is, phrases that are awkward in Greek but would read well if translated into Hebrew or Aramaic. The overall impression it leaves, therefore, is that of an author who thought in one language and was trying to write in

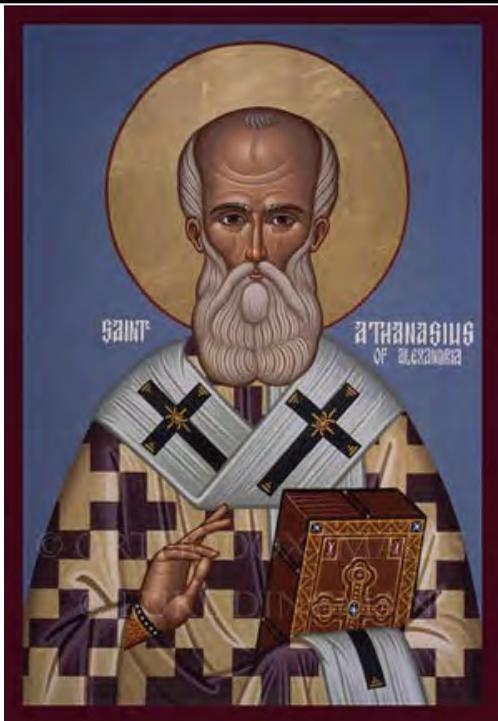
another. In addition, Mark's Gospel is the only one that uses Aramaic phrases at key moments of the narrative: *Talitha kourai*, meaning "Little girl, rise up!" (Mark 5:41); *Ephphatha*, meaning "Be released" or "be opened" (Mark 7:34); *Abba*, meaning "Father" (Mark 14:36); and *Eloi, Eloi*, meaning "My God, my God" (Mark 15:34)

The date of Mark's Gospel is also a matter of speculation. Most, although not all, scholars believe that Mark's was the earliest of the Gospels, written around 70 CE and followed in the eighties by Matthew and Luke, and in the nineties by John.

The year 70 was very significant for all Jews, including the Jewish followers of Jesus, because it was the year that the Romans destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem. The destruction was the traumatic end to the four-year revolt of the Jews against Rome. The Temple had been destroyed once before by Babylon, six centuries earlier, and the effect had been devastating. The Roman destruction was also a watershed in Jewish history.

After that destruction the Temple was never rebuilt. The leaders of the revolt (Zealots), along with the temple leaders (priests and Sadducees), disappeared or scattered.

Learning Our Faith From the Greek Fathers of the Church



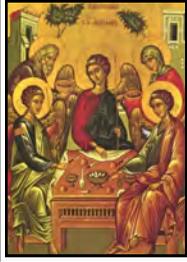
Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria in the fourth century, says much the same thing as Tertullian about heresy in his critique of his Arian adversaries. “How,” Athanasius asks, “can they deny that this heresy is foreign, and not from our fathers? But what is not from our fathers, but has come to light in this day, how can it be but that of which the blessed Paul has foretold, that ‘in the latter times some shall depart from the sound faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils?’” It seems that whenever we fail to turn to the fathers for guidance, we fall into error.

This is why, I believe, that the Eastern Church was spared the fractionalization that has transpired in the West. The Eastern Church has tenaciously adhered to the teachings of the fathers and the teachings of the first seven councils.

Heresy, then, is the willful propagation of a position or perspective that runs against the grain of apostolic teaching and tradition. It is typically linked to specific personalities, precisely because at the core of heresy is often an individual’s intention choice to advocate and promote a teaching that the church has not communally received and cannot discover in or reconcile with the teaching of the apostles. Athanasius himself comments that heresy is often marked by the name of its teacher, specifically because it is that teacher’s unique doctrine that sets a group apart from the church at large. Eastern Christians, in particular, on the other hand, are marked by their refusal to link themselves with any other name than that of Christ.

If we look at all the various Christian sects in the West, we see that they all have been linked to particular persons who either rightly or wrongly decided to separate themselves from the Western Church. (*One has to truly admit that frequently these separations were due to accesses that were present in the Western Church at the time.*)

Hopefully I have shown over the weeks that the Eastern Church has worked, throughout her history, to come to the truth through strenuous debate and argument. The end truth has always been achieved by accepting a consensus opinion.



THE EASTERN HERALD

СХІДНИЙ ВІСНИК

The Weekly Newsletter of Very Reverend Canon Wayne J. Ruchgy, Ph.D.
Vol. 63 No 7 Weekend of the Prodigal Son February 11-12, 2017

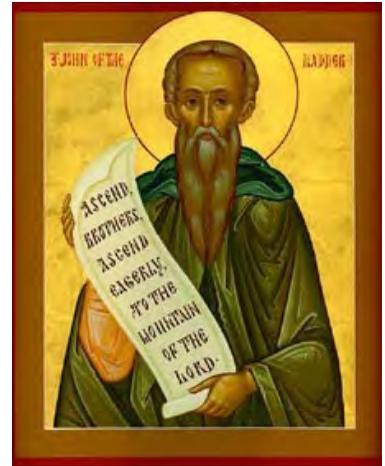
The Spirituality of the Christian East

The 29th Step on John's *Ladder*, is **DISPASSION**. The highest level of virtue is the state of dispassion. Dispassion does not mean an inability to experience the passions, but a complete mastery over them. The word dispassionate is sometimes misconstrued as *passionless*. Looking at the Greek word for dispassion, which is *apatheia*, does not help dispel this misconception. Dispassion is a state of being in which all the passions have been transformed into virtues. The problem is that no one can achieve it until he has acquired all the virtues, purified the senses, subjected the instincts to the will of the Spirit and mastered the art of ceaseless prayer.

To be dispassionate is to sanctify the mind and to detach it from material things, and it does so in such a way that, after entering this heavenly harbor, a person, for most of his earthly life, is enraptured, like someone already in heaven, and he is lifted up to the contemplation of God.

For most of us, our passions, sins, and desires distort the virtues. Our good intentions are mingled with ulterior motives and our perception of God's will is clouded by our desires. This is why we often confuse our own will with the will of God. Only the dispassionate are able really to know god's will, because for one who has achieved dispassion, the will of the Lord becomes a sort of inner voice through illumination.

St. John wrote: "When a man's senses are perfectly united to God, then what God has said



is somehow mysteriously clarified. But where there is no union of this kind, then it is extremely difficult to speak about God. The man who does not know God speaks about Him only in probabilities.

Dispassion could be considered synonymous with another important word in Eastern spirituality and that is *deification* or *Theosis*, which means to attain the likeness of God in the Person of Jesus.

The Return of the Prodigal Son

“He arose and went to his father.” He arose from the wreckage of his conscience and body alike. He arose from the depths of hell and touched the heights of heaven. Before the heavenly Father, a child rises higher because of pardon than he fell low because of guilt.

“He arose and went to his father.” He went not by the motion of his feet but by the progress of his thought. Being afar off he had no need of an earthly journey, because he had found short cuts along the way of salvation. He who seeks the divine Father by faith soon finds Him present to himself, and has no need to seek Him by traversing roads.

“He arose and went to his father. But when he was yet a long way off.” How is he who is coming a long way off? Because he has not yet arrived. He who is coming is coming to do pen-

ance, but he has not yet arrived at grace. He is coming to his Father’s house but he has not yet reached the glory of his former condition, appearance, and honor.

“But when he was yet a long way off, his father saw him.” That Father saw, he “who dwells on high; and looks down on the low things,” “and the high he knows afar off.” “His father saw him.” The father saw him, in such a way that the son could also behold his father. The father’s countenance illumined the face of the approaching son in such a way that all the dark aspect was dispelled which his guilt had previously cast about it.

St. Peter Chrysologus

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