

SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON



Icon of the Prodigal Son

Reflections on the Scripture Readings for this Weekend

On this third weekend in preparation for the Great Fast, our readings are taken from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians and Luke's Gospel. At first blush there doesn't seem to be a common theme between these two readings.

Two particular statements in Paul's letter are noteworthy. They are:

Verse 17: *But whoever is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him; and*

Verse 19: *You must know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within - the Spirit you have received from God.*

The passage from Luke's Gospel that we hear is perhaps one of the Lord's most popular and poignant parables, that of the Prodigal Son. Everyone knows it.

Over the years I have wrestled with this parable as, I think, most men do because it speaks so clearly about the relationship of fathers and sons. The parable has, however, several dimensions.

First, it expresses the fact that the younger son has a sense of being in exile when he is separated from his father. He discovers that no one really cares for him.

Second, it highlights the great love the Father has for both of his sons. He initiates contact with both sons, inviting them to be a part of his life.

And third, it highlights the fact that neither son really understood the father's unconditional love. Neither the younger or older son recognized the father's great love. The father simply and straightforwardly expresses his love for both sons and judges neither of them. He only loves them.



So, is there any way we can find a connection between these two readings. It dawned on me that if we look at ourselves in the way that Paul suggests, namely that if we are joined to Christ we are one spirit with him and that we are the temples of the Holy Spirit, we must come to the conclusion that God, our Heavenly Father, truly loves us unconditionally and doesn't judge us but only calls us to make Him a part of our lives.

The action of recognizing God's love for us rests with us. What we must resist doing is thinking that the challenges of life in anyway deny God's love for us. We must recognize that God's love remains very consistent and that the challenges of life and just that, the challenges of life.

Think about this!

Understanding Our Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church

Our Church puts great emphasis on the period of the Great Fast. Why and what is the meaning of the Great Fast?

First and foremost the Great Fast is the spiritual journey and its true destination is Pascha (Easter). It is the preparation for the “fulfillment of Pascha, the true Revelation.” It is important, therefore, that we understand the connection between the Great Fast and Pascha, for it reveals something very essential, very crucial about our Christ faith and life.

Pascha, it must be understood, is much more than just one of the feasts of our Church - more than a yearly commemoration of one of the past events in the life of Jesus, the Christ.

If you have participated in our Pascha celebration, you have, in some way, tasted of that unique joy. But what is that joy about? It is all about affirming our belief that Death has been destroyed and that our greatest wish is the gift that our Creator has given us, namely immortality - eternal life. The grave does not destroy us and fling us into “nothingness.” Pascha is God’s revelation to us about the *new understanding of life*. This revelation was made to humankind through the light that shone forth from the grave - the resurrection from the dead of our Brother Jesus.

St. Paul wrote: *we were buried with Christ unto death so that as Christ*



was raised from the dead we also may walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4).

So on Pascha - the new Passover - we celebrate Christ’s Resurrection as something that happened and still happens to us. Pascha assures us that our greatest desire is granted to us by God - namely immortality - and that our greatest fear - death - has been destroyed.

Of course this requires faith! If we do not have faith, then all this is meaningless and all we are left with is desperation, despair and the true sense of the futility of life. It was and is God’s desire that we humans be spared from these feelings. Why? Because they destroy any desire to “change” and “transform” ourselves, growing in our likeness of God as seen in the Person of Jesus.

Pascha has been given to us so that we may desire to fulfill the main task of this earthly life, namely, to grow more in our “likeness” of Jesus.

The Great Fast is given to us to help us focus on this reality and to increase our belief in this truth. What we do during this time is to fortify our faith and belief in this truth.

The Divine Liturgy and Our Worship of God

Our Church assigns a special Kondak for this third weekend of our five-week preparation period for the Great Fast, the weekend of the Prodigal Son. We pray during the Divine Liturgy:

When I foolishly separated myself from your Fatherly glory, I squandered in wickedness the riches You had given me. So now I cry out to You with the voice of the Prodigal Son, saying: "I have sinned before You, O merciful Father; receive me, repentant, and make me as one of Your hired servants."

This prayer is powerful on several levels. First, it suggests that we realize that God gave us at our birth not only His life but His Spirit and the powers of that Spirit.

Second, it recognizes that often we have not used the powers of His service for our benefit and have truly squandered the gifts that He has given us. Many are the gifts that He has showered upon us. Think about them. Those powers include the ability to love, imagine, create, care and learn. They have been given to us in order to help us grow as God's children.

Third, this prayer recognizes that we have not always used these powers in a manner that can help us grow in our likeness of Jesus. And, of course that is the task and goal of this earthly life, namely to grow in our ability to be like Jesus, the model of



who God created when He created us human beings. If we live like Jesus, we live like the persons God intended when He created us.

Of course in order to begin to think like this we must be willing to give up our attachment to the way our society thinks. We must realize that we are in exile from the Father's Kingdom and do everything in our power to return from that exile.

This pray calls us to give up our attachment to this world and, rather, give ourselves to seeking the Kingdom of our Father Who awaits our return to Him.

The problem that we face is that we become so involved in this world and attached to the things of this world - not only things but the ways of this world - that we forget that we have not been created for this world but for God's Kingdom. This world is only one opportunity that God gives us to grow as spiritual beings. A part of our growth is to give up our attachment to the things of this world but seek our Father's Kingdom.



St. Michael's Parish News

A Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in Dearborn Michigan

2018 GREAT FAST



In just a few short weeks we will begin the Great Fast 2018, Monday February 12. Now is the time to begin think about how you will observe the Fast. I cannot stress

upon about the necessity of voluntary practices during this time. Don't think about "giving things" up as much as how you will discipline yourself so that you can concentrate on the work of the Fast.

PRESANCTIFIED LITURGY

FRIDAY EVENINGS @ 7:00 PM
Beginning on February 16th

LITURGY OF ST BASIL THE GREAT

SUNDAY MORNINGS @ 10:00 AM
Beginning on February 18th

DAILY PRAYERS FOR THE FAST

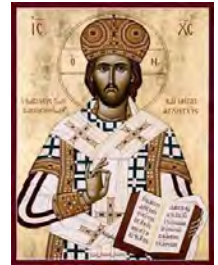
Beginning on February 12th

One of the general recommendations of the Church is to abstain from meat on all Fridays. Next week I shall offer a number of suggestions on how the Fast can be observed. Make it a time of spiritual growth. *You won't be sorry.*

Faith is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods

CALLED TO HOLINESS

I have been sharing thoughts about holiness in this article. In using the Greek word ἅγιος the focus is placed on being absolutely separate from evil, every possibility of sin or defilement is repelled. To be ἅγιος is to not only set apart for God, but to be free from sin itself.



The Latin word *sanctus* is much less closely associated with cultic worship as the Greek or Hebrew term. It has more of a legal undercurrent. For example, a royal decree can be *sanctus*, meaning that it is unchangeable. This unchangeability is much more the focus. Being *sanctus* implies that something is august, and inviolable. It is often applied to God, but does not have the same kind of inherent association with divinity that one might find in the Hebrew and Greek words.

These three words are helpful in triangulating what exactly is meant when Christians today talk about *holiness*. There is an inescapable foundation of *worship* and *participation* with God that grounds the word, but there are also *(Continued on page 8)*

The Story of Christmas in the New Testament

This week I would conclude my sharing of information about the Birth of Christ as seen in the four Gospels. I have been sharing this information so that indeed we will bring our faith to believe in this event, even though the history of the actual event is shared in four different ways.

The four Gospels in the New Testament present four unique and yet complimentary pictures of Jesus – and this is evident in the way they record the birth of Jesus: Matthew presents Jesus as the King of the Jews worthy of obedience and worship. Luke shows a humane Savior that brings good tidings and liberation to the poor, neglected and marginalized; Mark presents Jesus as Lord that serves in secret and thus shows a new way, free from the fight for supremacy and status. And finally, John presents Jesus as God, who comes as the Word become flesh and this shines in the darkness to bring a new beginning in this world.

Following the example of the Western Church, slowly the Eastern Churches began to celebrate the Nativity of our Lord on the 25th of December on the new calendar and January 7th on the old calendar. This

was a separation of the of the event of Christ's birth from the other celebrations of God's Manifestations to humankind. Three great fathers of the Eastern Church played a decisive role in this regard: Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom. Basil was the first to begin celebrating the Lord's birth as a separate feast between the years 271 and 374. Under his influence, Gregory introduced the feast in Constantinople before his death in 390 CE. St. John Chrysostom began celebrating this in Antioch in 386 or



388. In a sermon John defended the date of the Nativity as the real day of the Lord's birth, giving as proof the very rapid spread of this feast and the great esteem in which the faithful had held it. According to him, the fact that the conception of Jesus occurred six months after the conception of John the Baptizer proves that the date is the real date. So then, if the conception of Jesus occurred in March (new calendar), then his nativity should fall in December.

We know, however, that the Nativity replaces the pagan feast of the "Victory of the Sun".

Interesting history!

The Courage to Pray

Seeing is not enough. We must also hear. Hearing is an act of sustained attention. In order to hear, we must not only lend our ears, but also try and understand the meaning and intention of the words. Hearing means bowing our heads in humility which is capable of accepting what the other person is sowing on the ground of our mind and heart. This is the true meaning of the word 'humility'. The word comes from the Latin 'humus', fertile soil, that soil, which we no longer notice because we are so used to it, dumb and dark, capable of making good use of the rubbish we tip onto it, capable of transforming our refuse into wealth, of accepting every seed, giving it body, life, growth, to become fully itself, without ever denaturing it. Our own power of hearing begins with humility. Like the rich silent, creative earth, we should offer ourselves to the Other.

But this humility is also obedience. The Latin word *obaudire* means both to listen and obey. We must listen in order to hear and profit by what we hear. This is the proper attitude to God, total attention because we must hear him, and the desire, determination to receive his message and profit by it, that is to say be transformed, changed, to stop being what we are and become what we are called to be.

Now the problem is that we humans find it difficult not to just listen - to look at the events of our lives and learn from them. It is difficult to "listen to God" and not transform His words to us into our desires. To listen to God demands that we try to separate ourselves from the things that we want and to look at what life is delivering. What life delivers to us is God trying to communicate with us. If life is not going the way that we want, what is God attempting to tell



us. Of course this means that we have to believe that God communicates to us through the events of life. So I would ask you: Do you truly believe that God communicates to you through the events of life? Does He signal you what you need to do through the events of life?

Look at the challenges that life presents to you. What do these challenges tell you? Do they signal to you that you have to change how you look at Life? When we pray, God communicates to us, if only we listen. This takes time and effort. We have to learn to listen.

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sunday January 28 – Weekend of the Prodigal Son - Tone 1
10:00 AM + Hryhory Drobný; 40th Day Remembrance

WEEK OF MEATFARE - TONE 2

Monday January 29 - Translation of St. Ignatius' Relics
No Service Scheduled

Tuesday, January 30- Three Holy Hierarchs
8:00 AM - Special Intention

Wednesday January 31—Cyrus & John, Unmercenaries
No Service Scheduled

Thursday February 1 - Tryphon, Martyr
No Service Scheduled

Friday February 2 - The Lord's Encounter with Simeon
8:00 AM - Special Intention

Saturday February 3 - Simeon & Anna
No Service Scheduled

Sunday February 4 – Weekend of Meatfare - Tone 2
10:00 AM + Adrian Bluj; Wife Luba and Family

(Continued from page 5 - Call to Holiness)

other elements that have made their way in. The Greek influenced thinking about holiness making it more focused on separation from evil, while the Latin added an element of immovability to the term. Both of these foci can be seen in the development of Christian theology about holiness.

So the Hebrew, Greek and Latin word for “holy” all added a dimension to the word. We have yet to think about the English word for holy. It too added a unique dimension to the words meaning.

Needless to say, to be *holy* isn't beyond the ability of any person. It is a matter of *desire* and a real *commitment to personal change*. To be holy does require *growth* or *change*. But *growth* and *change* are the essential tasks of this earthly existence.



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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

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734.451.1893

John & Janet Dicky
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Daria Drobný
313.791-0292

Robert Krokosky
248.431.9554

Leo & Mary LaDouceur
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313.624.9867

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A Theme For Prayer During the Coming Week

I think that the theme for our prayer during this coming week is one of understanding where we are. Are we making every effort to be in the Kingdom of our Heavenly Father or are we truly deeply implanted in this earthly existence? Do we even think about the Kingdom of our Father? Do we have a sense of being exiled from the Kingdom of the Father?

One question we might ask ourselves in prayer is: *How often do I think of God and my relationship with Him?* It is important that I realize where I am in my relationship with God.

How often do you think about God? Is He someone Who is on your mind? Do you see Him as an important Person in your life?

So as you pray during this coming week, keep making an assessment of how important God is to you. Do you really desire to have a relationship with Him? Do you see Him as very important in your life?

We must honestly answer these questions in the quiet of our own hearts. If He is not the most important Person in your life, why not? Do you place other things in your life as more important? (i.e., family, friends). All of us must ask ourselves how we make

God the most important Person in our lives! No other relationship is more important. If this is difficult for you to admit, then ask yourself why? God has to be more important than our spouses, children or grand-children. Why? Because we cannot truly be good for them if God is not the most important Person in our Life.

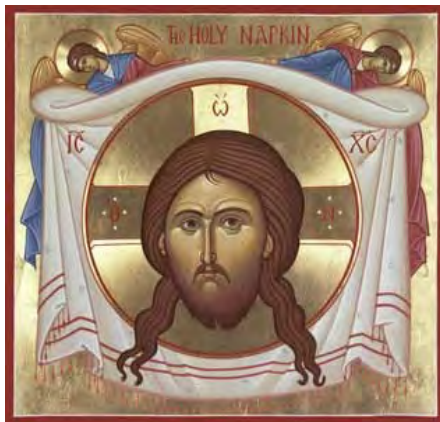
The only true way we can be of great benefit to our children and grandchildren is to truly be dedicated to a relationship with God. If that is first and foremost in our lives, then we will give them more than we can ever truly imagine.

Children pick up very quickly and easily what is important to us. If they see that God is important to us, then we will have given them more than

we can ever imagine. Without God, life is meaningless. Do you believe this?

There is a true meaning and purpose to our lives. When we live up to this meaning and purpose, we benefit all those we love for we give them a gift of truly understanding what life is all about.

Ask yourself: *How do I look at life? Am I a positive influence on my family and others?*



Learning our Faith from the Greek Fathers of the Church

I would continue sharing information about the argument between Cyril and Nestorius. Cyril, rightly or wrongly, interprets Nestorius' reluctance to describe Mary as *Theotokos* as a threat to the reality of the union of God with human nature, a reluctance that in turn threatens the benefits obtained through such a union. For it is through the appropriation of human nature that the benefits of salvation are communicated to that nature by *God and no other*. In Cyril's words: "since it was his own [the Word's] and personal flesh, that of the incorruptible God, he set it beyond death and corruption." Hence all human nature, or, as Cyril puts it, "human bodies", can be revitalized through "participation in his holy flesh and blood."

Cyril was angry with Nestorius because he believed him to be unnecessarily fighting against such a union and appropriation, what Cyril describes as the "birth of the Word." Nestorius, perhaps in an overly rationalistic turn of phrase, had described the union of the Word with the man Jesus as an *association*. Such language deeply disturbed Cyril, since he felt it falls far short of what is

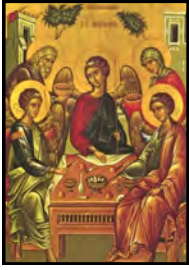
meant by the self-emptying of the Word described by Paul. If we have only an association of sorts, Cyril asked, "are they not implying that the Only Begotten's wonderful economy in the flesh served no purpose for the inhabitants of the earth?" In other words, only an appropriation of human nature - not a mere association - can communicate the Son's benefits to us in our troubled condition.



To drive this point home, Cyril turns his attention to a more detailed discussion of the incarnation. *For what end* did the Word become incarnate? For this end, that by the likeness that the Word born from God had with us, the law of sin in the members of our flesh could be condemned, and so that in the likeness of the death of the one who knew not death, death might be destroyed.

I think you can see how absolutely important the correct expression of the faith was to the Fathers. They wrestled with each and every word and struggled to find expression which they felt truly expressed the true faith. Nestorius, it should be remembered, didn't want to be considered a heretic.

More to follow!



THE EASTERN HERALD

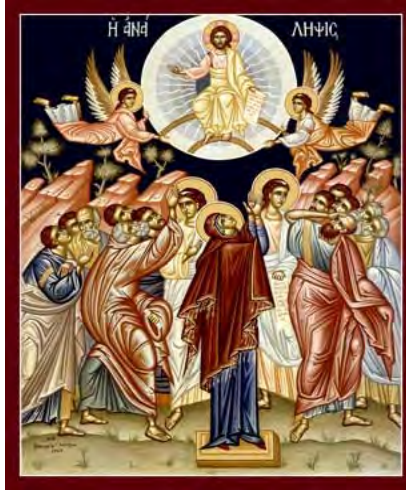
СХІДНЬЙ ВІСНИК

The Weekly Newsletter of Very Reverend Canon Wayne J. Ruchgy, Ph.D.
Vol. 64 No 34 Weekend Of the Prodigal Son January 27-28, 2018

The Spirituality of the Christian East

It has been one of my observations after more than 50 years of priestly ministry, that many good people seem to think that growth in their “spirituality” is really something that is beyond them and only reserved for a special, few people like Mother Theresa and Father Solanas. They seem to cringe when they hear that all humans are called to be “saints”, namely people who work at becoming “spiritual” people.

Spirituality is, as I have shared with my readers, the quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things. To be concerned about your soul, however, means that you have to give up being concerned about the “things” of this world. I think, however, that people cling to the things of this world because they are afraid to believe that there is life beyond the grave. The funny thing is



Life's Journey is an Ascension to the Heavenly Father

that we have all experienced the fact that when we die, we takes nothing with us . You never see a hearse with a luggage rack. The only things we take with us are our human experience and our memories.

Of course if we don't believe there is life beyond the grave, then we don't believe we even take those things with us.

I also think about Pascal's wager: Pascal argues that a rational person should live as though God exists and seek to believe in God. If God does not actually exist, such a person will have only a finite loss (some pleasures, luxury, etc.), whereas they stand to receive infinite gains (as represented by eternity) and avoid infinite losses.

The fact of the matter is that we are spiritual beings and “spirituality” is involved in our understanding and growth as spiritual beings.

What say you?

What the Prodigal Son Really Wanted

The prodigal son is as impatient as the father was kind. He is weary of his father's being alive. Since he cannot shorten his father's life, he strives to get possession of his property. He was not content to possess his father's wealth in company with his father; and he deserved to lose the privileges of a son.

But let us make some inquiries. What reason brought the son to such attempts? What bold prospect raised his spirits to make so startling a request? What reason? Clearly, the fact that the Father in heaven cannot be bounded by any limit, or shut in by any time, or destroyed by any power of death. The son could not await his father's death to get his wealth. So he conceived the desire to get his pleasure from the generosity of his father still alive. That was the insult which lay in his request, as the father's

very bounty proved.

"And he divided his means between them," the text states. At the request of the one son he soon divided all his means between the two. He wanted both sons to know the fact that up till then he had been holding on to his property because of love, not miserliness; that foresight, not jealousy, was the reason he had not given it away. He retained control of his property to preserve it for his sons; not to refuse it to them. He did not want his fortune to perish, but to remain intact for his sons.

Oh, happy are the sons whose entire property rests in the love of their father! Happy are the sons whose whole wealth consists in showing allegiance and honor to a father!

St. Peter Chrysologus

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