

SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON



*Icon of the Prodigal Son*

## A REFLECTION ON OUR READINGS FOR THIS WEEKEND

On this third weekend of the five-week preparation period for the Great Fast, we hear readings from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians and Luke's presentation of the parable of the Prodigal Son. We have two more weeks before the beginning of the Great Fast.

The passage from Paul's Letter begins with these words: *Everything is lawful for me - but that does not mean that everything is good for me. Everything is lawful for me - but I will not let myself be enslaved by anything.* He then goes on to express his belief, which is our belief, that the body is not for immorality. He then also adds: *Whoever is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him.* Poignant thoughts as we prepare to enter into the Great Fast.

Our Gospel reading presents one of the most well-known and popular parables of Jesus. It is usually called the parable of the Prodigal Son and follows the parable of Divine Mercy which presents the case of a shepherd leaving 99 sheep behind and searching for the one lost sheep as well as the woman who has 10 silver coins, loses one and searches until she finds it. She rejoices over the finding of the one lost silver piece.

So how do these two readings help prepare me to enter into the Great Fast in a way that will be beneficial for my spiritual growth?

In many ways, as I thought about these readings, they are all about our "free will" to embrace the way that we want to live. Unfortunately at times our "free will" does not have us choose a way that will be for our benefit. We are duped into thinking that something is good for us and it turns out that it isn't.

It is important, however, that we examine the ways that we choose to live and attempt to choose a way that will help us grow and change, since this is the main purpose of earthly life.

The Church has years of experience in helping change and grow spiritually. She makes various suggestions. It is all a matter of whether or not we want to embrace them.

We are called, I believe, through the Prodigal Son parable, not to misjudge God our Father. The two sons totally missed their father's love for them. I like to think of this parable as the parable of the "loving father". He showed equal love for both sons even though they didn't seem to understand his love. Lent: a time to truly come to an understanding of God's love for us.



## DISCOVERING GOD'S DREAM FOR US

Before I interrupted this article to share thoughts about the feast day that we just celebrated, the Lord's Meeting with Simeon and Anna, I was sharing ideas about "God's DREAM for us." I wonder how many persons have ever thought about the fact that God has had a dream about us for all eternity. We have always been a part of His creation even though that creation may have become manifest in time. We have always been present to Him, who we call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I know that this thought is probably difficult for many of understand. This thought should make us pause and think about who we are in God's dream - His awareness. Why? because we, if we are honest, come into this

world with both genuine strengths and true weaknesses. So why would God create us in this manner and, further, conceive of us from all eternity in this manner. The simple answer: He created us with a free will and calls us to be in a relationship with Him. In order to do this, we have to "spiritually grow." Our strengths and weaknesses are His gifts to us to help us accomplish this task. All we have to do is to learn how to use

them wisely. We have to use them to achieve the "best-version-of-ourselves".

This means that we must be gentle with ourselves and yet desire to achieve this "best-version". Desire makes all the difference. The other interesting thing about this desire to achieve the "best-version" is always changing since as we grow we discover there is always more room for growth.



So how do we even begin this process of attempting to achieve the "best-version?" We begin with a true and honest examination of who we are. We can either do this alone or engage someone who we feel will be honest with us and ask their help. It means asking: what are my talents and what are my faults. Once we can sense what these are,

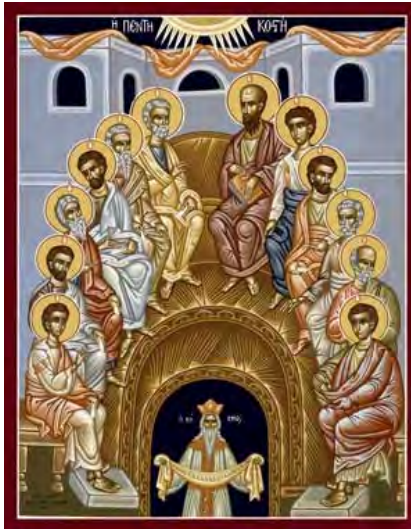
we can begin to see how they might help us to become engaged in the process of becoming the person that God dreamed for us.

In order to do this, I believe, we have to give up the idea that God only loves us if we are "perfect." He honestly loves us unconditionally just as we are. He calls us to become engaged in growth so that we might learn to love ourselves as He loves us and return His love.

# GROWTH IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

---

Physical life is a two-sided coin: we are growing, evolving, becoming, yet we remain the same person from the moment of conception. The same thing happens in *Theosis*, or the spiritual life. It is a living process. Incorporated into Christ from our Initiation into the Church, we are a new creation in Him. Yet we must grow in what we have become. We are called to cooperate more and more with the Holy Spirit through synergy and to be transfigured in the Lord. This implies a growth or evolution, as in physical life. However, since the life is not physical, it cannot be measured easily, nor should we attempt to measure our own growth. This is for our



spiritual father or mother to do. The Fathers of the Church - in unison with spiritual writers of other Christian traditions and even other religions - do speak of several phases of growth in *Theosis* which occur when people take their spiritual lives seriously.

In the physical life, there are accurately identifiable stages: infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, senior adulthood. In the various theories of developmental psychology, stages of emotional life are likewise

mentioned. In the spiritual life too, there are stages of maturation and integration which are mentioned by writers both Christian (Eastern and Western) and non-Christian. With varying terminology, each speaks of beginning, progressing and being advanced in the spiritual life. There seems to be a common basis to what is described.

The Holy Scriptures describe the believer's state of awareness and practice in terms of levels of growth and maturity. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we see the distinction between infancy and more mature stages expressed as a progression from basic faith to a deeper understanding.

Why not take up now your New Testament and read Paul's Letter to the Hebrews chapter 5:11-6:3. This will also help you to become more acquainted with the New Testament.

You will notice in this passage that repentance, basic faith, the mysteries of initiation and understanding of the Church's eschatological teaching are connected to infancy in the Christian life, not maturity. They, however, are an essential foundation for further Christian growth.

# St. Michael's Parish News

A Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in Dearborn Michigan



## ADULT DISCUSSION SESSION

*Today, During Our Coffee Hour*

We shall meet today during our coffee hour to discuss the first article that I have passed out: Understanding the Trinity. I hope to continue these sessions during the Great Fast. Please do join us if you want to grow in your understanding of our Faith.

\*\*\*\*\*

## THE GREAT FAST

*Begins, Monday February 24th*

Now is the time to begin thinking about how you will spend the 40 days of the Great Fast. I shall, in next week's Bulletin, share some suggestions and ideas about the season.

It is a time given to us to prepare ourselves for the Great and Holy Week and, of course, Easter.

\*\*\*\*\*

## LENTEN SERVICES

**Fridays: Presanctified @ 7:00 PM**

**Sundays: Lenten Matins @ 9:30 AM**

**Sundays: Basil's Liturgy @ 10:00 AM**

We anticipate Lenten Matins to be about 20 minutes long.

***If we don't change, we don't grow.  
If we don't grow, we aren't  
really living***

## THE NEW LIFE

The "New Life" that God has envisioned for us is a life that is filled with a real sense of knowing who we truly are in God's creation and knowing that the human life



we have been given is a great and loving gift from God Himself. The "New Life" is coming to a deep and genuine understanding that we have been made in God's IMAGE, as seen in the Person of Jesus, and given the real potential to GROW IN HIS LIKENESS. If we come to a real understanding of this reality, life changes. Of course we have to believe that the meaning of life is to "CHANGE" - to spiritually become a more dimensional person, if I can make up a new phrase.

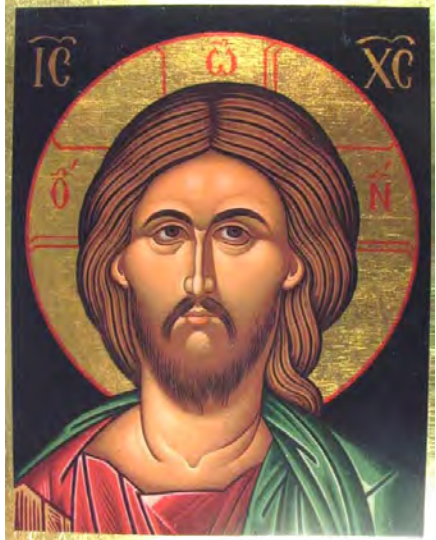
What do I mean by becoming a more "dimensional person." By this I mean that I will more clearly know who I am and also know what the meaning and purpose of my life is. For me this is unquestionably the most important thing I can try to accomplish during my time on earth. I believe, with my whole heart and soul, that trying to reach this understanding

*(Continued on page 8)*

## THIS IS MY BELOVED SON

What I presented in the last issue of this article was an outline of the activity of every person of the Trinity toward our salvation. If we could go back in time and see what John the Baptizer saw, we would first turn our attention to Jesus: a man, apparently like everyone else, who shows himself to be sinless as he steps up from the River Jordan immediately. But the Holy Spirit, the energy of ascetic ascent, opens our eyes and our ears and we see that Jesus is more than a mere mortal. It is that same Holy Spirit, sent from the Father to help us recognize Christ; the Holy Spirit that then leads us to be baptized with Christ in the Jordan and to be united with him, so that we may, with Him, be called “children of God” and participate in the eternity of the Father. This is nothing less than the mystery of salvation.

Words cannot say with precision what this mystery means. But the biblical story directs us to reflect on the mystery of the Trinity. First, our attention turns to Jesus Christ, because he brought us the good news and we recognize in him the union of the mortal and the immortal. But reflecting further on Jesus, we discern the operation of the Holy Spirit in the awakening of the spiritual senses, allowing us to discover the mystery of Christ. And finally, we can get a fleeting sense of the Father, the one who expresses the boundlessness and infinity of divinity, to whom Christ is leading us. Even if they are revealed to us by Scripture and tradition, we cannot understand the Trinity fully. But by the fleeting glimpse of the mystery of the Father we know the entire universe is a small and limited bubble next to the eternal and free existence beyond time and space, where God is. There we are given the mystery of the one God



in three different ways of being: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Transfiguration of Jesus is the other biblical moment where we can see signs of the simultaneous revelation of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. What might this connection mean? Both events imply a significant change. There is a distinct connection between the Baptism of Jesus and our own spiritual life, which also starts with a public event of baptism. The rest of our lives are about fulfilling and understanding what happened in that public event.

*Have you ever thought about your own baptism?*

# CHRIST, TRUE GOD and TRUE MAN

In this article I have been sharing with you thoughts about what brought the Church to declare the dogma of Jesus being fully and truly God and fully and truly man. I last introduced the theories of Nestorius whose thoughts were later declared as heretical.

Nestorius carefully distinguished between the two natures, and his construction seems orthodox - correct according to our faith - until he refused the title of Mother of God, *Theotokos*, to the Virgin and tried to replace it with the word *Christotokos*. This revolted the piety of the simple believers and Nestorius thus caused a scandal. For, unable to grasp the mystery of personhood, he now conceived the person in terms of nature, and finally identified the first with the second. Accordingly he opposed the person of the Word to that of Jesus, though they were certainly united - but by a moral connection, by an election that made Jesus the receptacle of the Word. For Nestorius, only the human person of Christ was born from the Virgin; consequently she was the mother of Jesus, but not the mother of God. The two sons, of God and of man, were united but not one in Christ.

This I know is difficult to understand. People who have studied philosophy can more easily see the distinction between “person” and “nature or essence.” They are two entirely different things. The problem is that we humans experience ourselves as one and equate our personhood with our human nature.

And yet, if Christ has no unity of person, our nature is not authentically assumed by God, and the incarnation ceases to be a “physical” restoration. If there is no real unity in Christ,



union between man and God is no longer possible. The entire doctrine of salvation loses its *ontological* (Ontology is the philosophical study of the nature of being, becoming, existence, or reality. It is part of the major branch of philosophy known as metaphysics - it deals with questions about what things exist or can be said to exist, and how such entities can be grouped according to similarities *and differences*) foundation; we remain separated from God; deification is barred; Christ is no more than a great example; Christianity only becomes a morality.

St. Michael the Archangel  
Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church  
6340 Chase Road  
Dearborn, MI 48126

Rev. Wayne J. Ruchgy, Ph.D.  
Pastor

Rectory: (313) 582-1424  
Cell: (313) 580-4412  
WRuchgy@gmail.com

### **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  
586.755.3129

Daria Drobny  
313.791-0292

Robert Krokosky  
248.431.9554

Leo & Mary LaDouceur  
313.278.7378

Gordon Malaniak  
734.564.9817

Rev Deacon Leonard Mier  
313.584-6795

Greg & Esther Petrovich  
734.453-4354

Rafic Vawter  
313.624.9867

# SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

**Sunday, February 9 - Weekend of the Prodigal Son - Tone 2**  
**10:00 AM + Adrian Bluj; Wife Luba and Family**  
**+ Michael Papinchak; Bob & Corrine Boyko**

## **36th WEEK AFTER PENTECOST - TONE 3**

Monday, February 10 - Charalampus, Martyr  
*No Service Scheduled*

Tuesday, February 11 - Blase, Bishop-Martyr  
*No Service Scheduled*

Wednesday, February 12 - Meletius, Archbishop  
*No Service Scheduled*

Thursday, February 13 - Martinian, Venerable  
*No Service Scheduled*

**Friday, February 14 - Death of Cyril, Apostle to the Slavs**  
**8:00 AM - Special Intention**

Saturday, February 15 - Onesimus, Apostle  
*No Service Scheduled*

**Sunday, February 16 - Weekend of Meat Fare**  
**10:00 AM + Special Intention**

*(Continued from page 5 - The New Life)*  
about myself and about life is truly the door to internal peace. I believe that if we don't have a truly clear understanding of this, life can be very difficult and confusing.

This is why, I believe, that God, from all eternity, chose to assume human nature and come into the world and reveal to humankind how to live in order to have true peace and contentment. I would guess that this is what most of us really desire - peace and contentment. I would hope that most of my readers are desirous of achieving this. I don't think that the things of this world can offer us this. Society is too conflicted to allow the average person to achieve this. The stress of modern life seems to block the achievement of peace and contentment. What do you think? Have you even thought about this?



<http://www.stmichaelarchangel.org> - and - [Facebook.com/stmichaelugccdbn](https://www.facebook.com/stmichaelugccdbn)



# THE COURAGE TO PRAY

In the last issue I stressed the fact that one of the challenges we face as we attempt to pray - attempt to enter into communication with our God - is that we must try to present our TRUE SELVES. The problem, of course, is that we have many different “personalities”. We have the “social-person”, the “family-person”, the “friend-person” the “acquaintance-person” and the “societal-person,” that is the person that we are within our society. We tend to group ourselves with various factions in our society instead of being ourselves. So we have to decide which is the “real person,” the person that is the most authentic. This takes work. We have to reflect deeply upon who we are and decide which person is “real” for us.

Nevertheless this is the only real person there is in us. And God can save this person, however repellent he may be, because it is a true person. God cannot save the imaginary person that we try to present to him, or to others or ourselves. As well as seeking the real person in us, through these chance manifestations, we must also seek constantly the person we are to God. We must seek for God in us and ourselves in God. This is a work of meditation which we should engage in every day all through our lives.

Meditation amounts to taking time out for ourselves to be alone and to think about our lives and who we are. This takes serious reflection. We have to decide that to take this action means that we value our lives and our relationship with God sufficiently to give ourselves to the task of coming to know ourselves. We should never be afraid to find out who we truly are. We should not judge who we are as good or bad but, rather, to attempt



to understand who we are. It does little good for us to judge who we are. It is much more important to understand who we are, if that makes any sense to you, my readers.

When we read the scriptures honestly we can admit that certain passages mean little to us. We are ready to agree with God because we have no reason to disagree with him. We can approve of this or that commandment or divine action because it does not touch us personally, we do not yet see the demands it makes on us personally. Who are you? Do you know?

***Have you ever stopped and thought about who you are?***

## ST BASIL'S THOUGHTS ON GENESIS



### ST BASIL THE GREAT

As I ended this article in the last issue, I shared with my readers the thought that God delegated the final part of the creation of animals to man. The sacred text is emphatic about this astonishing delegation of creative authority: **Whatever the man called each animate being, that was its name.** Unlike in pagan mythologies, man is no mere laborer for the gods, but by God's will he acts in the world as His colleague.

The man faithfully obeyed God and gave names to all the animals on earth and birds of heaven, **but for man there was not found a helper fit for him.** Those reading these stories as

history are somewhat nonplussed at the thought of God wondering if any of the animals might prove a fit helper for the man, and so they often suggest that God of course knew none of the animals would fit the bill, but nonetheless brought them to the man so that he might have this insight by experience as well. The ancients may not have read the text as if God's actions contained such a hidden agenda. Rather, the story served to emphasize the fundamental difference between the animals and the woman: it was found and discovered (by the man and Yahweh?) that none of the animals would serve the purpose of providing a helper fit for the man. Yahweh would have to provide something else, something completely different from the animals.

And Yahweh immediately took steps to provide this: **He cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he slept took one of his sides and closed up the flesh in its place.** This deep sleep (Hebrew *tardemah*) was no normal or natural doze, but a supernatural coma and slumber to render the man senseless for the coming radical procedure. The word is used for the divinely caused sleep in Genesis in a number of Old Testament passages. This is significant, for it emphasizes that the man had absolutely nothing to do with the creation of the woman. He was in no sense her creator but was entirely passive during the entire operation. God alone created woman; the man simply provided the raw material. This reveals the dignity of the woman. She too was a creation of God as was the man. Both are children of God.



# THE EASTERN HERALD

## СХІДНИЙ ВІСНИК

The Weekly Newsletter of Very Reverend Canon Wayne J. Ruchgy, Ph.D.  
Vol. 67 No 6      WEEKEND OF THE PRODIGAL SON      February 8-9, 2020

### THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN EAST

As I suggested in last week's installment of this article, we encounter, in a very intense manner, Eastern Spirituality in our Church's celebration of the Great Fast. This is true for several reasons: (1) in the early Church it was a time of religious education for potential members; and (2) the entire focus of the period is on personal change and transformation. *Metanoia* (i.e., literally, it is a Greek word meaning "change of mind". Yet the full meaning is somewhat more. In the New Testament, the word *metanoia* is often translated as "repentance". But this kind of repentance is not about regret or guilt or shame; it implies making a decision to turn around, to face a new direction - it means changing our hearts and minds and working to live the way Jesus lived). We see that the Church suggests engaging in acts which require a certain degree of "self-discipline." Fasting requires "self-discipline". Slowing down our lives requires "self-discipline". Choosing to engage in unconditional acts of love towards others, requires "self-discipline". Any attempts at personal change and transformation truly require "self-discipline".

Its always important to remember that God will not love us more if we engage in freely chosen penitential activities during the Great Fast. If we do, we will change!

Again our Eastern Spirituality would have us freely choose the way that we live the Great Fast. When we make a personal, free choice to observe



the fast, we will grow. We will not grow if we feel we are being coerced to do things. God does not punish people who don't observe the Great Fast. Rather, people who do not freely embrace the Fast as a time for personal growth, miss an opportunity to grow more in the likeness of Jesus and enter into a deeper relationship with God. It is all a matter of personal choice. I would exhort my readers to not pass up this chance for spiritual growth.

### *Who Art in Heaven*

These words I think have a very deep meaning. They remind us of the homeland we have abandoned, of the citizenship we have lost. In the parable of the young man who left his father's house, went off the rails and was reduced to living with pigs, the Word of God shows us human wretchedness. That young man did not find his one-time happiness again until he had realized his moral degradation, had looked into his own heart and had pronounced the words of confession. These words almost agree with the Lord's Prayer, because the prodigal son says: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you." [Luke 15:21] He would not confess himself to be a sinner against heaven

if he were not convinced that the homeland he had left at the time of his going astray were not in actual fact heaven.

By this confession of his he makes himself worthy once again to stand in the presence of his father who runs towards him, embraces him, and kisses him. The conclusion is this. To return to heaven there is only one route and that is to admit one's sinfulness and seek to avoid it. To make the decision to avoid it is already to be perfecting one's likeness to God.

*St. Gregory of Nyssa  
On the Lord's Prayer*