

HOLY TRINITY ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH



723 N BODINE ST PHILADELPHIA, PA 19123

CHURCH BULLETIN

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Sunday of the Prodigal Son

Gospel Reading Luke 15: 11 - 32



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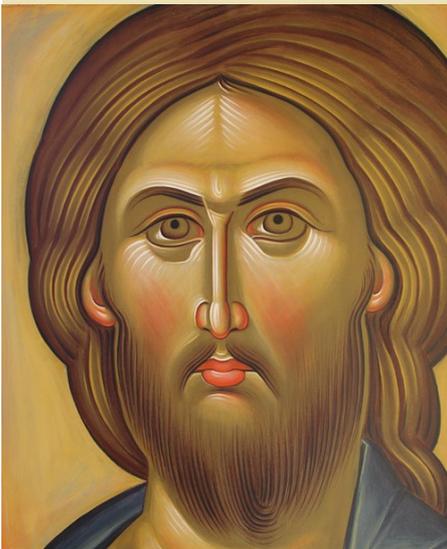
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The Lord said this parable: "There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that falls to me.' And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.' And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am

no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to make merry. Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

Apostle Reading 1 Corinthians 6: 12 - 20

Brethren, "all things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be enslaved by anything. "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food" -- and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not

know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two shall become one flesh." But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body and in your spirit which belong to God.

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Synaxarion. Sunday February 28, 2021 (Sunday 34th after Pentecost - The Sunday of the Prodigal Son of the Prodigal Son): Holy Venerable John Cassian and Germanus of Dobruja Martyrs Pamphilus the priest and Valens the deacon; Saint Hierarch Flavianus, Archbishop of Constantinople

On the Sunday of the Prodigal Son

All of life is an ebb and flow. A leaving and a returning. A descent and an ascent. A coming and going.

In ways past counting we have left the father's house. But we are always welcome to return. We cannot go so far as to not be able to return. In fact, we cannot go "far away" at all! God is everywhere. Where can we possibly go where he is not? But to us the road seems long because sometimes it takes years for us to realize the consequences of our crazy choices and once we do, it seems to take much longer than we would like to get ourselves out of them. But really, God is only a change of mind away. Nothing more. He has more patience than Job. It is we who get antsy.

I may have told you this story before, but it bears repeating. (As if I never repeat myself!) Fr. Keating was teaching the method known as Centering Prayer to a group of people. Afterwards a woman came up to him and said, "Father, I can't do this! My mind wanders away a thousand times!" He replied, "Wonderful!" "But why is that wonderful, Father?" "Because that is one thousand times to come back to God." God is only a change or mind away.

When a monk was asked what his life was like, he replied, "Falling and rising. Falling and rising." Each fall is an opportunity to rise and return. We must not despair over our falls. Instead, we must rise and go to our Father who will embrace us and care for us just as he did his Prodigal Son. The falls are not what matters. It is the return that matters.

The Holy Fathers knew well what it takes to heal and transform a soul. They knew from personal experience, all of them, to the last man and woman, what it takes to become a new creation. They all experienced the power of repentance and the unconditional compassion of God.

St. Peter of Damascus must have been a truly enlightened pastor well acquainted with the realities of human life in this fallen world. He wrote these hopeful words for those



who find repentance difficult, "But if repentance is too much for you, and you sin out of habit even if you don't want to, show humility like the publican (Luke 18:13): this is enough to ensure your salvation." Furthermore, he tells us that the one who does not despair and condemn himself for having sinned is "pure in heart." Pure in heart for being able to show himself the same kind of love God shows those who fall.

Do not think for a moment that God will not forgive. If God can stop forgiving, he can also stop loving and that is impossible for "God is

love." Even if we do not repent he forgives. He doesn't wait for us to ask. The problem is that we cannot enjoy his forgiveness unless we are willing to receive it and we are not willing to receive it unless we ask for it. He gives even if we aren't ready and even if we don't want it, but we need to be open to receive it. That is our job.

Let me give you two definitions of repentance. One, you have heard from me before. Repentance is giving up all hope of a better past. The past is what it is and cannot be changed, but we do not have to carry it with us. We do not have to let the past stick to us. Unfortunately, we are like Velcro. Everything sticks and we have a heck of a time trying to get unstuck. If we do not allow the past to stick to us, then we are free to move forward in the present. We have to learn how to keep things from sticking, but that is another sermon. Or better, come to confession and we can talk about it there.

The second definition is this: repentance is a change from a mindless way of life to a mindful one. It is really as simple as that. It is only when we have lost our minds that we fall into sin. Like when we drive down the road and start day-dreaming. If we don't stop, we will end up killing ourselves or someone else. Our selfish desires blind us. We can know we are caught when all we can think about is me, me, me! The Lord uses a beautiful turn of phrase when he tells us that the prodigal came to his senses. In one moment he stopped thinking

about himself and remembered his father's house, the love and generosity he had left behind. That was enough to get him to start the journey home. His mindlessness had made him oblivious to the obvious: his selfishness got him where he was. His desire for pleasure over-rode his reason. Our desires and passions unchecked render us mindless.

Finally, the prodigal woke up. Reality dawned. He opened his long-closed eyes and discovered himself in a pig-sty. The pig-sty was no place for a child of the Father. Mindfulness is the key to not ending up in a pigpen just as being awake is the key to not driving into a ditch. If we are aware and present, our eyes wide open and our minds clear, free from attachment to desire, then we are truly free.

The father's generous welcome proves something else. Even while the prodigal was spending his money in riotous living, he was still his father's son. When he given over to sexual abandon, he was still his father's son. No matter what he did, he was still his father's son. The Gospel tells us that even while the prodigal was far off from home his father saw him, ran to him, and the celebration began. In truth, the father was with him all along. As the father cleaned his wounds and clothed him in the finest clothes this message was being transmitted: "You are My son. That is who you are and that is who you always will be. These beautiful robes are your rightful clothes. Those rags are not natural to you. Your sins are not natural to you. I will show you your true identity." And he does. With the greatest compassion and love he shows him his true nature. He re-clothes him in the beautiful robes of human being.

That is exactly what God desires to show each of us if we will allow it. The road to the Father's house is only a change of mind away.

Fr. Antony Hughes



HOLY TRINITY'S Liturgical Schedule from February 28 to March 7, 2021

Sunday February 28 (Sunday of the Prodigal Son):

9:00 am - Matins
10:00 am - Holy Liturgy
12:00 pm - Coffee hour

Saturday March 7 (Soul Saturday):

9:00 am - Matins
10:00 am - Holy Liturgy
11:30 am - Memorial service

Sunday March 8 (Meatfare Sunday):

9:00 am - Matins
10:00 am - Holy Liturgy
12:00 pm - Coffee Hour
1:00 pm—Baptism for the
Buteanu Family



We Can All Be Considered Prodigal Sons

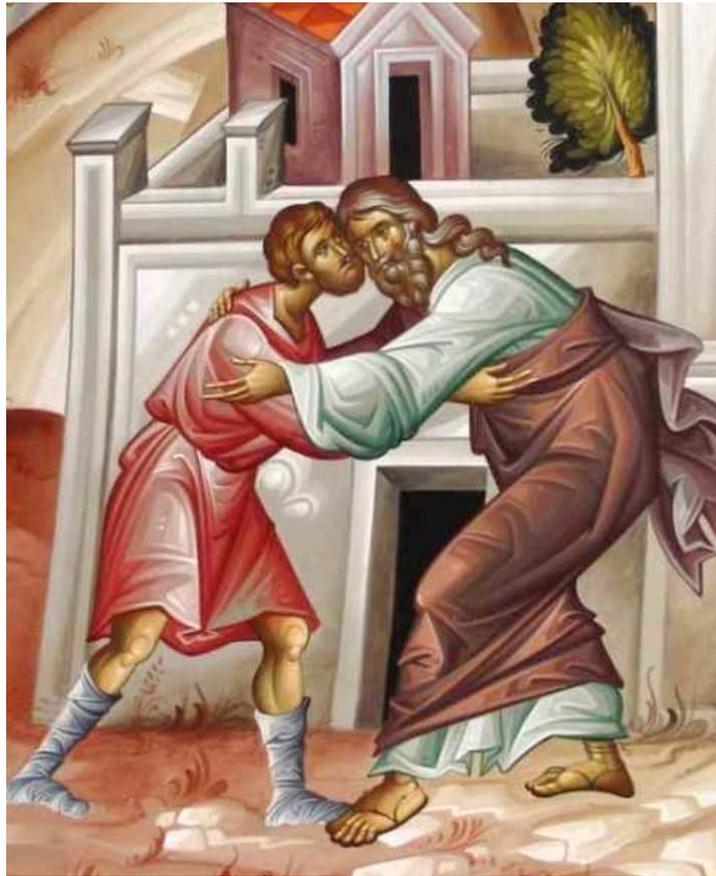
We can all be considered prodigal sons because we are spending the precious time we have been given on things that are taking us away from God, rather than bringing us closer to God. This is what sin does. Is taking us in a far-away place where we forget about the Father and we think we are free to spend the precious time we have and the precious gifts we were given for things that do not matter in the end.

Many may say, yeah Father, there is nothing wrong in enjoying life. I agree, there is nothing wrong in that, but there should be a balance between enjoyment and responsibility, between satisfying the body and fulfilling the soul, between what we receive and what we give back.

One cannot just spend, spend, spend because in the end will hit rock bottom and in the suffering of the hard contact with the rock bottom will finally understand what the true purpose of the inheritance was: not to spend it with the harlots, not to spend it in the restaurants, not to waste it oversleeping after a night of partying, but to use it wisely to achieve at the end what we call salvation.

Sometimes however this may be too late, and we talked about this in the parable with the rich man that had a good harvest, but other times this hard wake up call can change someone's life. The Gospel today is about this, is not about despair, is not about punishment, is about hope, love and forgiveness.

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. (Luke 15:20)

The Father is always waiting for us to come home to Him, to wake up from the illusion of happiness and prosperity the devil is creating around us and ran to Him recognizing our mistake to embrace Him with all our being, letting Him be one with us, guide our lives to where it belongs, not in far off lands, but here in the communion with His love. Happiness is many times not in the things we crave for, but in the things we already have.

You want to make someone happy, teach them to be happy with what they

have, you want to make someone unhappy, show them the world. I am sure many of us have felt that moment of change. For some is the moment of conversion, from a different religious background to Orthodoxy. For the Orthodox is the moment when they actually realize what they were missing and go back to their roots. It is a powerful moment; it is a life changing moment.

But some, after arriving at this moment, once the effervescence of the moment has passed they say: done, Christ is back in my life, I fast, I come to Church once in a while, I take Communion I'm OK. But this is nothing but another illusion of security, because our wicked ways that have been with us all our lives have a way of coming back in the moment we expect them the least. You know what they say about the addicts: once an addict, always an addict. Sin, and especially the repeated sin is also an addiction so we can paraphrase this and say once a sinner, always a sinner. Like the alcoholic will find a way to get to the bottle, so the sinner will find a way to go back to sin.

The spur of the moment is not enough to secure salvation for us, the transformation needs to be deeper, not just on the surface, but in the depth of our being. Otherwise the

emotion will pass and we will go back to the far off land, with the parties, the harlots and the false friends.

Even the greatest of the saints have not let the guard down until they went on to the Lord. They were always with the guard up,

like warriors, fighting the unseen warfare with their thoughts and the temptations of the world. It is a war that we have to win, but the victory is only at the very end.

So the only way to secure a true change in our lives is to align our lives in complete obedience to God, to let Him guide us toward Him, to allow Him to take to hand and walk us through the obstacles of life like a guide does to a blind man. We are in fact spiritually blind, we need to let Him open our eyes so we can see the vision, the beautiful plan He has prepared for us from the beginning of the world. He does not want us to suffer; He does not want us to be a sad, moralistic bunch, with no fun at all. He only wants us to stop resisting the change He wants to make in us. To open our hearts for the change He brings.

Through sin we have introduced corruption and mortality in our bodies. Christ wants to fix this: He brings immortality and incorruption. He showed us the way by being the first of the new kind, being the first that has regained, as a man, the rightful place for mankind at the right hand of the Father.



One thing however is necessary, only one, to die. We cannot live forever in these bodies, they need to be destroyed in order to be changed. Practically speaking we need to

die to sin, so we can be born into virtue. We need to die

to this material world to be received in the spiritual Kingdom. We need to give up the slavery of our transgressions so we can roam free with the Lord.

Until we have done that we will always be prodigal sons, running away

whenever the Father turns His back to us. It is true that the Father will always welcome us with open arms. But although His patience and love and understanding is infinite, we don't live forever, once we die, nothing can be done. We don't have to wait for the second before death to repent, to cry then: Father I have done wrong! Forgive me. Who knows the moment of death? Only God, so the moment of change is not at 70, 80 years old, after a life spent far from God, that very moment is now, at 20, 30, 40 sooner rather than later, before sin has made addicts, before sin has become our second nature that we cannot shake off.

Let us pray therefore that our Father that has created us with His own hands will give us the wisdom to change our lives, now, before it is too late, to give us the strength to stay firm in this change so at the end of our days spent searching for Him He could open His loving, fatherly arms and say: "welcome faithful son, enter into the joy of your Father!" Amen.

Fr. Vasile Tudora