

SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese

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SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON

1 February 2015

TONE 2 —Afterfeast of the Presentation of the Lord. Greatmartyr Theodore Stratelates (“the General”—319); Prophet Zachariah (ca. 520 B.C.); St. Sava II, Archbishop of Serbia (1269).

FIRST ANTIPHON

My heart overflows with a good word: I speak my poem to the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. R.: Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us! Grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee forever. (R:) Glory... Now and ever... (R:)

SECOND ANTIPHON

Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O most mighty, with Thy glory and Thy majesty. Bend Thy bow, and prosper, and reign. (R:) O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead: save us who sing to Thee, “Alleluia”! Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king’s enemies; the scepter of Thy kingdom is a righteous scepter. (R:) Glory... Now and ever... (Only begotten ...)

AT THE LITTLE ENTRANCE

The Lord has made known His salvation; He has revealed His justice in the sight of all nations. O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, save us who sing to Thee: Alleluia!

TROPARION OF THE RESURRECTION (Tone 1): While the stone was sealed by the Jews, and the soldiers were guarding Thy most pure body, Thou didst arise on the third day, O Savior, granting life to the world. For this cause the heavenly powers cried aloud unto Thee, O Giver of life: “Glory to Thy Resurrection O Christ! Glory to Thy kingdom! Glory to Thy providence, O Thou Who alone art the lover of mankind!”

TROPARION OF THE MEETING OF THE LORD (Tone 4): Rejoice thou who art full of grace, O Virgin Theotokos! For from thee hath risen the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, enlightening those in darkness. Rejoice thou also, O righteous Elder, as thou receivest in thine arms the Redeemer of our souls, Who also granteth to us the Resurrection!

KONTAKION FOR THE SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON (Tone 3): Foolishly I sprang away from Thy great fatherly glory and dispersed in wicked deeds the riches that Thou didst give me. With the prodigal I therefore cry unto Thee now: "I have sinned against Thee, O compassionate Father. But receive me in repentance; make me as one of Thy hired servants, O Lord!"

KONTAKION FOR THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD (Tone 1): Thou, O Christ God, Who by Thy birth didst sanctify the Virgin's womb and, as is meet, didst bless Simeon's arms, and didst also come to save us: preserve Thy fold in wars, and confirm them whom Thou didst love, for Thou alone art the Lover of mankind!

TODAY'S EPISTLE READING

Let your mercy, O Lord, be upon us. Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous!

From the First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

(1 Cor 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 the 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.**

Saint Paul is here writing to the community in Corinth, to correct some serious errors in their understanding of Christianity. All believers in Christ, so they claimed, are saved and have already transitioned to the life of the risen Jesus. For them, this resurrection was first and foremost a reality of the soul; the body was left out. And since the body was not included in their life in Christ, the Corinthians didn't mind various types of immorality related to the body. Their slogan was "All things are lawful for me!"

The Apostle steps in with very important corrections. First, a human being is not, essentially, a soul that happens to be attached to a body! It is rather a complex soul- body unity. This is why it is impossible to have a strict division between the things of the body and things of the soul. To be a Christian means to subject the entire person, body and soul, to Christ, and to function increasingly according to the direction of the Holy Spirit.

The body is not only some sort of instrument for food and sex that we haul around during our earthly journey and then discard at death. The body is, rather, part of what we are and who we are; and if we are Christians, the body, too, is something we entrust to the Lord (as we say in the Liturgy, we commend all of our life—soul and body—to Christ our God). As Christians, then, our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. In short, the body is not only a machine that explores and

experiences material realities, but also a place where God is present. Moreover, we will continue to be a soul-and-body unity even in the world to come, because the body will be part of our future resurrected self. How do we know this? We know because Jesus Christ has also risen with his body! The same power that did this in Him “will also raise us up” — soul and body! Overall, we are called to “glorify God” (that is, to become dwelling-place for God’s glory) both in our bodies and in our souls.

In short: our life in Christ either includes our body, or it includes nothing at all.

TODAY’S GOSPEL READING

From the Gospel according to Saint Luke

(Luke 15:11-32) The Lord told 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 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 rise 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 still 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 the servants, “Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him and put a ring on his finger, 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 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, “Look, these many years I have been serving 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.”

The hearers of this parable would have perceived the son’s request, “Give me the share of property that falls to me!” as unbelievably rude, even cruel! This child was impatient for his father’s death; he

wanted to behave as though his parent had died. Any father in such a situation would have been outraged and reacted with anger, probably handing out some severe retribution.

But God is not like that: He bows to the free choice of His creatures, just like the father in this parable gives the son what he had asked for. Jesus' audience would have expected the father to respond in kind to his son: something along the lines of "since you wanted to behave as though I was dead, from now on you shall be as dead to me! Do what you want, I no longer care!"

But God is not like that. We see that when the prodigal son returns, the father ran and embraced him and kissed him—he does not hold a grudge, he does not bring up the hurtful things from the past. All he cares about is that his child "was dead, and is now alive; was lost, and is found!" As Ezekiel 18:23 says (quoted in the prayer read at Confession), "Do I desire the death of the wicked? No, but rather that he should return from his wicked way and live!"

The son plans his steps carefully: he will get back to his village, he will try to speak to his father, appease him and make a proposal. He has even prepared the little speech he intends to give to his father. But God does not wait for us to ascend to Him. Just as the father in this parable ran into the street while his son was still at a distance, God came down to meet us here, and walk us back home. The greatest hope the prodigal son can entertain is that his father will accept him back as a slave.

But God is not like that! He does not weigh virtues and vices like a petty bureaucrat; He is rather like the father in the parable, who takes the repentant in, clothes him with "the robe of old"—the robe of light that once belonged to Adam in paradise!—and, by placing a ring on his finger, gives him full rights of sonship. As the Gospel of John puts it: "To all who did receive him ... he gave the right to become children of God!" (John 1:12).

Unfortunately, the older son does things differently: although he is a son, he views his relationship with his father mainly as a burden ("all these years I have been serving you ... I never disobeyed your command"), and he actually resents it profoundly ("you never gave me a kid"). Indeed, "obedience to God" such as we see in the older brother is a terrible delusion, an idolatry that will make us sick in mind and soul and body.

There is something peculiar about his relation with the younger brother, as well. If he had longed to see him, and listened for any sign of him, he would have known, like the father, that the prodigal was on his way back. He should have been there, in the street, coming out to meet him with tears of joy. Instead, however, the older brother refuses to forgive his brother, even though the prodigal has returned and repented; moreover, he reminds his father of everything that happened and puts the worst possible spin on his brother's lost wealth ("he has devoured your living with harlots"). He even refuses to call him his brother: "this son of yours!" he says. He is angry and refuses to join the banquet.

It seems that the two sons are not very different from each other: one chooses to leave far away, while the other stays home but is just as far away in his heart. One repents and returns; the other one refuses the invitation of his father. The banquet to welcome the prodigal son who returns is also an opportunity for the older brother: the opportunity to also "return to his father."

Of course, we learn first of all from the prodigal son. This Gospel is urging us to come to our senses—that is, to notice that we have wandered off and away from God, and to return to Him. But we are also learning from the older brother, just as we learned from the Pharisee, last Sunday—that is, we learn not to repeat their errors. We are invited to call the heavenly God "Father" by calling our neighbor "brother"; we are called to living and rejoicing in God by rejoicing in meeting our brother.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Today: memorial Trisagion for Ileana Șerbănescu's grandmother, Petruta.

- silent auction for packages of dark chocolate (supplied freely by the Harrisons). The proceeds will be sent as a gift to Ignatius and Amy, who are expecting their second child.
- **Sunday, February 15** (Sunday of the Last Judgment— "Meatfare"): Pan-Orthodox services and Pre-Lenten Luncheon at Sts. Peter and Paul Ukrainian Church. Matins 9:15, Liturgy 10 am.
- **Wednesday, February 18, 6:15-8 pm: Fellowship and Study Group in Cranberry.** We will be reading and discussing a few pages from Elder Porphyrios, a contemporary saint. The pages will be posted on the parish website early next week.
- **House blessings.** Fr. Bogdan will be available on Saturdays and Sundays afternoons and evenings. Please email or call to schedule a visit!
- **Ladies' Retreat (into the wilderness):** this year's retreat is being planned for the weekend of August 21st or 28th at Kooser State Park in the Laurel Highlands. If interested, please talk to Ileana to reserve your spot
- **"A Day with Sula."** Sula has graciously invited us to her home to share with us her faith journey. If interested, please talk to Cristina or Georgia.

SCHEDULE OF LENTEN SERVICES DURING THE WEEK

FIRST WEEK OF LENT (St. Andrew's Orthodox Church)

- **Monday-Thursday, 2/23-26, 6PM:** Compline and Great Canon of Saint Andrew
- **Friday, 3/27, 6 PM:** Liturgy of Pre-Sanctified Gifts

LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS: *The Orthodox practice is to fast before these evening Liturgies from about noon (have a light lunch, then abstain from food and drink). Following the services, we will break the fast with a Lenten potluck meal.*

- **Wednesday, 3/4, 6 PM:** Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts (Sts Peter & Paul)
- **Wednesday, 3/11, 6 PM:** Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts (St. Anthony's)
- **Wednesday, 3/18, 6 PM:** Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts (St. Andrew's)
- **Wednesday, 3/25, 6 PM:** Feast of the Annunciation (Sts Peter & Paul)
- **Wednesday, 4/1, 6 PM:** Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts (St. Anthony's)

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: Seba, Lisa, and Sam (Michaels), Bill and Ann, George (Georgiades), Christine (Abraham), Jim, Tony, Samantha, Luke (relatives of Dollie's), Norma, Victoria (Frank's mother), Richard (Johns), Bill, Ed, Peter, Georgia and Scot, Sam, Karen (Joanna's mother), Diane, Sula, Dollie, Dolores (Bingham), Karyn, Ignatius and Amy, John, Jonathan and Joanna, Andrei and Nyoka, Benjamin, John, Janet, Craig, Christy (relatives of Jean); Yvonne (Ben's mother). Ron, catechumen; Shea & Katie, Timothy & Caroline – seeking for the true faith.

DEPARTED: Rick, Phyllis (Seba's husband and sister), Angeliki, Metropolitan Philip, Joe and David Sipos; Bill (Georgia's father-in-law), Glenn (Jean's grandson); Stella, Edmund (Ed's uncle), Richard, Dolores Patricia (Thompson), Leatrice (Totin), Ed (Joanna's grandfather), Joseph (Rose's father), Fred (Dollie's uncle), Bob (Diane's father), Michael, Gabriel, Hilda (Chris Abraham's mother).

From Alexander Schmemmann, *Great Lent*

SUNDAY OF THE PUBLICAN AND THE PHARISEE: Humility

The culture in which we live constantly instills in us the sense of pride, of self-glorification, and of self-righteousness. It is built on the assumption that man can achieve anything by himself and it even pictures God as the one who all the time "gives credit" for man's achievements and good deeds. Humility—be it individual or corporate, ethnic or national—is viewed as a sign of weakness, as something unbecoming a real man. Even our churches: are they not imbued with that same spirit as the Pharisee? Do we not want our every contribution, every "good deed," all that we do "for the Church" to be acknowledged, praised, publicized?

The Lenten season begins then by a quest, a prayer for humility, which is the beginning of true repentance. For repentance, above everything else, is *a return to the genuine order of things*, the restoration of the right vision. It is, therefore, rooted in humility, and humility— the divine and beautiful humility— is its fruit and end. "Let us avoid the high-flown speech of the Pharisee," says the *Kontakion* of this day, "and *learn the majesty* of the Publican's humble words..." We are at the gates of repentance and at the most solemn moment of the Sunday vigil; After the Resurrection and the appearance of Christ have been announced—"having beheld the Resurrection" —we sing for the first time the *troparia* which will accompany us throughout the entire Lent:

Open to me the gates of repentance, O Giver of Life, for my spirit rises early to pray towards thy holy temple, bearing the temple of my body all defiled. But in Thy compassion, purify me by the loving kindness of Thy mercy!

Lead me on the paths of salvation, O Mother of God, for I have profaned my soul with shameful sins, and have wasted my life in laziness. But by your intercessions, deliver me from all impurity.

When I think of the many evil things I have done, wretch that I am, I tremble at the fearful day of judgment. But trusting in Thy living kindness, like David I cry to Thee: Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy.

THE SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON: Return from Exile

A man who has never felt that he is exiled from God and from real life, will never understand what Christianity is about. And the one who is perfectly "at home" in this world and its life, who has never been wounded by the nostalgic desire for another Reality, will not understand what is repentance.

Repentance is often simply identified as a cool and "objective" enumeration of sins and transgressions, as the act of "pleading guilty" to a legal indictment. Confession and absolution are seen as being of a juridical nature. But something very essential is

overlooked, without which neither confession nor absolution have any real meaning or power. This "something" is precisely the feeling of *alienation from God*, from the joy of communion with Him, from the real life as created and given by God. It is easy indeed to confess that I have not fasted on prescribed days, or missed my prayers, or become angry. It is quite a different thing, however, to realize suddenly that I have defiled and lost my spiritual beauty, that I am far away from my real home, my real life, and that something precious and pure and beautiful has been hopelessly broken in the very texture of my existence. Yet this, and only this, is repentance, and therefore it is also a deep desire *to return*, to go back, to recover that lost home....

One liturgical peculiarity of this "*Sunday of the Prodigal Son*" must be especially mentioned here. At Sunday Matins, following the solemn and joyful Psalms of the *Polyeleon*, we sing the sad and nostalgic Psalm 137:

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, and we wept when we remembered Zion... How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand be forgotten. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy...

It is the Psalm of exile. It was sung by the Jews in their Babylonian captivity as they thought of their holy city of Jerusalem. It has become forever the song of man as he realizes his exile from God, and realizing it, becomes man again: the one who can never be fully satisfied by anything in this fallen world, for by nature and vocation he is a pilgrim of the Absolute. This Psalm reveals Lent itself as pilgrimage and repentance—as return.

SUNDAY OF THE LAST JUDGMENT: Preparation for Lent

The Gospel lesson for the day is Christ's parable of the Last Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46). When Christ comes to judge us, what will be the criterion of His judgment? The parable answers: *love*-- not a mere humanitarian concern for abstract justice and the anonymous "poor," but concrete and personal love for the human person, any human person, that God makes me encounter in my life [...]

Christian love is the "possible impossibility" to see Christ in another man, whoever he is, and whom God, in His eternal and mysterious plan, has decided to introduce into my life, be it only for a few moments, not as an occasion for a "good deed" or an exercise in philanthropy, but as the beginning of an eternal companionship in God Himself. For, indeed, what is love if not that mysterious power which transcends the accidental and the external in the "other"-- his physical appearance, social rank, ethnic origin, intellectual capacity-- and reaches the *soul*, the unique and uniquely personal "root" of a human being, truly the part of God in him? If God loves every man it is because He alone knows the priceless and absolutely unique treasure, the "soul" or

"person" He gave every man. Christian love then is the participation in that divine knowledge and the gift of that divine love. There is no "impersonal" love because love *is* the wonderful discovery of the "person" in "man," of the personal and unique in the common and general. It is the discovery in each man of that which is "lovable" in him, of that which is from God. [...]

The parable of the Last Judgment is about Christian love. Not all of us are called to work for "humanity," yet each one of us has received the gift and the grace of Christ's love. We know that all men ultimately need this *personal love*-- the recognition in them of their unique soul in which the beauty of the whole creation is reflected in a unique way. We also know that men are in prison and are sick and thirsty and hungry because that personal love has been denied them. And, finally, we know that however narrow and limited the framework of our personal existence, each one of us has been made responsible for a tiny part of the Kingdom of God, made responsible by that very gift of Christ's love. Thus, on whether or not we have accepted this responsibility, on whether we have loved or refused to love, shall we be judged. For "inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, you have done it unto Me!"