

SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



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SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON

12 February 2017

TONE 1 — Meletius, Archbishop of Antioch (381). Ven. Mary (who was called Marinus), and her father, Ven. Eugene, at Alexandria (6th c.). St. Anthony, Patriarch of Constantinople (895). New Martyr Kristo the Gardener (1752). Aleksy the Wonderworker, Metropolitan of Moscow (1378).

FIRST ANTIPHON

It is good to give praise unto the Lord, and to chant unto Thy Name, O Most High! Refrain: Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us! To proclaim in the morning Thy mercy, and Thy truth by night! (R.:) Upright is the Lord our God and there is no unrighteousness in Him (R.:) Glory... Now and ever... (R.:)

SECOND ANTIPHON

The Lord is King, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with strength and has girt Himself! Refrain: Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, as we chant to Thee, "Alleluia"! For He established the world which shall not be shaken! (R.:) Holiness befits Thy house, O Lord, unto length of days! (R.:) Glory... Now and ever... (Only begotten Son and Word of God ...)

AT THE LITTLE ENTRANCE

Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ! 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 which 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!

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!"

TODAY'S EPISTLE READING

Prokeimenon: 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 correct a false understanding of Christianity. The Corinthians claimed to be saved and to have already transitioned to the life of the risen Christ. 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 **"Anything goes—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, soul *and body*, 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 a 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 his former 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 as unbelievably rude, even cruel. This son 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, handing out some severe retribution. But the father in this parable is not like that; he gives the son what he had asked for. This is how God is: He bows to the free choice of His creatures.

The hearers of the parable 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), "I do not desire the death of the wicked, but rather that he should return from his wicked way and live!"

The son plans his steps carefully: leave the pigsty, get back to his village, speak to father, appease him, ask to be taken in as a slave. He even prepares the little speech for 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 relationship 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 devoured your living with harlots”). He won't even call him his brother: “this son of yours!” he says. He is angry and refuses to join the banquet.

After all, the brothers are not very different from each other: one chooses to leave and goes 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

- **Next Sunday, February 19** (Sunday of the Last Judgment— "Meatfare"): Pan-Orthodox service at Sts. Peter and Paul: 9AM Matins, 10 AM Divine Liturgy, followed by potluck.
- **Sunday, February 29** ("Cheesefare"). Dairy Potluck (cheese-anything and any kind of cheese, milk, yogurt, kefir). Please plan on staying on, after the meal, for **Forgiveness Vespers** at 1:30 PM.
- **Sunday, March 12**. GENERAL PARISH MEETING! One position on the parish council (Jean Bowen’s) is open for election.
- **House blessings**. Bogdan is available Saturdays and Sundays afternoons/ evenings.

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: Venetia (Chrissi’s mom); Newborn Lydia May (Cole); Daniel (Sipos); Kent (Jean’s husband); Maura; Christi, Janet, Ann; John and Mary Ann (Jean’s relatives); Stelian (Cezar’s father); Seba, Lisa, and Sam (Michaels), Norma; Christine (Abraham), Marion and Jim Raimondi (relatives of Dollie’s), Norma, Richard (Johns), Ed, Peter, Georgia and Scot, Sam, Karen (Joanna’s mother), Diane, Sula, Dollie, Karyn, Fr. Ignatius and Amy, John, Jonathan and Joanna, Andrei, John, Janet, Christy (relatives of Jean); John and Julie (Smolen); Dennis, Vincent, Roy and Laura, Danny, Cathy (relatives of John and Julie); Christine, Phoebe, Tina. Garrett & Autumn, Benjamin – seeking the true faith.

DEPARTED: Iosif; Job; George (Georgiades); Diane (Georgia’s sister); Victoria and Susan (mothers of Frank and Stacy); Bill; Dolores (Bingham); Gladys (Smolen); Donald (Norma’s brother); Craig (Jean’s son-in-law); Abie Abraham; Patrick (Rose’s brother); Josephine (Julie’s sister); Cristian (Andronic); Rick, Phyllis (Seba’s husband and sister), Angeliki, Joe and David Sipos; Glenn (Jean’s grandson); Stella, Edmund (Ed’s uncle), Richard, Leatrice (Totin), Joseph (Rose’s father), Fred (Dollie’s uncle); Lance; Bob (Diane’s father), Michael, Gabriel, Hilda (Chris Abraham’s mother).