

Orthodox Church in America + Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania

Elevation of the Holy Cross

Orthodox Church

Williamsport, PA.



Sunday of the Prodigal Son

February 16th, 2025

Elevation of the Holy Cross Orthodox Church

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Today's Scripture Readings:

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Gospel: St. Luke 15:11-32

Welcome to everyone! Please join us for some fellowship in the Parish Hall after the Liturgy!

**** Parish Announcements ****

+ The Church will be open this Tuesday & Thursday from 7:00 - 9:30am for private prayer and/or Confession.

+ *Compline/Bible Study* - Thursday February 20th at 5:30

+ *Great Vespers* - Saturday February 22nd at 5 (*Panikhida* at 4:45)

+ *Hours & Divine Liturgy* – Sunday February 23rd at 9:40 - *Meatfare Potluck Fellowship* following in the Hall.

+ **House Blessings** continue . . . Please see Fr Seraphim to set up a day and time. 😊

**** THANK YOU to everyone who helped with the Luncheon yesterday! Many visitors . . . Thank God!**

**** February Benevolence – 50/50 - Holy Cross Saturday Luncheon - St Ann Food Pantry**

Our Stewardship – February 9th, 2025

Tithes/Offerings - \$532.00 / Online Giving - \$373.50

Candle Offerings – \$14.00 / Benevolence -\$25.00

Thank you for your generosity to our Parish!

Regarding Holy Communion: Only those faithful who are Orthodox Christians and have properly prepared themselves by fasting, prayer [i.e., Prayers Before Communion], recent confession, and who were at least present for the reading of the Epistle and Gospel should approach to receive the Holy Eucharist. We should all be at peace with everyone too. If you have any questions about Communion, please see Fr. Seraphim 😊

✝ *St. Luke 15:11-32 (Gospel) The Parable of the Lost Son*

Then He said: “A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.’ So, he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with 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, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.’”

“And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it and let us eat and be merry; for this my

son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.

“Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So, he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.’

“But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore, his father came out and pleaded with him. So, he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’

“And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’”

Prayers For the Health and Salvation of those in need: *Many Years!*

His Eminence Archbishop Alexander, Priestmonk Ambrose (Young), Abbot Tryphon, Mitred-Archpriest Nicholas (Harris), Mitred-Archpriest Daniel & Mat. Myra (Kovalak), Pres. Eva (Koutroulelis), Alexa Stover (child to be born of her), Catharine Mann, Paul Beard, Harry Hiras, Evelyn Chabal, Michael Kuzmiak, Juliana Matusiak, Isaac Bannister, Elizabeth Yonkin, Michael Lazorchak, Elizabeth Davis, Lara Schmitt, Larissa Chapin, Brian Gunter & those suffering from the wars in Ukraine, Russia, & the Middle East, the California Fires, & the families of the Air disasters ***Our Catechumens:*** Garrett Payer, Shyanne Vance, Melissa Czock, Kurt Schmitt (Military), Lucas Malek & Jiselle Macari

Prayers for the Newly Departed: *Memory Eternal*

Archpriest John Maxwell +2/4, Subd Yakov Hando +1/15, Mat Tatiana Peterson +1/13, Mat Susanne Senyo +1/18, Wayne Lucas +2/1 All those who have lost their lives in the wars in Ukraine, Russia, & the Middle East, the victims of the California Fires, & the Air disasters

“Have I Ever Really 'Heard' the Parable of the Prodigal Son?”

by Fr. Steven Kostoff (w/permission)

This parable is chosen at this particular time in order to draw us toward repentance (Gk. *metanoia*); to remind us that Great Lent is the “school of repentance;” and that without repentance, our other “lenten efforts” become rather meaningless – if not spiritually dangerous. What will it take to convince us that we, too, need that “change of mind” and return to our heavenly Father that is the truest expression of living according to the Gospel?

As I ponder that question, I ask myself further: Have I ever really heard this parable in the way that Christ refers to “hearing?” And that would mean being shaken at the very core of my being. Am I only paying “lip service” to this greatest of the parables, as I listen to it as a wonderful short story that is exciting to analyze and discuss; but not quite capable of moving me any closer to genuine repentance? Again, these are the questions that came to my mind as I read this parable aloud in the Liturgy for about the thirtieth consecutive year. Does anyone else possibly share these questions with me?

Yet, if we have spent some time in analyzing the richness of this parable, then we realize that it is not only about the prodigal son, with the two other characters – the father and the older brother – acting in a clearly subordinate manner or for the sake of rounding out the story. They are both integral to the parable and hold equal weight as we try and grasp the parable as a whole. Without the father and the son, the parable would suffer from a certain one-sidedness or incompleteness.

This is absolutely true when it comes to the very core meaning of the parable - which is repentance. We are deeply moved by the movement of the prodigal son toward his return to his father’s home. We first read of his journey to a “faraway country” and rapid and total decline wherein he wastes his inheritance in “loose living.” An all too-familiar tale. This is followed by a spiraling descent that has him longing for the pods that serve as food for the pigs he has been hired to tend. His re-ascent begins with his “coming to himself” after what must have been a painfully honest self-assessment of his stricken condition of estrangement from

even basic human fellowship. This culminates in the thought of returning to his father and begging for mercy and the actual movement of “arising” and doing it.

None of this would have borne any fruit, however, without the compassion and love of the prodigal son’s father who embodies the forgiveness that completes his repentance. If the father had been stern, or absorbed with his own sense of being offended; if he had chastised his son with the predictable and perhaps satisfying retort, “I told you so;” then the parable would collapse with an all too-human reaction that would be plausible but unworthy of the Gospel that Jesus came to proclaim. For the father of the parable is a figure of our heavenly Father’s compassion, love and forgiveness that Christ came to offer to all and every sinner. The father remains unforgettable as a “character” precisely because he confounds our expectations in his boundless love fully revealed by running out to his son, falling on his neck and kissing him. This is how the Father “Who is without beginning” acts toward his wayward creatures who have spent their inheritance – the “image and likeness” of God – in the faraway country of self-autonomy and the “swinish” fulfillment of the most base desires. Our repentance results in a cosmic joy that God shares with the angels and the preparation of the “banquet of immortality.”

The older son represents precisely that all too-human response referred to above of hurt feeling and an offended sensibility that leaves him insensitive to his repentant brother’s return and salvation. No matter how justified such a response would seem from our human perspective, it remains outside of the Gospel’s “transvaluation of values.”

This is our “invitation” to Great Lent offered to us by the Lord Jesus Christ: “**Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.**” (MATT. 4:17) To help us understand the beauty of that movement of repentance, the Lord delivers what just may be his “parable of parables,” the one we usually name after the prodigal son. So before we get out our lenten cookbooks, we must first really “hear” this parable and pray to God that He will direct and guide us toward true repentance. The lenten cookbook will not save us – but repentance will.