THE ORDER FOR THE READER TYPNIKA SERVICE
WHEN WE ARE UNABLE TO ATTEND CHURCH

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2021


*THE SERVICE TAKES PLACE IN FRONT OF OUR ICON CORNER*

EVERYONE: O, God cleanse me a sinner and have mercy on me! (3x)

READER: Through the Prayers of Our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ Our God, Have Mercy on us.

READER: Amen. O, Heavenly King, the Comforter the Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere present and fillest all things. Treasury of Blessings and Giver of Life. Come and abide in us and cleanse us from every impurity and save our souls, O Good One!

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us. (3 times)
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.
O most Holy Trinity, have mercy on us. Lord, cleanse us from our sins. Master, pardon our transgressions. Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities, for Thy Name’s sake.
Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

EVERYONE: Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

READER: Through the Prayers of Our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ Our God, Have Mercy on us.

READER: Amen. Lord have mercy (12x)
READER: Through the Prayers of Our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ Our God, Have Mercy on us.

Bless the Lord, O my soul! Blessed are Thou, O Lord! Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. Who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases. The Lord is compassionate and merciful, long suffering and of great goodness. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Blessed art Thou, O Lord!

**THE LITTLE LITANY is not said in the absence of a Priest or Deacon.**

The reader continues:

READER: Amen. Lord have mercy (3x)

READER: Through the Prayers of Our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ Our God, Have Mercy on us.

EVERYONE: Amen. Followed by the singing of the Second Antiphon.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have being. Put not your trust in princes, in sons of men in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs he returns to his earth, on that very day his plans perish. The Lord will reign forever; Your God, O Zion, to all generation.

Now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen. Only-begotten Son and immortal Word of God, Who for our salvation didst will to be incarnate of the holy Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, Who without change didst become man and wast crucified, Who art one of the Holy Trinity, glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit: O Christ our God, trampling down death by death, save us!

**THE LITTLE LITANY is not said in the absence of a Priest or Deacon.**

The reader continues:

READER: Amen. Lord have mercy (3x)

READER: Through the Prayers of Our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ Our God, Have Mercy on us.

EVERYONE: Amen. Followed by the singing of the Third Antiphon.

In Thy Kingdom remember us, O Lord, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.

Followed by the singing of the appointed Troparia for the day:

**TROPAR FOR THE RESURRECTION, TONE 5**

Let us, the faithful, praise and worship the Word, co-eternal with the Father and the Spirit, born for our salvation from the Virgin; for He willed to be lifted up on the Cross in the flesh, to endure death, and to raise the dead // by His glorious Resurrection.
THE EPISTLE LESSON

READER: The Prokeimenon is in the 5th Tone:

Thou, O Lord, shalt protect us / and preserve us from this generation forever.

CHOIR: Thou, O Lord, shalt protect us / and preserve us from this generation forever.

READER: Save me, O Lord, for there is no longer any that is godly!

CHOIR: Thou, O Lord, shalt protect us / and preserve us from this generation forever.

READER: Thou, O Lord, shalt protect us!

CHOIR: And preserve us from this generation forever.

READER: THE READING IS FROM THE FIRST EPISTLE OF THE HOLY APOSTLE PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS.

READER: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

BRETHREN:
All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her?

For “the two,” He says, “shall become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.

READER: And to your spirit: Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

CHOIR: Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

READER: I will sing of Thy mercies, O Lord, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim Thy truth from generation to generation.

CHOIR: Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

READER: For Thou hast said: Mercy will be established forever; Thy truth will be prepared in the heavens.

CHOIR: Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
THE GOSPEL LESSON

READER: And that we may be accounted worthy of hearing the Holy Gospel, let us pray to the Lord God.

EVERYONE: Lord have mercy (3x)


EVERYONE: Glory to Thee, O Lord, glory to Thee.

READER: Luke 15:11-32

Let us Attend!

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.’”
EVERYONE: Glory to Thee, O Lord, glory to Thee.

READER: Remember us, O Lord, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom.
   Remember us, O Master, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom.
   Remember us, O Holy One, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom.

THE LITANY OF FERVENT SUPPLICATION is not said in the absence of a Priest or Deacon. The reader continues:

READER: Amen. Lord have mercy (12x)

READER: Through the Prayers of Our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ Our God, Have Mercy on us.

EVERYONE: Amen.

READER: The Heavenly Choir sings Thy praises and cries out: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord of Sabaoth; Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.

READER: Draw nigh unto Him, and be enlightened; and your faces shall not be put to shame.

READER: The Heavenly Choir sings Thy praises and cries out: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord of Sabaoth; Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.

READER: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

READER: The Choir of Holy Angels and Archangels, with all the Powers of Heaven, sings Thy praises and cries out: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord of Sabaoth, Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.

THE SYMBOL OF FAITH (THE NICENE CREED)

EVERYONE: I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of light; true God of true God, begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, by Whom all things were made. Who for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man. And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried. And the third day He arose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into Heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father; And He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead. Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father; Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke by the prophets.

In One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins. I look for the Resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

THE LITANY OF SUPPLICATION is not said in the absence of a Priest or Deacon. The reader continues:

READER: Amen. Lord have mercy (12x)

READER: Through the Prayers of Our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ Our God, Have Mercy on us.
EVERYONE: Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

READER: Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us and save us.

EVERYONE: Amen. (Followed by the singing of the appointed Kontakia)

KONTAKION FOR THE RESURRECTION, TONE 5
Thou didst descend into hell, O my Savior, shattering its gates as Almighty; resurrecting the dead as Creator, and destroying the sting of death. Thou hast delivered Adam from the curse, O Lover of Man, and we all cry to Thee: O Lord, save us!

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

KONTAKION LENTEN TRIODION, TONE 3
I have recklessly forgotten Thy glory, O Father; and among sinners I have scattered the riches which Thou gavest me. And now I cry to Thee as the Prodigal: “I have sinned before Thee, O merciful Father; receive me as a penitent, / and make me as one of Thy hired servants!”

Now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Steadfast Protectress Tone 6 (Hymn to the Theotokos)
Steadfast Protectress of Christians, constant advocate before the Creator. Despise not the entreating cry of us sinners, but in Your Goodness come speedily to help us who call on You in faith! Hasten to hear our petition and to intercede for us, O Theotokos!! For You always protect those who honor You!

READER: Lord have mercy (12x)

O All-Holy Trinity, Cons substantial Power, Undivided Kingdom, Origin of all Good: be graciously inclined unto me, a sinner. Make steadfast my heart and give it understanding, and take away from me every defilement. Enlighten my mind, that I may ever glorify, praise and worship Thee, and say: One is Holy, One is the Lord Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen. Blessed be the Name of the Lord, henceforth and forevermore. (3x)

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

PSALM 34

READER: I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall be continually in my mouth. In the Lord shall my soul be praised; let the meek hear and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together. I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my troubles. Draw nigh unto Him, and be enlightened, and your faces shall not be put to shame. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The Angel of the Lord will encamp around those who fear Him, and will deliver them. O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that hopes in Him. O fear the Lord, all you His saints; for there is no want for them that fear Him. The rich have become poor and have hungered; but they that seek the Lord shall lack no good thing. Come,
O children, hearken unto me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Who is the man that desires life, who loves to see days that are good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears unto their supplication. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

The righteous cried, and the Lord hear them, and He delivered them out of all their troubles. The Lord is nigh unto them that are broken in heart, and will save them that are humble in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, and out of them all shall the Lord deliver them. The Lord keeps all of their bones; not one of them shall be broken. The death of sinners is cruel, and they that hate the righteous shall do wrong. The Lord will redeem the soul of His servants, and none of them shall do wrong that hope in Him.

READER: More honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious beyond than the Seraphim, without defilement, You gave birth to God the Word, True Theotokos, we magnify You.

CHOIR: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen. Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy. Lord, Bless!

READER: May He, Who rose from the dead,, Christ our True God, through the Prayers of our Holy Fathers, through the Prayers of the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, by the Power of the Precious and Life-Creating Cross, through the protection of the Bodiless Powers of Heaven, through the prayers of the Holy Glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John, through the prayers of the holy glorious and all-laudable Apostles, through the Prayers of all the North American Saints, through the prayers of ________________ the patron of this Holy Temple, through the prayers of the Venerable Basil the Confessor, Companion of the Venerable Procopius at Decapolis; and the Blessed Nikolai, Fool-for-Christ at Pskov, whom we commemorate today; of the holy and righteous Ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna, and of all the saints, have mercy on us and save us.

(The faithful now come up and venerate the Precious Cross and Icons in our Icon Corner.)

READER: Through the Prayers of our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us.

CHOIR: Amen. Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy.
SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON
The Sunday after the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee is the Sunday of the Prodigal Son which is the next Sunday in the preparation for Great Lent. This parable of God's forgiveness calls us to come to ourselves as did the prodigal son, to see ourselves as being "in a far country" far from the Father's house,
and to make the journey of return to God. We are given every assurance by the Master that our heavenly Father will receive us with joy and gladness. We must only "arise and go," confessing our self-inflicted and sinful separation from that "home" where we truly belong (Luke 15:11-24).

After the Polyeleion at Matins, we first hear the lenten hymn "By the Waters of Babylon." It will be sung for the next two Sundays before Lent begins, and it serves to reinforce the theme of exile in today's Gospel.

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The second preparatory Sunday of Great Lent is termed the "Sunday of the Prodigal Son." In the touching parable of the Prodigal Son read during Liturgy, the Holy Church teaches us to rely on the mercy of God, provided we have sincerely repented of our sins. On this Sunday and the succeeding two Sundays, during the Polyeleos at the All-night Vigil, Psalm 136 is chanted: By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and we wept when we remembered Sion... This psalm describes the suffering of the Jews during the Babylonian captivity and their longing for their fatherland. The words of this psalm teach us about our spiritual captivity, the captivity to sin, and that we should aspire towards our spiritual fatherland, the Heavenly Kingdom.

The final words of this psalm scandalize many with reference to Blessed shall be he who shall seize and dash thine infants (those of the Babylonians) against the rock! Of course, the literal meaning of these words is brutal and unacceptable for the Christian, for the Lord Himself taught us to love and bless our enemies and to worship God in spirit and truth. These words gain a pure and lofty significance with a Christian and spiritual nature, for they mean, "Blessed is he who has a firm resolve to break, on the rock of faith, the newly forming evil thoughts and desires (as it were in their infant state) before they mature into evil deeds and habits."

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THE PRODIGAL SON

Today's Gospel reading reminds us that we must repent before we can hope of returning to the Father. "I have recklessly forgotten Thy glory, O Father, and among sinners I have scattered the riches Thou gave me. And now I cry to Thee as the Prodigal: I have sinned before Thee, O merciful Father; receive me a penitent and make me as one of Thy hired servants." (Today's Kontakion)

We also learn from the Gospel that no matter how great our sins are when we come to our senses and repent, God the Father will welcome us and forgive us.

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Sunday of the Prodigal Son - Today - Luke 15:11-32

The Prodigal took his inheritance early, wasted it, and then found himself a non-person in a foreign land. He returned to his father and home, hoping to be at least admitted as a servant, instead, his father welcomed him and returned him to his former position as a beloved son. Likewise, God does not simply restore a repentant sinner to the grace he might have possessed before sinning. He bestows on him the greatest grace he could receive.
As we proceed on the path to Great Lent, we are also called to return to God in repentance, and God will accept us as His beloved children.

NEXT SUNDAY: The Sunday of the Last Judgment (Meatfare Sunday)

COMMENTARY ON THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

The parable of the prodigal son is known so well that some of its phrases have passed into ordinary spoken language. We all remember book illustrations relating to it from our childhood. Christ's parable of the prodigal son replies to the reproaches of the Pharisees that "He receiveth sinners, and eateth with them" (Luke 15:2). Christ forgives them and calls sinners to repentance, saying "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:10). All three of these parables-the good shepherd, the lost sheep, and the prodigal son, stress forgiveness in the final time, are found in chapter 15 of the Gospel according to Luke.

This parable is inexhaustible; its themes, too many to count. Every man who studies it with reverence, finds consolation for his anxiety about his own soul.

The first theme of the parable is history - God's chosen people and the pagan nations. The elder son in the parable could be Israel, and the younger son, the pagans. According to Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky, this parable may summarize the Old Testament period, when men committed the original sin and withdrew from God. "The Father grieves over the departure of the beloved son. But, not infringing upon his filial dignity and filial freedom, He waits until the son himself, on having come to know all the bitterness of evil, and having remembered his past life in the Father's home, begins to yearn for this home and opens his heart to the Father's love. Thus it was with the human race."

The second theme is guilt. The parable of the prodigal son is read at the Liturgy on the third preparatory Sunday before Great Lent, when the faithful prepare to cleanse themselves from sin through the endeavor [podvig] of repentance.

Its third theme is repentance: the gradual, inner process of the sinner's turning towards full repentance, which calls for awareness of his fall, his sincere remorse, and his humble conversion of spirit toward the Heavenly Father.

Its fourth theme is the Church and her Liturgy. According to the Synaxarion for the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, the best robe, in which the father arrays his son who has returned, is the Mystery of Baptism; the ring and seal of the Holy Spirit is the Mystery of Chrismation; the feast with the eating of the fatted calf is the Eucharist, the Mystery of Communion. The music and dancing are symbols of the Church celebration of her restored fullness and oneness.

The fifth theme is the Savior Himself, Who appears as the Eucharistic slaughtered calf, referred to in Scripture as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

The elder son represents envy, legalism and need for mutual, brotherly forgiveness. The younger, prodigal son is all fallen mankind as well as each individual sinner. His portion of goods, that is, the younger son's share of the property, are God's gifts to each man. According to Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, these are "the mind and heart, and especially the grace of the Holy Spirit, given to each Christian. The demand made to the father for the portion of goods falling to the son in order to use it arbitrarily is the striving of man to throw submissiveness to God off from himself and to follow his own thoughts and desires. The father's consent to hand over the property depicts the absolute authority with which God has honored man in the use of God's gifts."

Having taken his portion, the younger son departs to a far country, a foreign place of estrangement from God. There he stops thinking of his father and "lives riotously," in a life of sin that alienates him further from the Creator. He quickly squanders his property, his share of God's gifts of mind, heart, and body. His poverty is spiritual desolation. Such a man does not really control what brings him pleasure. It controls
him. This is why Apostle Paul warns Christians: "I will not be brought under the power of any [thing]" (1 Corinthians 6:12).

One Church thinker has written: "This far country, this foreign land reveals to us the profound essence of our life, of our condition. Only after having understood this, can we begin the return to real life. He, who has not felt this at least once in his life, who has never realized that he is spiritually in a foreign land, isolated, exiled, will not understand the essence of Christianity. And he, who is completely "at home" in this world, who has not experienced a yearning for another reality, will not comprehend what repentance and remorse are . . . Remorse and repentance are born out of the experience of alienation from God, from the joy of communion with Him . . . It necessarily includes in itself the profound desire to come back, to return, to find anew the lost home."

Before Great Lent, beginning with the Sunday of the prodigal son, the Church chants the psalm "By the waters of Babylon," to remind us of the captivity of the Jews in that far country. This same captivity in sin alienates the Christian from God. But this psalm likewise speaks of repentance, love, and return to the father's home.

Having lost his inheritance, the younger son begins to hunger. To survive, he herds pigs as a swineherd. And he would gladly eat the swine's food-"with the husks," but no one would give him any. A saving thought awakens in him: "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!"

The prodigal son could recall this fact because he had not dissipated his one remaining gift--memory of his father and his home, which amounts to his conscience (God's voice within us). And here, conscience life returns and he understands his terrible situation. Resolve comes to him, to forsake his sins and to repent his offences to the Lord. Finally, his humility, repentance, and awareness of his unworthiness bring the sinner back to the father.

When God allows calamities to sinners, He brings them to their senses. They are God's call to repentance. Bishop Theophan the Recluse compares the typical sinner to a man in a deep sleep. In man's turning to God, the recluse finds three psychological moments that match the parable: (1) awakening from the sleep of sin (Luke 15:17); (2) the ripening of resolve to forsake sin and to dedicate himself to pleasing God (Luke 15:17-21); and (3) investing the sinner with power in the mysteries of repentance and communion.

The vivid parable image of this father of two sons stands for the Heavenly Father. The Father is the primary allegory of the parable, Whose goodness exceeds all human concepts, in His love for the sinner and His joy when the prodigal son's returns to Him. The Gospel says to us, "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him." The waiting father has looked every day to see whether his son were returning. When He sees him, He has compassion, and runs and falls on his neck, and kisses him. The son starts his confession, but the father does not let him finish. The Father has already forgiven and forgotten everything, and he receives the dissolute and starving swineherd as a beloved son. The father does not require proofs of his son's repentance, because he sees that his son has overcome shame and fear to return home. He commands his servants to give him the best robe, shoes, and a ring on his hand. The ring is God's gift to the forgiven sinner, the gift of God's Grace. According to Blessed Theophilact, the ring restores the sinner's marriage to the earthly Church and the Church in Heaven.

Words cannot convey the fullness of God's love for fallen sinners. Perhaps Apostle Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians has it best: "Charity suffereth long and is kind . . . charity vaunteth not itself, . . . is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Because every sin is against love, repentance can be real only before God, the face of Perfect Love, for "God is love" (1 John 4:8).

The Father's joy is there because "my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." The prodigal son was spiritually dead when he was living without God, and he came back to spiritual life by
returning to life in God. Sacred Scripture often represents return to God as a resurrection from the dead (cf. Romans 6:13, Matthew 8:22, Revelation 3:1, Ephesians 2:1).

The elder son of the parable is also problematic. The return of his younger brother and his reconciliation to the father displeased the elder son. Here is how the parable sets it forth:

"Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf."

The elder son, Jesus Christ implies, is the Pharisee or Scribe whose legalism blocks him from coming to the Father. The elder son is all of us. The elder son was not much at fault until his brother returned and provoked the terrible sin of envy, which had led to the first murder and to the later murder of the Savior Himself. In the house of the Father (an image of the Church) angels feel joy and exultation over one sinner that repents, but this joy is sealed off from the elder son. The father invites the elder son to enter this joy, but he prefers to calculate legal considerations and contracts. Such cold, juridical attitudes prevail wherever love has dried up. The elder son does not really value his father's gifts. His soul holds a void more fearful than his brother's before repentance. The elder son has choked his conscience.

At some time, we all behave like the sons of the compassionate father. By our sins, we all alienate ourselves from His love. The service for the Sunday of the Prodigal Son describes our alienation from God: "I have wasted the riches which the Father gave me; I have spent them all and now am destitute, dwelling in the land of evil citizens." The prodigal son was in that state until the Gospel parable says, "he came to himself."

What does "he came to himself" mean? One Holy Father says that our salvation begins in self-knowledge. We may argue that self-knowledge is a cumulative lifetime pursuit, toward which a man always strives. But the Holy Fathers would say that until you have come to know who you are; until you have sensed the image of God in yourself; until you, living amidst earthly citizens, have felt that you are a citizen of heaven and have been enslaved to "foreign citizens"; until you, amid the filth of your soul, have come to know the image of God in yourself - until then you have not entered on the path of salvation at all. Salvation begins when you come to know your own divine nature, as the prodigal son did. In one instant he saw that he was a slave to sin in a foreign land without genuine life. After a such self-recognition, a man may contrast himself with God's image in him, however bruised and calloused by habitual sin. Then a man begins to thirst for regeneration from sin and conversion back to being God's image. Conversion may take a great change in perspective. A monk came to Venerable Antony and began to ask that he forgive and have mercy on him. Antony replied to him: "Neither I, nor God will have mercy on thee, if thou wilt not have mercy on thyself." This rebuff from Saint Antony may seem strange to us. How is this so? Saint Antony asks us to understand that each of us must first discover the image of God in himself. Each of us must say "Have mercy on my inner man who, though brutalized by sin, possesses the image of God; until I myself have mercy on God's creation in myself; until in my conscience I have mercy on myself, who am sinful, defiled, and prodigal, until I take pity on my immortal soul - until then, God also will not have mercy on me. Until then, my entreaty will be in vain."

Patristic experience teaches that our requests for mercy will be in vain until we must sense in ourselves the image of God, the remnants of Divine beauty in us although distorted. The prodigal son saw how badly he was living and how well his father's servants lived. At that point, he had mercy on himself, and so went to God to beg for mercy from Him. When we have mercy on ourselves and feel the contrast between
ourselves in creation and ourselves in life, then we too can follow the path of the prodigal son toward God and can beg for mercy. Renewal of the image of God in ourselves is conversion, our sole business on earth. For us to keep God's creation - the image "of God's ineffable Glory" - constantly before our eyes, means we have more mercy on ourselves. We shall perceive the joy of life in God while we endure. Then we shall come to God and shall beg Him, as the prodigal son: "make me as one of Thy hired servants." And we shall be received by God.
GOD WILL TAKE US BACK

The Lord spoke 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 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 the son 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 comes, 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.”

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. What does being a son mean? What is required in order to be defined as a son of someone?

2. What does the younger son think it means? The older son?

3. Is the younger son still a son once he leaves his father’s land? Why or why not?

4. What does the father’s response when the son returns, “He was dead,” tell us about this question?

5. What does this suggest about being sons of God? Are we sons of God if we stop serving him?

6. What happens when the son returns to his father? Is he a slave or a son again?

7. What does this suggest about what God does for us when we return to his service?
The Sunday of the Prodigal Son

“Let the little children come to me, and do not for bid them, for to such is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

The Joy of the Lord

Have you ever been so excited to get somewhere that you ran on your way? Imagine taking a walk to the playground and then taking off running when you saw the park. Sometimes it’s just too hard to wait! Today we hear the beautiful story of the Prodigal Son. We hear how the young man asks his father for his money. We hear how he wastes all that money. We hear how he feels awful about it, and we hear how he comes back to ask for his father’s forgiveness. Then we hear how happy his father is to see his son again!

Do you know just how excited his father is? The Bible says, “But while he was still far away, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and hugged him and kissed him.” Do you see how excited and happy his father was to see his son? He ran to meet him! He just couldn’t wait.

Now we know this story is really a story about how God loves us, His children, too! When we make mistakes, we can always turn back to our Lord. We can always change the way we’re acting or break the bad habits we have. We can turn back to the Lord, and we can ask for our Father’s forgiveness. Then, He will be like the father in the Prodigal Son story today. He will meet us and welcome us back. God will have that same joy too!

The Pre-Lenten Sundays

The next Sunday in the preparation for Great Lent is the Sunday of the Prodigal Son. Hearing the parable of Christ about God’s loving forgiveness, we are called to “come to ourselves” as did the prodigal son, to see ourselves as being “in a far country” far from the Father’s house, and to make the movement of return to God. We are given every assurance by the Master that the Father will receive us with joy and gladness. We must only “arise and go,” confessing our selfinflicted and sinful separation from that “home” where we truly belong (Lk 15.11–24).
The next Sunday is called Meatfare Sunday since it is officially the last day before Easter for eating meat. It commemorates Christ’s parable of the Last Judgment (Mt 25.31–46). We are reminded this day that it is not enough for us to see Jesus, to see ourselves as we are, and to come home to God as his prodigal sons. We must also be his sons by following Christ, his only-begotten divine Son, and by seeing Christ in every man and by serving Christ through them. Our salvation and final judgment will depend upon our deeds, not merely on our intentions or even on the mercies of God devoid of our own personal cooperation and obedience.

... for I was hungry and you gave Me food, I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, I was a stranger and you took Me in, I was naked and you clothed Me, I was sick and in prison and you visited Me. For truly I say to you, if you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to Me (Mt 25).

We are saved not merely by prayer and fasting, not by “religious exercises” alone. We are saved by serving Christ through his people, the goal toward which all piety and prayer is ultimately directed.

Finally, on the eve of Great Lent, the day called Cheesefare Sunday and Forgiveness Sunday, we sing of Adam’s exile from paradise. We identify ourselves with Adam, lamenting our loss of the beauty, dignity and delight of our original creation, mourning our corruption in sin. We also hear on this day the Lord’s teaching about fasting and forgiveness, and we enter the season of the fast forgiving one another so that God will forgive us.

*If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses* (Mt 6.14–18).
OUR JOURNEY TO PASCHA! 2021

SUNDAYS

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<th>Date</th>
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<td><strong>February 21st</strong></td>
<td><strong>TRIODION WEEKS</strong></td>
<td><strong>PUBLICAN AND THE PHARISEE</strong></td>
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<td><strong>FEBRUARY 28th</strong></td>
<td><strong>THE PRODIGAL SON RETURNS!</strong></td>
<td><strong>SCHEDULE A CONFESSION. EVERY MORNING SAY, “TODAY I WILL BE HUMBLE.”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>MEATFARE</strong></td>
<td><strong>THE LAST JUDGEMENT</strong></td>
<td><strong>CHRIST IS RETURNING FROM THE EAST AND WE WAIT FOR HIM!</strong></td>
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<td><strong>MARCH 7th</strong></td>
<td><strong>ADAM AND EVE ARE CAST FROM PARADISE!</strong></td>
<td><strong>ASK EACH OTHER FOR FORGIVENESS EACH EVENING THIS WEEK BEFORE BED.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>MARCH 14th</strong></td>
<td><strong>FAREWELL TO CHEESE TODAY</strong></td>
<td><strong>BRING AN ICON TO CHURCH FOR A PROCESSION.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>MARCH 21st</strong></td>
<td><strong>GREAT LENT BEGINS WITH FORGIVENESS VESPERS</strong></td>
<td><strong>BRING A PRAYER ROPE TO BE BLESSED TODAY! USE IT AND PRAY THE JESUS PRAYER EACH DAY THIS WEEK.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>MARCH 28th</strong></td>
<td><strong>SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY</strong></td>
<td><strong>WEAR YOUR CROSS TO CHURCH AND KISS THE CROSS EACH MORNING WITH A BOWL!</strong></td>
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<td><strong>APRIL 4th</strong></td>
<td><strong>ST JOHN OF THE LADDER</strong></td>
<td><strong>ASK ST. JOHN TO HELP YOU REACH PARADISE WITH THE SIGN OF THE CROSS!</strong></td>
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<td><strong>APRIL 11th</strong></td>
<td><strong>VENERATION OF THE HOLY CROSS</strong></td>
<td><strong>ASK THE THEOTOKOS TO OFFER YOU AND THE WORLD PURE THOUGHTS AND IDEAS THIS WEEK.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>APRIL 18th</strong></td>
<td><strong>ST MARY OF EGYPT</strong></td>
<td><strong>PLACE YOUR PALM BRANCHES AND PUSSEYWILLOWS BEHIND AN ICON AT HOME AND IN YOUR CAR!</strong></td>
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<td><strong>APRIL 25th</strong></td>
<td><strong>FLOREY (PALM) SUNDAY</strong></td>
<td><strong>REFRAIN FROM TV, INTERNET &amp; PHONES TO HONOR CHRIST’S DEATH.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>APRIL 30th</strong></td>
<td><strong>ENTRY OF OUR LORD INTO JERUSALEM</strong></td>
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<td><strong>MAY 2nd</strong></td>
<td><strong>ROYAL HOURS AND VESPERS SCHEDULE</strong></td>
<td><strong>GREAT AND HOLY FRIDAY</strong></td>
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<td><strong>NO FASTING</strong></td>
<td><strong>HOLY PASCHAI (CHRIST IS RISEN!)</strong></td>
<td><strong>GREET EVERYONE WITH “CHRIST IS RISEN!” SAY IT BEFORE GOOD MORNING AND GOODNIGHT!</strong></td>
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Orthodox Christian Stewardship is a way of life, which acknowledges accountability, reverence, and responsibility before God. A primary goal of Stewardship is to promote spiritual growth and strengthen faith. Becoming a Steward begins when we believe in God, to whom we give our love, loyalty and trust and act on those beliefs. As Stewards, we affirm that every aspect of our lives comes as a gift from Him. Stewardship calls on the faithful to cheerfully offer back to God a portion of the gifts with which they have been blessed. Orthodox Christian Stewardship is a way of life, which acknowledges accountability, reverence, and responsibility before God by teaching and giving examples of a virtuous life to all (St. John Chrysostom). A primary goal of Stewardship is to strengthen our understanding of the teachings and dogmas of The Orthodox Faith through supporting the work of The Church. This can be found in The Divine Services as reiterated by St. John of San Francisco:” The Divine Services in their composition contain all the fullness of the dogmatic teaching of the Church and set forth the path of salvation.”

Fulfilling our responsibility of continual learning begins when we believe in God, to whom we give our love, loyalty and trust and act on those beliefs. Through being Stewards of the Gospel and of The Orthodox Church, Education calls on the faithful to cheerfully receive instruction given to the Church by Our Lord, Holy Scripture, The Divine Services, and The Holy Fathers of the Church. Through Orthodox Christian Stewardship, The Church promotes spiritual growth and strengthened faith and calls on all of us to bring the faith and love of Our Lord to every aspect of our lives as gifts from Him through our time, talents, and treasures. During this year, let us come together as a Diocesan Family and recommit ourselves to both spiritual growth of our Life in Christ as well as through Orthodox Christian Stewardship by attending the Divine Services, attending the many opportunities of Education for both Adults and Children through Parish Education, gatherings, and fellowship and by supporting our Parishes and Diocese in the many endeavors through which, by the Grace of God, we will bring the light and love of Our Lord to all!

LET ALL THAT YOU DO BE DONE IN LOVE. 1 Cor.16:14

YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND. Matt. 22:37

YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. Matt. 22:39

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES AND PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU. Matt. 5:44

LOVE IS PATIENT, LOVE IS KIND, LOVE DOES NOT ENVY, LOVE DOES NOT BOAST, LOVE IS NOT PROUD, LOVE IS NOT SELFISH, LOVE IS NOT PROVOKED. 1Cor. 13:4

LOVE BEARS ALL THINGS, LOVE ALWAYS HAS FAITH, LOVE ALWAYS HAS HOPE, LOVE ENDURES ALL THINGS. LOVE NEVER FAILS! 1Cor. 13:7,8