

Luke 15:11-32 (Gospel)

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.'"

The Meeting of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the Temple Commemorated on February 2

Today the Church commemorates an important event in the earthly life of our Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 2:22-40). Forty days after His birth the God-Infant was taken to the Jerusalem Temple, the center of the nation's religious life. According to the Law of Moses (Lev. 12:2-8), a woman who gave birth to a male child was forbidden to enter the Temple of God for forty days. At the end of this time the mother came to the Temple with the child, to offer a young lamb or pigeon to the Lord as a purification sacrifice. The Most Holy Virgin, the Mother of God, had no need of purification, since she had given birth to the Source of purity and sanctity without defilement. However, she humbly fulfilled the requirements of the Law.

At this time the righteous Elder Simeon (February 3) was living in Jerusalem. It had been revealed to him that he would not die until he should behold the promised Messiah. By inspiration from above, Saint Simeon went to the Temple at the very moment when the Most Holy Theotokos and Saint Joseph had brought the Infant Jesus to fulfill the Law.

The God-Receiver Simeon took the divine Child in his arms, and giving thanks to God, he spoke the words repeated by the Church each evening at Vespers: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32). Saint Simeon said to the Most Holy Virgin: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against. Yea, a sword shall pierce through your own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:34-35).

At the Temple was the 84-year-old widow Anna the Prophetess, daughter of Phanuel (February 3), "who did not leave the temple, but served God with fasting and prayers night and day. She arrived just when Saint Simeon met the divine Child. She also gave thanks to the Lord and spoke of Him to all those who were looking for redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:37-38). In the icon of the Feast she holds a scroll which reads: "This Child has established Heaven and earth."

Before Christ was born, righteous men and women lived by faith in the promised Messiah, and awaited His coming. The Righteous Simeon and the Prophetess Anna, the last righteous people of the Old Testament, were deemed worthy to meet the Savior in the Temple.

The Feast of the Meeting of the Lord is among the most ancient feasts of the Christian Church. We have sermons on the Feast by the holy bishops Methodius of Patara (+ 312), Cyril of Jerusalem (+ 360), Gregory the Theologian (+ 389), Amphilocius of Iconium (+ 394), Gregory of Nyssa (+ 400), and John **Con't Page 8**

The Gospel: Turning things upside down

By Fr. Steven Kostoff

Yesterday, the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, we entered the season of the Triodion, that vast compilation of lenten hymnography gathered together in one book over the centuries that will guide us through the pre-lenten period, and then on through Great Lent and Holy Week, taking us to the very brink of the Paschal celebration of the Death and Resurrection of Christ.

The inspired hymnography of the Triodion interprets the Scriptures in a direct and accessible manner, in the process making it clear that each person and event from the Scriptures – Old or New Testament, positive or negative – is meant to be applied to our own lives as someone or something to emulate or avoid. The Church always treats the Scriptures as a living Word, not as a chronicle of the past or as an abstract system of belief. This form of concrete realism is indeed more challenging than a presentation of untested ideas. Be that as it may, the Triodion opens with the Sunday of the Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee [Luke 18:10-14].

In the Orthodox Church, this reading is part of the pre-lenten cycle always prescribed for the fourth Sunday before Great Lent begins. The intentions of the Lord in delivering this parable are clearly expressed in the solemn pronouncement following the parable itself: “For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted [Luke 18:14].

The pride and self-righteousness of the Pharisee – he who “exalts himself” – is rather starkly contrasted with the humility and repentance of the Publican – he who “humbles himself.” From these two examples of a revealed interior disposition, it is only the publican who is “justified” according to Christ. With a kind of “folk-wisdom” that would have resonated for his rural flock in early 20th century Serbia, Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich recasts the parable in an earthy story form that seeks to reinforce Christ’s teaching: “A man went into the forest to choose a tree from which to make roof beams. And he saw two trees, one beside the other. One was smooth and tall, but had rotted away inside, and the other was rough on the outside and ugly, *Con’t Page 9*

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Chrysostom (+ 407). Despite its early origin, this Feast was not celebrated so splendidly until the sixth century.

In 528, during the reign of Justinian, an earthquake killed many people in Antioch. Other misfortunes followed this one. In 541 a terrible plague broke out in Constantinople, carrying off several thousand people each day. During this time of widespread suffering, a solemn prayer service (Litia) for deliverance from evils was celebrated on the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord, and the plague ceased. In thanksgiving to God, the Church established a more solemn celebration of this Feast.

Church hymnographers have adorned this Feast with their hymns: Saint Andrew of Crete in the seventh century; Saint Cosmas Bishop of Maium, Saint John of Damascus, and Saint Germanus Patriarch of Constantinople in the eighth century; and Saint Joseph, Archbishop of Thessalonica in the ninth century.

On this day we also commemorate the icon of the Most Holy Theotokos known as “the Softening of Evil Hearts” or “Simeon’s Prophecy.” The Mother of God is depicted without Her Child, with seven swords piercing her breast: three from the left side, three from the right, and one from below. A similar icon, “Of the Seven Swords” (August 13) shows three swords on the left side and four from the right. The icon “Simeon’s Prophecy” symbolizes the fulfillment of the prophecy of the righteous Elder Simeon: “a sword shall pierce through your own soul” (Luke 2:35).

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THE GREATER CLEVELAND COUNCIL OF ORTHODOX CLERGY

Dear Friends,

The Orthodox Christian community of Greater Cleveland and Lorain will soon honor the Sunday of Orthodoxy. A celebration will take place on Sunday, February 25, 5:00 PM at the Saints Constantine & Helen Cathedral, 3352 Mayfield Road, Cleveland Heights. Paul Finley, the local director of St. Herman’s FOCUS Cleveland, will preach the homily.

The Greater Cleveland Council of Orthodox Clergy has assumed the responsibility of soliciting donations to underwrite the celebration and to support the Orthodox ministries that serve our area. We ask you to contribute to this effort by making a donation to the GCCOC. In return you will be listed as a “Patron” in the handout at the Pan Orthodox Vespers, and the donations collected will be used to support local Orthodox charities.

Please make your check payable to the greater Cleveland Council of Orthodox Clergy or “GCCOC” and return it to your priest no later than February 19.

Yours truly,

Fr. Stephan J. Callos

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Fr. Steven Con't

but its core was healthy. The man sighed, and said to himself: 'What use is this smooth, tall tree to me if it is rotten inside and useless for beams? The other one, even if it is rough and ugly, is at least healthy on the inside and so, if I put a bit more effort into it, I can use it for roof-beams for my house.' And, without thinking any more about it, he chose that tree."

And just to be certain, Bishop Nikolai drives home the moral point in the following conclusion: "So will God choose between two men for His house, and will choose, not the one who appears outwardly righteous, but the one whose heart is filled with God's healthy righteousness."

The Pharisee acted according to the Law, keeping himself free externally from sin, fasting twice a week and paying a tithe on all that he had. How many parish priests secretly wish that that was precisely how their parishioners would live and act! (For the moment we will not investigate just how parishioners would wish their priests to act). In fact, conventional wisdom would lead one to expect that in such a parable, the Pharisee would be praised precisely for his exact piety, while and the publican would serve as a stark reminder of how not to live. However, Christ turns all of this conventional wisdom "upside down," for it is the interior orientation of the heart that Christ is most concerned with, and it is here that the Pharisee twisted righteousness into self-righteousness, which is basically a form of idolatry – that of the "self." Do any of us escape that self-destructive trap? If not, then better to admit it, as Saint John Chrysostom reminds us: "It is evil to sin, though here help can be given; but to sin, and not to admit it – there is no help here."

The humility of the publican is perhaps best expressed in a series of short descriptions – unwillingness to look up towards heaven, the beating of the breast, the plaintive cry, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner" – rather than an intellectually constructed set of abstract notions. Why is it so hard to be humble? Perhaps because it frightens us. But what would the source of this fear possibly be? We fear being taken advantage of, of being used by others, of losing ground in our struggle to not only get ahead, but to survive in a harsh world. We may pay lip-service to humility as Christians, but we act as if deep down we "know better." Humility is hardly a recommended survival tactic! I would rather doubt that humility is the "stuff" of self-help literature. This silent and implicit rejection of the virtue of humility makes a certain amount of sense if we equate humility – wrongfully, I am certain – with weakness, timidity, passivity, fear of conflict, etc. So we usually practice a safe form of humility when that will keep us in our "comfort zone." But do we know better? Can we actually doubt the strength of a universally acclaimed Christian virtue without having experienced it ourselves? Certainly we recognize the truth that we literally depend upon the

humility of Christ for the gift of salvation! We praise and glorify Christ precisely because of His surpassing humility. Perhaps, then, if we ever made a sustained effort to be humble, we would appraise this essential virtue differently. As Saint Isaac the Syrian writes, "Until a human person achieves humility, he will receive no reward for his works. The reward is given not for the works but for the humility." And as Saint Makarios the Great notes, "A humble person never falls. Being already lower than any, where can he fall? Vanity is a great humiliation, but humility is a great exalting, honor and dignity."

The Gospel – based on the scandal of the Cross – has turned many things upside down. In God's judgment, according to Christ, the proud are humbled and the humbled are exalted. The parable of the Publican and the Pharisee sets this choice before us.

SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON

Hasten to open your fatherly arms, O Lord, for I have foolishly wasted my whole life. In the inexhaustible treasury of your mercy, O Savior, do not despise the poverty of my heart. I cry to You, O Lord, full of compunction: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. Matins Sessional Hymn, Tone 1

REFLECTION ON SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON

It is me, O Lord. I am the Prodigal.

O Lord, Jesus Christ, your story pierces my heart, for you have perfectly described my own experience of life. Your Word is truly a sword that knows its mark, and it has found its place. It is me, O Lord, I am the Prodigal. I have wasted so much of my time, so many of your gifts. I have squandered your riches unworthily.

But I take such comfort, that this story is not only about me. Before me, in your Word, I see the Father. Rather, the Father sees me from "afar off". He is there waiting for my return, hoping for my repentance, lovingly anticipating a wonderful reconciliation. If I have disappointed Him by my foolish choices in the past, I will not disappoint Him today. I will return to my Father and my God. I will return to his embrace and ask forgiveness. I will repent.

I remember a story from the life of Abba Moses: A brother asked the old man, "Here is a man who beats his servant because of a fault he has *Con't Page 10*

Reflection on Prodigal Son Con't

Committed; what the servant say?" The old man said, "If the servant is good, he should say, 'Forgive me, for I have sinned'." The brother said, "Nothing else"? The old man said, "No, for from the moment he takes upon himself the responsibility for the affair and says, 'I have sinned', immediately his master will have mercy on him."

It is me, O Lord, I am the Prodigal. Grant me also a true spirit of repentance. Make me your true servant who accepts responsibility for my failings, and grant me the courage to face you and say, "Forgive me, for I have sinned." Today, let me know your love; let me experience your holy embrace. Set the feast and prepare the banquet table. Grant that by my reception today of your Holy Mysteries, my repentance will be made perfect, and our reconciliation complete.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

*Why does Christ our true God, through our Church's readings, offer this story of the Prodigal Son at this time before the Great Fast?

*Do I appreciate the real meaning of responsible repentance?

*What demands will my sincere repentance ask of me, as I observe this Pre-Lenten Sunday?

LETTER OF THANKS RECEIVED

Fr. Andrew Bartek
Rector, Holy Assumption Orthodox Church
110 East Main Street
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Thank you so much for the very generous donation that your parish has made to Bistro 163! We appreciate your commitment to open your hearts to help those in need in our community. Your contribution will be used to provide meals to those in our county who cannot afford to eat in a restaurant that serves fresh, nutritious food.

Bistro 163 is an ecumenical food ministry that seeks to benefit the entire Ottawa County community, both those in need of help, and those with help to give. It is our mission to build community by providing a place where all neighbors eat and come together as ONE.

We are truly grateful for the support, patronage, and friendship of your church!

Note: Just a reminder we gave \$500

GOD BLESS ALL OF YOU!

SIGN-UP SHEET FOR SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY

There is a sign-up sheet to go to the Sunday of Orthodoxy in Cleveland Heights. On Sunday, Feb. 25. We will leave at 3:00pm & arrive back around 8:30pm. As of Feb. 1 we have 5 people signed up.

FEBRUARY CELEBRATIONS

BIRTHDAY	NAME DAY	ANNIVERSARY
4- Nathaniel Bremer 5- Christi Soski 6- Alex Zarynow 10- Fr. Eli Bremer 12- Fr. James Gleason 14- Sandy Martin 16- David Mazurik 22- Wayne Golob 24- Sonya Rose 26- Bill Glovinsky 26- Pani Bernadette Zarynow	NONE THIS MONTH	2-10-1973 Consecration of Retired Metro. Herman 2-14-2004 Consecration of the Most Blessed Tikhon 14- Jim & Rita Mazur 8- Joe & Sonya Rose 2-21-2014 His Grace Bishop David of Alaska

If there are those names to be added or removed, please contact Fr. Andrew. He would like to list all members of your family Orthodox and non-Orthodox.