

Metro Tikhon con't from Previous Pg

on his neck, and kissed him. The father is not proud, but himself leaves his own house and runs to meet his son. And the father does not cover the son with reproaches saying: "I hope that now you realize your mistake." Nor does the father demand that the son repay him in anyway, but offers him even more of his blessings by putting the best robe on him, a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet, and calling for a festal celebration.

We should note that, just as at the beginning of the parable, the father is silent, which shows that even now, he is leaving his son free, and his love for his son is expressed, not in his words, but in his action of speaking to the servants and calling for a great feast. The Holy Fathers have seen in this feast and image of the Holy and Divine Liturgy, through which we, who are prodigals in so many ways, can return with peace and with joy to the house of the Father and participate in his very life. But in order to do this, we must freely come to that banquet, we must recognize that we are prodigal sons, and in that recognition, in that repentance which takes place in our heart, we will draw closer to God.

This is the opposite of what took place with the elder son who was angry because of the way the father was treating the wayward son. The older son does not realize that he himself is a prodigal son, even though he physically remained all this time with his father. But his heart is darkened to this reality and, unlike the younger son, he is angry and will not go in. And this show that, even though he never left the father's house, the older son was never really there. He cannot go into his father's house to rejoice over the return of his own brother, and even justifies himself before the father by boasting about what he perceives to be his own faithfulness and virtue. He says to the Father, "I have never transgressed your commandment" but his actions reveal that he is not humble and that, in fact, he has transgressed his Father commandment, not by doing anything wrong, but by not receiving the father's love and by not seeing that this love extends to both of his sons equally. And so the hell inside his heart is greater than the hell that the younger son endured in the foreign land.

So, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, let us learn from today's parable, but let us not only learn, but let us be moved by it.

For we are all prodigals who, in one way or another, have wasted the great gifts that our Lord has given us. We have wasted them, but our Lord has not cast us off for that reason; we have wasted them, and our own actions, and thoughts, and passions, have led us to a far away land of darkness and emptiness. And yet, in spite of this, our Heavenly Father continues to love us and his great love protects us, and draws us back to him. If we remain in our passions and our sins, in our laziness and in our judgment of others, then we will also remain, by our own choice and not by God's punishment, in that land of darkness and emptiness. But if we, like the prodigal son, come to our senses, if we offer sincere and humble repentance which is reflected in the life that we lead, then we will partake of the banquet of immortality, we will truly be united with Christ, and he will continue to offer us his precious Body and Blood, which, as we pray in the liturgy, is divided yet not disunited, which sanctifies all those who partake thereof.

May this gift be our by the grace and mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who is glorified with His eternal Father and the most holy, good and life-giving Spirit, both now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Matthew 6:14-21 (Gospel)

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Sunday of Cheesefare: Expulsion of Adam from Paradise

Commemorated on March 6

As we begin the Great Fast, the Church reminds us of Adam's expulsion from Paradise. God commanded Adam to fast (Gen. 2:16), but he did not obey. Because of their disobedience, Adam and Eve were cast out of Eden and lost the life of blessedness, knowledge of God, and communion with Him, for which they were created. Both they and their descendents became heirs of death and corruption.

Let us consider the benefits of fasting, the consequences of disobedience, and recall our fallen state. Today we are invited to cleanse ourselves of evil through fasting and obedience to God. Our fasting should not be a negative thing, a mere abstention from certain foods. It is an opportunity to free ourselves from the sinful desires and urges of our fallen nature, and to nourish our souls with prayer, repentance, to participate in church services, and partake of the life-giving Mysteries of Christ.

At Forgiveness Vespers we sing: "Let us begin the time of fasting in light, preparing ourselves for spiritual efforts. Let us purify our soul, let us purify our body. As we abstain from food, let us abstain from all passion and enjoy the virtues of the spirit..."

Romans 13:11-14:4 (Epistle)

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

Uncovering of the Precious Cross and the Precious Nails by Empress Saint Helen in Jerusalem Commemorated on March 6

The Holy Empress Helen uncovered the Precious Cross and Nails of the Lord at Jerusalem in 326.

At the beginning of the reign of Saint Constantine the Great (306-337), the first Roman emperor to recognize Christianity, he and his pious mother Saint Helen decided to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. They also planned to build a church on the site of the Lord's suffering and Resurrection, in order to reconsecrate and purify the places connected with the Savior's death and Resurrection from the foul taint of paganism.

The empress Helen journeyed to Jerusalem with a large quantity of gold. Saint Constantine wrote a letter to Patriarch Macarius I (313-323), requesting him to assist her in every possible way with her task of the restoring the Christian holy places.

After her arrival in Jerusalem, the holy empress Helen began to destroy all the pagan temples and reconsecrate the places which had been defiled by the pagans.

In her quest for the Life-Creating Cross, she questioned several Christians and Jews, but for a long time her search remained unsuccessful. Finally, an elderly Hebrew named Jude told her that the Cross was buried beneath the temple of Venus. Saint Helen ordered that the pagan temple be demolished, and for the site to be excavated. Soon they found Golgotha and the Lord's Sepulchre. Not far from the spot were three crosses, a board with the inscription written by Pilate (John 19:19), and four nails which had pierced the Lord's Body.

Now the task was to determine on which of the three crosses the Savior had been crucified. Patriarch Macarius saw a dead person being carried to his grave, then he ordered that the dead man be placed upon each cross in turn. When the corpse was placed on the Cross of Christ, he was immediately restored to life. After seeing the raising of the dead man, everyone was convinced that the Life-Creating Cross had been found. With great joy the empress Helen and Patriarch Macarius lifted the Life-Creating Cross and displayed it to all the people standing about.