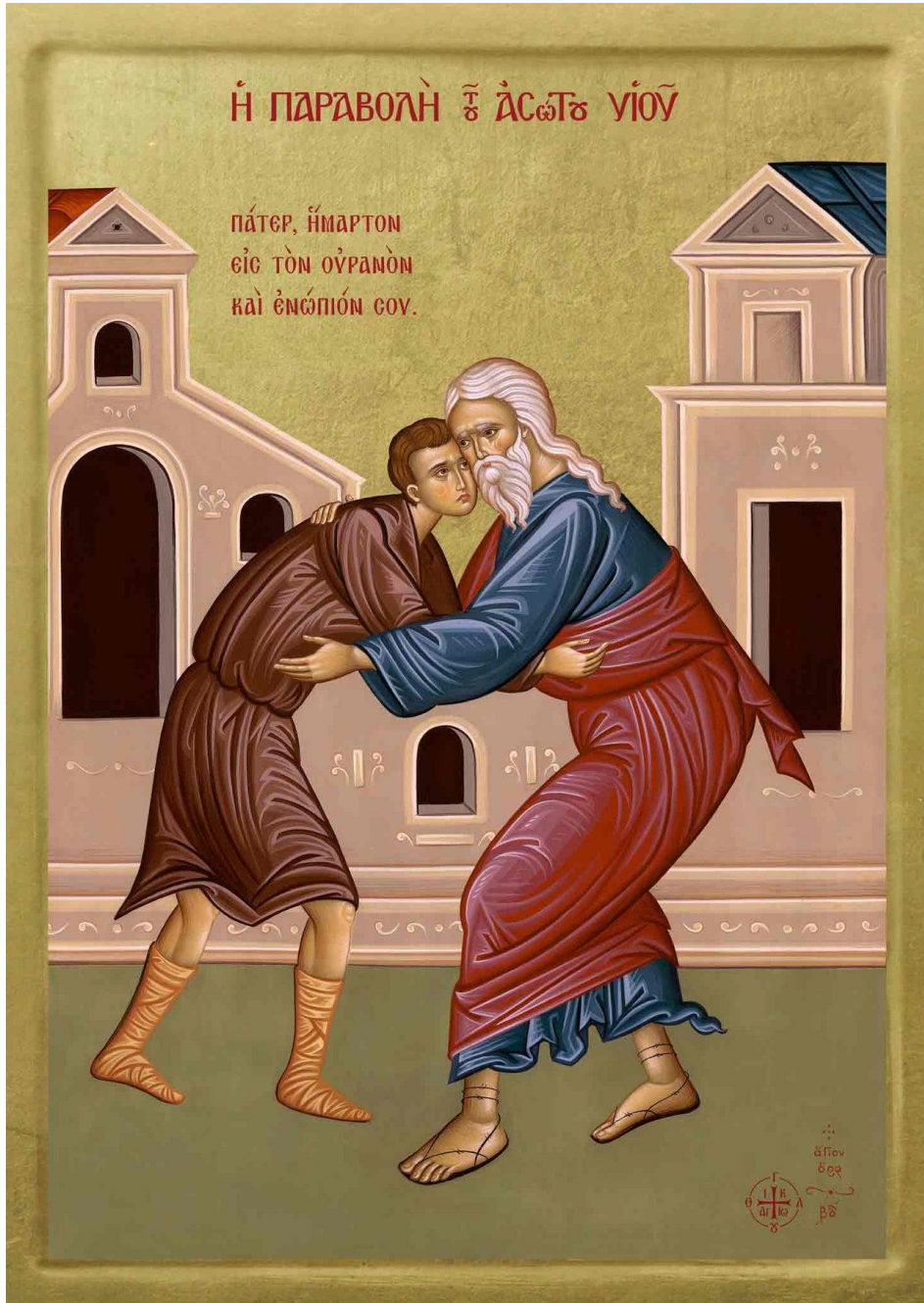


**St Ignatios of Antioch
Melkite Greek Catholic Church
1003 Merry Street
Augusta, Georgia 30904
706 364-6219**



Sunday of the Prodigal Son

February 5, 2023

Sunday of the Prodigal Son



Looking for the Way Home (Luke 15:11-32)

ON THE FIRST FEW SUNDAYS of the Triodion Psalm 137 is chanted before the Gospel at Orthros. Describing the plight of Jewish exiles in the seventh century BC, it begins with this verse: *“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion.”*

When the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem in 597 BC they deported the defeated Jewish king along with nobles and important craftsmen to Babylon. In response to successive revolts the Babylonians destroyed the temple and deported even more people.

The forced exile ended in 538 BC after the fall of Babylon to the Persian king Cyrus the Great, who gave the Jews permission to return to Judea and to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem.

This theme of exile comes to the fore today as the Church asks us to consider that we too are exiles, not from the Kingdom of Judah but from the Kingdom of God. The difference is that, while the deported Jews knew that they were exiles, we are largely unaware of it or unconcerned about it. We are doing reasonably well, our lives are satisfying and we are confident that things are getting better and better every day. But the Church holds up before us this image of exile so that we may realize that we are far from home, we are not where we are meant to be. This realization is the first step in the Lenten journey to find our way back to God.

We Are the Prodigal Son

We are not told the exact age of the young man when he decides to set off on his own, but countless commentators have depicted him as an adolescent. His behavior certainly bears this out. He has the selfish impatience of youth: he wants his inheritance now, even though his father is still alive. He is more interested in what the man's money can buy than in the man himself.

In that, the young man repeats the choice made by our first parents who preferred the appetizing but forbidden fruit to continued fellowship with the One who provided it. He also images the choices we all make when we focus our attention on the fruits of creation rather than on the Creator who offers us a relationship with Himself. In any such choice we become the petulant adolescent whose first stabs at maturity always seem to require resentment of the parent if not outright rebellion.

On his own the Prodigal's newfound independence seems to lead him into slavery rather quickly. He begins living what various translations call a "wild," "reckless," "loose" "riotous" "foolish," "notorious," "dissolute," "wasteful," or "prodigal" way of life. We are left to imagine what that might have involved; we certainly know what the result was. He spent everything he had and ended up with nothing. He wanted to be independent but did not understand that being independent does not free a person from being responsible.

No well-balanced person in our world wants to be dependent on another. We often forget, however, that our desire for human self-determination cannot lead us away from God without disastrous results. We inevitably end up spiritually bankrupt and living on the pig's fodder of a Godless world.

Unlike many people, however, the Prodigal does something about his condition. First, the Prodigal saw his situation for what it was. He came to realize that he was at the bottom and things couldn't get much worse. Secondly he thought

about the home he had forsaken. Finally he made the decision and acted upon it: *“I will arise and go to my father”* (Lk 15:18). He repents.

Like the deported Jews the Prodigal came to see himself as exiled. But while the Jews had been forcibly deported to Babylon and could not return home, the Prodigal had exiled himself from his true home. He was therefore able to pick himself up and embark on the journey back. He rightly saw his need to admit his wrongdoing and express his sorrow. *“I 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’”* (Lk 15: 18-19).

Many people addicted to alcohol, drugs or other self-destructive behaviors come to the same realization when they bottom out. Their recovery process begins when they accept responsibility for their condition and seek to make amends. We may recognize the similarity of an addict to the Prodigal, but fail to see the comparison with ourselves.

All of us are far from home, perhaps not because of addiction but because of sin. The sin of Adam – seeking to live independently of God – is replicated in the lives of each of us in one way or another. Mankind wants the inheritance – all that we receive from God – but does not value a relationship with the Father. The difference is that while a recovering addict, like the Prodigal, has a clear sense of his addiction, we may be unaware of our loss because we have not hit bottom. We may not realize that being away from the Father’s house is in fact to be in exile.

The Forgiving Father and the Mercy of God

Still thinking of himself and his own needs, the son in the parable plans to plead for the lowest place in his father’s household. The young man does not know with whom he is dealing. The father does not wait for his son to apologize or beg for forgiveness. He welcomes him home with open arms and calls for a celebration. He is the image of our heavenly Father who knows when one of His children seeks forgiveness and grants it at once, without demanding any form of penance or satisfaction.

Note that the father does not go in search of his son when the lad is enjoying the wasteful life he has chosen or when he is miserable, but not yet resolved to return home. His mercy would bear fruit only when the son had come to truly desire it and so the father waits for his son to make the first move. But when the son does return, the father does not make him work for forgiveness; he gives it freely.

In this the father is unlike many of us who would want the ungrateful son to squirm before accepting him back home. We might feel justified in “teaching him a lesson,” but this is apparently not God’s way. When repentance truly touches the heart, the “lesson” has already been learned.

The Father’s extraordinary mercy is no excuse for taking advantage of Him: seeking the blessing of His house while not repenting in action as well as in words. As St Isaac the Syrian taught, “But the fact that repentance furnishes hope should not be taken by us as a means to rob ourselves of the feeling of fear, so that one might more freely and fearlessly commit sin” (Isaac the Syrian, First Collection: Homily Ten).

Proclaiming the Mercy of God

Our liturgy continually emphasizes the mercy of God. The beloved Polyeleos psalm sung so frequently in our churches at the most solemn occasions has as its refrain, “For His mercy endures forever, alleluia” The Typica psalms each proclaim the depths of God’s mercy to His People: *“He forgives all your iniquity, he heals all your diseases, he redeems your life from the pit, he crowns you with steadfast love and mercy”* (Ps 102: 3, 4).

The second psalm is even more specific: *“He brings about justice for the oppressed; he gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the strangers, he upholds the widow and the fatherless; but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin”* (Ps 146:7-9). Coincidentally it is precisely these psalms, so familiar to the faithful of our Church, which Pope Francis cited in the letter opening his “Year of Mercy” in 2015-2016.

Is it unreasonable to think that we, who continually sing of God’s mercy in our services, should not be encouraging one another to return to the Father by attending the Church’s Lenten services, by approaching the Mystery of Confession and by embracing the ideas in “The Great Fast in the Home,” available on our eparchy’s web site, www.melkite.org?

As the Lord said in the parables which precede the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15, *“I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance... Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents”* (Lk 15:7, 10).

St. Cyril of Alexandria on the Parable

“What is the object of this parable? Let us examine the occasion which led to it; in this way we shall learn the truth. The blessed Luke said a little before concerning Christ, the Savior of us all, “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Him. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’” Since the Pharisees and scribes were making an outcry on account of His gentleness and love for mankind, wickedly and impiously blaming Him for receiving and teaching people whose lives were impure, Christ set before them this present parable to show them clearly that the God of all requires even the person who is thoroughly steadfast and firm, who knows how to live in a holy manner, and has attained the highest praise for his sober conduct to be earnest in following His will, that when any are called to repentance – even if they are the most blameworthy – he must rejoice and not give way to a loveless irritation on their account.”

“For sometimes people are indignant at this, and even say, ‘This man, who has been guilty of such and such actions... has been inscribed among the sons of God, and honored with the glory of the saints!’” Such complaints come from an empty narrowness of mind, not conforming to the purpose of the universal Father. For He greatly rejoices when He sees those who were lost obtaining salvation, and raises them up again to that which they were in the beginning, giving them the garment of freedom...

“It is our duty, therefore, to conform ourselves to that which God wills: for He heals those who are sick... He seeks those who were lost; He raises as from the dead those who had suffered spiritual death. Let us also rejoice and, together with the holy angels, praise Him who is good, and the Lover of mankind.”

Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, 107

Sunday Collections

Attendance	Date	Collection
---	December 11, 2022	---
21	December 18, 2022	2,132.00
24	December 25, 2022	349.00
20	January 1, 2023	1,277.00
27	January 8, 2023	340.00
23	January 15, 2023	6,690.00
12	January 22, 2023	11.00
47	January 29, 2023	1,510.50

Divine Liturgy Intentions: For the Living:

Bishop Francois, Fr. Eugene Mitchell, Fr. James Graham, David Mangelsdorf, Brian Frank, Maria Barklage, Nookid Graham, Ali de la Vega, A Special Parish Intention, Medical Personnel and First Responders

For the Dead:

Jan Munn

Announcements

We are live-streaming on our Facebook page at the following days & times:

Friday 6:00 PM Weekday Vespers

Saturday - 6:00PM Great Vespers

Sunday – 9:00AM Orthros & 10:00AM Divine Liturgy

FR. MICHAEL will be out of town this week, attending the annual Clergy Conference in San Antonio.

HOUSE BLESSINGS! With the Feast of Theophany and the blessing of Holy Water we now begin the season of blessing homes between now and the start of Great Lent. Let Father Michael when you'd like him to come and bless your house.

PRAYER OPPORTUNITIES AROUND TOWN – Most Holy Trinity parish will be hosting a Men's Holy Hour every Friday morning from 6-7am. There will also be a coffee hour and reflection time afterwards – Men from all parishes are invited to attend

for whatever portion of the time they are available. For the Ladies – St. Joseph’s will be hosting a Women’s Holy Hour on the first Monday of each month at 7pm.

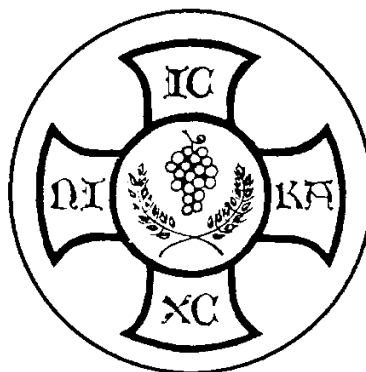
A Dating Retreat and Study Series for single Catholics! NCSC is hosting a **FREE online Dating Retreat with guest speaker Fr. Robert Spitzer (January 27 & 28)**. Over 400 single Catholics from around the world have already signed up and we’re expecting 500+. Don’t miss the opportunity to meet other like-minded singles and go deeper in your faith!

Starting the week of February 6th, NCSC will also be hosting a **6-week study series - “Relationship Ready: A Single Catholic’s Roadmap to Marriage”** that will cover topics such as the **meaning of love, communication, conflict resolution, male/female complementarity** and much more. To sign up for these programs, visit NationalCatholicSingles.com.

Connect with like-minded single Catholics

<p>At the</p> <p><i>the Dating Retreat</i></p> <p>Find what you're looking for</p> <p>January 27 & 28</p>	<p>Join us for</p> <p><i>Relationship Ready:</i></p> <p>The Single Catholic's Roadmap to Marriage</p> <p>Starting the week of February 6th</p>
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NationalCatholicSingles.com



Resurrectional Troparion

(Tone 2)



When you des - cend - ed to Death, O Im - mor - tal



Life, You put Ha-des to death by the splen - dor of



Your Di-vin - i - ty, and when You raised the dead



from be-low the earth, all the Hea-ven - ly Po-wers



cried out to You: O Gi - ver of Life, Christ our God,



glo-ry to You!

Kondakion of the Sunday of the Prodigal Son

(Tone 3)

In my foo - lish wret - ched - ness I ran a-way from
Your glo - ry, and I squan - dered wick - ed-ly
the rich-es You have gi - ven me. And so now,
like the Pro - di-gal Son, I cry out to You: I
have sinned in Your sight, Mer-ci-ful Fa - ther, re-
- ceive me now that I re - pent and make me as
one of Your hired ser-vants.

Prokimenon

Reader: May your kindness, O Lord, be upon us, for we have hoped in you!

All: May your kindness, O Lord, be upon us, for we have hoped in you!

Reader: Exult you just, in the Lord; praise from the upright is fitting.

All: May your kindness, O Lord, be upon us, for we have hoped in you!

Reader: May your kindness, O Lord, be upon us,

All: For we have hoped in you!

Readings for the Week:

Monday: 1st John 2:18-3:8

Mark 11:1-11

Tuesday: 1st John 3:9-22

Mark 14:10-42

Wed: 1st John 3:21-4:11

Mark 14:43-15:2

Thursday: 1st John 4:20-5:21

Mark 15:1-15

Friday: 2nd John 1:1-13

Mark 15:22-41

Saturday: 1st Corinthians 10:23-29

Luke 21:8-9; 25-27; 33-36

Feb. 5: 4th Day of the Feast of the Encounter; Holy Woman Martyr Agatha
Feb. 6: 5th Day of the Feast of the Encounter; Holy Father Photios, Patriarch of Constantinople, Holy Father Boukolos, Bishop of Smyrna
Feb. 7: 6th Day of the Feast of the Encounter; Holy Father Parthenios, Bishop of Lampsacos and our Venerable Father Luke of Hellas
Feb. 8: 7th Day of the Feast of the Encounter; Holy Great-martyr Theodore, General of the Armies; Holy Prophet Zechariah
Feb. 9: Leave-Taking of the Feast of the Encounter; Holy Martyr Nicephoros
Feb. 10: Holy Hieromartyr Charalampos
Feb. 11: Holy Hieromartyr Blaise, Bishop of Sebastea
Feb. 12: Holy Father Meletios, Bishop of Antioch

Word Search

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Calf
Compassion
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Fortune
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Life
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Pigs
Pods
Possessions
Property
Rejoice
Ring
Robe

Sandals
Senses
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Sons
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Traveled
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Parish Information:

Rt. Rev. Michael Skrocki, JCD
Pastor

abounamike@aol.com

Knights of Columbus **JFK Council**

1st Wednesday of the month, 7pm.

Odd-numbered months at St. Ignatios

Even-numbered months here at Most Holy Trinity

4th Degree Assembly

2nd Wednesday of the month, 7pm

Odd-numbered months at Most Holy Trinity

Even-numbered months here at St. Ignatios

Publicans Prayer Group

Postponed until Further Notice

New Parishioners:

Please register with Fr. Michael.

Mystery of Holy Confession

Please contact Fr. Michael to set up a convenient time.

Mystery of Christian Initiation

Expectant parents should notify Fr. Michael prior to the birth of the child. Adult converts should contact Fr. Michael so arrangements may be made for any necessary instruction and sacraments.

Mystery of Holy Crowning

Those planning to marry should notify the Fr. Michael
at least six months prior to the desired Wedding date.

Mystery of Holy Anointing

Please notify Fr. Michael when you or a family member is in need of anointing.

To report sexual abuse by clergy, parish personnel or volunteers of the Eparchy of Newton,
please call the Victim Assistance Coordinator at 1-800-479-5910.

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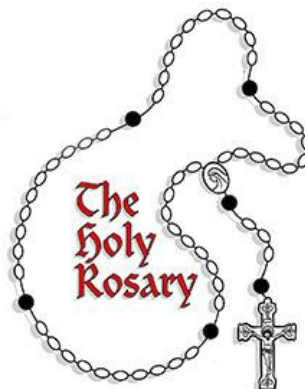
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