

At the door of Your compassion do I knock, Lord; send aid to my scattered impulses which are intoxicated with the multitude of the passions and the power of darkness. You can see my sores hidden within me: stir up contrition—though not corresponding to the weight of my sins, for if I receive full awareness of the extent of my sins, Lord, my soul would be consumed by the bitter pain from them. Assist my feeble stirrings on the path to true repentance, and may I find alleviation from the vehemence of sins through the contrition that comes of Your gift, for without the power of Your grace I am quite unable to enter within myself, become aware of my stains, and so, at the sight of them be able to be still from great distraction.

Saint Isaac the Syrian



Sunday 8 February 2015 is the Sunday of the Prodigal Son

Matins Gospel: Mark 16:1-8

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

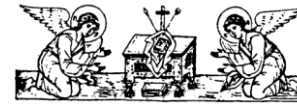
Gospel: Luke 15:11-32

Resurrectional Apolytikion

When You went down to death, O immortal life, then You slew Hades with the lightning flash of Your Godhead; but when from the depths below the earth You raised the dead, all the Powers above the heavens cried out: 'Giver of life, Christ our God, glory to You!'

Seasonal Kontakion

O Father, foolishly I ran away from Your glory, and in sin, squandered the riches You gave me. Wherefore, I cry out to You with the voice of the Prodigal, 'I have sinned before You Compassionate Father. Receive me in repentance and take me as one of Your hired servants.'



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

8 February 2015

Archbishopric of Good Hope
Patriarchate of Alexandria & All Africa

I Will Arise and Go to My Father

Today we continue our preparation for Great Lent by hearing the parable of the Prodigal Son. In holding this parable before us as we begin this season of repentance, the Church reminds us what repentance is all about, namely, our return to the loving God from whom we have gone astray.

In this well-known parable, Jesus describes how a man took his inheritance and squandered it, travelling to a far country and becoming destitute as a result of his wild living. He eventually came to his senses and realised that he would be better off to return to his father and ask to be employed as a servant, but his father, seeing him coming, welcomed him as a son and did not hesitate to throw a lavish feast for him.

The parable of the Prodigal Son is our own story, and Jesus tells it in order to show us what repentance means for us. At the heart of this story is the relationship between the father and his wayward son, and in this relationship we see our own relationship to God. God is a loving Father, who longs for us to return to Him. He is not a strict judge who weighs up what we have done, but rather a Father who does not stop longing that we will return to Him.

By rejecting God and wandering away from Him, we have become entrapped in sin. Sin is not simply the breaking of the commandments, but it is the destruction of our relationship with God. And repentance, then, is about returning to God, to our loving Father, who longs to welcome us.



Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: 1 John 2:18-29; 3:1-8; Mark 11:1-11
Apodosis of the Presentation; Martyr Nicephoros

Tuesday: 2 Timothy 2:1-10; John 15:17-27; 16:1-2
Hieromartyr Haralambos; Anastasios, Patriarch of Jerusalem

Wednesday: Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:1-6; Matthew 10:1, 5-8
Hieromartyr Blaise; Empress Theodora

Thursday: 1 John 4:20-21; 5:1-21; Mark 15:1-15
Meletius, Abp. Of Antioch; Antonius, Abp. Of Constantinople

Friday: 2 John 1:1-13; Mark 15: 20, 22, 25, 33-41
Martinian of Palestine; Apostles Aquila and Priscilla

Saturday: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; Luke 21:8-9,25-27,33-36
Saturday of Souls; Auxentios of the Mountain; Cyril, Apostle to the Slavs

Christ chooses those who stand. Rise and run to the church. Here is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He who hears you pondering in the secret places of the mind runs to you. When you are still far away, He sees you and runs to you. He sees in your heart. ... He falls on your neck to raise one prostrate and burdened with sins and bring back one turned aside to the earthly toward heaven. Christ falls on your neck to free your neck from the yoke of slavery and hang His sweet yoke upon your shoulders.

Saint Ambrose of Milan

I Confess One Baptism

A series on the meaning of Christian Baptism

We saw last week that the service of holy baptism begins with the renunciation of Satan and the confessing of our faith in Christ. After this, the candidate for baptism is ready to enter the Church.

At the heart of the baptismal service lies the immersing of the person to be baptized in the baptismal font, which the Church Fathers see as a Divine Womb, which grants us as second birth as children of God. However, before the candidate is baptized, we should also note the following actions:



- The person to be baptized is addressed by name. We are received into the Church as unique and free persons, not simply as anonymous individuals. God knows and loves each one of us intimately and this is reflected in the importance of our names as Christians. It is also why we are addressed by name when we approach the Chalice to receive Holy Communion.
- The candles are lit, which remind us that baptism is also called illumination. It is the entrance into the light of faith. However, we are also surrounded by darkness in our world and so the baptismal

candle is a reminder that the Light of Christ will accompany the person baptized into the world and remain with them throughout their lives.

- The water of the baptismal font is blessed by the priest. This reminds us both of the goodness of water and of the material creation, but also of its need to be purified from the evil that lurks in the deeps. This is why the priest makes the sign of the Cross over the water, saying, "Let all adverse powers be crushed beneath the signing of Your most precious Cross."
- The candidate for baptism is then anointed with olive oil on the forehead, breast, back, hands, feet, ears, and mouth. This also reminds us that God's creation is good and holy and that the person is dedicated to the service of Christ.

The person to be baptized is then immersed in the water three times, with the priest saying: "The servant of God (name) is baptized in the name of the Father. Amen. And of the Son, Amen. And of the Holy Spirit, Amen." As the water closes over their head, it is as if they were buried in a grave. And when they emerge from the water, it is as if they are rising from the grave. Baptism represents our old, sinful nature dying and then being resurrected again by Christ in a new and cleansed form.

To be continued...

When you come to the sacred initiation, the eyes of the flesh see water; the eyes of faith behold the Spirit. Those eyes see the body being baptized; these see the old man being buried. The eyes of the flesh see the flesh being washed, the eyes of the spirit see the soul being cleansed. The eyes of the body see the body emerging from the water; the eyes of faith see the new man come forth brightly shining from that new purification. Our bodily eyes see the priest as, from above, he lays his right hand on the head and touches (him who is being baptized) our spiritual eyes' see the great High Priest (Jesus) as He stretches forth His invisible hand to touch his head. For, at that moment, the one who baptizes is not a man, but the only-begotten Son of God.

Saint John Chrysostom

The Saturday of the Departed

This coming Saturday, on the eve of the Sunday of the Last Judgement, the Church encourages us to pray for all who have "fallen asleep in the hope of resurrection and life eternal." This is the Church's great day of prayer for its deceased members. We are not saved as isolated individuals but as members of the Church. We are all members of Christ's Body and we need and depend on one another. The love of Christ has gathered us together and holds us in being and we are called to love one another and to bear the burdens of our brothers and sisters. It is this mutual love that is at the foundation of the Church's prayer for the departed. If we love Christ, we also love those who are in Him and it is His love that holds us all alive.



Thou hast willed to fashion me as a living creature from natures visible and invisible: Thou hast made my body from the earth, and given me a soul by Thy divine and quickening breath. Therefore, O Saviour, grant rest to Thy servants in the land of the living, in the tabernacles of the righteous.

From Vespers of the Saturday of the Departed

To Repent is to Return from Exile

We know that we are called to repent, but we may be inclined to think of sin and repentance in legal terms. While God does call us to keep His commandments (because He knows what is best for us), sin is about much more than simply breaking rules. Sin is far more than any individual sin, but is more fundamentally a state of alienation of God. Like the prodigal son, and like Adam who was cast out of Paradise, we have become alienated from God. We have lost the joy that comes from a life of communion with God. We have lost the sense of life as it was meant to be. We have lost the spiritual beauty and the innocence of our first creation.

To repent means to return from exile as the prodigal son did. And in order to return from exile we first have to realise that we are indeed in a state of exile, a state of alienation from God. Yet too often we have anaesthetised ourselves to the pain of our exile: we fill our lives with entertainment and activities which may not be bad in themselves, but which can dull us to the pain of what we really feel. If we are to repent, we need to allow ourselves to realise our alienation from God. We need to allow ourselves to feel the pain of our human brokenness, and to acknowledge the depth of our longing for God.

Today, on the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, the Church sings the sad and nostalgic Psalm 136 (137) at Matins which recalls the exile of the Jews in Babylonian captivity: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, and we wept when we remembered ion..." This has become the song of all who recognise their exile from God and, in recognising it, turn towards the God for whom they long.