

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



**21 February 2016 is the
Sunday of the Publican & the
Pharisee**

Matins Gospel: Luke 24:13-35

Epistle: 2 Timothy 3:10-15

Gospel: Luke 18:10-14

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

Let us worship the Word, O ye faithful, praising Him that with the Father and the Spirit is co-beginningless God, Who was born of a pure Virgin that we all be saved; for He was pleased to mount the Cross in the flesh that He assumed, accepting thus to endure death. And by His glorious rising, He also willed to resurrect the dead.

Seasonal Kontakion:

Let us flee from the boasting of the Pharisee and learn through our own sighs of sorrow the humility of the Publican. Let us cry out to the Saviour, "Have mercy on us, for through You alone are we reconciled."

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday, 22 Feb: 2 Peter 1:20-21; 2:1-9; Mark 13:9-13
Monday of Prodigal Son; Uncovering of Relics at Eugenius; Righteous Thalassius & Baradatus

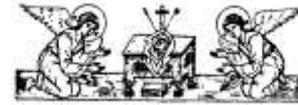
Tuesday, 23 Feb: 2 Peter 2:9-22; Mark 13:14-23
Tuesday of Prodigal Son; Hieromartyr Polycarp; Proterius, Abp. of Alexandria

Wednesday, 24 Feb: Luke 7:17-30; 2 Corinthians 4:6-15; Matthew 11:2-15
1st & 2nd Finding of the Head of the Forerunner; Romanos, Prince of Uglich

Thursday, 25 Feb: 1 John 1:8-10; 2:1-6; Mark 13:31-37; 14:1-2
Thursday of Prodigal Son; Tarasius, Pat. Of Constantinople; Martyrs Reginus & Lebadueus

Friday, 26 Feb: 1 John 2:7-17; Mark 14:3-9
Friday of Prodigal Son; Porphyrius, Bp. of Gaza; Photine, the Samaritan Women

Saturday, 27 Feb: 1 Timothy 6:11-16; Luke 20:46-47; 21:1-4
Saturday of Prodigal Son; Procopius the Confessor



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

21 February 2016

The Publican and Pharisee

Today marks the beginning of Triodion as we move into the period of preparation for Great Lent. And today's Gospel challenges us to consider our real position before God, and the sort of repentance that God is asking of us in the coming season.

In this parable of the Publican and the Pharisee, Jesus Christ presents us with two very different responses to God. The Pharisee considered himself a righteous man. He thanks God for this and points out that he is not like other sinners, and especially not like the Publican (or tax-collector) in whose presence he was praying. The Publican, by contrast, did not even dare to lift his eyes to heaven, but could only repeat: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." And Jesus says of him: "This man, I tell you, went home justified; the other did not. For everyone who raises himself up will be humbled, but anyone who humbles himself will be raised up."

The Pharisee was in many respects a righteous man and he is to be commended in giving God the credit for his good actions. The things that he does are good. But in his self-certainty he is blind to his own sins and his own need to repent and instead sees himself as having somehow "arrived." Moreover, in comparing himself to others we see his pride. He lacks the humility of the Publican who was perfectly aware of his own sin, not looking at anyone else, but throwing himself entirely onto the mercy of God.

We can be very quick to judge people whom we see as Pharisees, yet we all have something of the Pharisee in us. We would prefer to focus on our own strong points and point out the failings of others. And yet Christ shows us that it is only by entering into our own hearts and acknowledging who we truly are before God that we are able to throw ourselves onto His mercy and receive His forgiveness.

Let us not pray as the Pharisee: for he who exalts himself shall be humbled. Let us humble ourselves before God and with fasting cry aloud as the Publican: God be merciful to us sinners.

From Vespers for the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee



The Lenten Triodion Begins

In just under a month's time the season of Great Lent begins, possibly the richest and most distinctive period of the Church's life. However, lest Lent should suddenly appear unannounced, the Church also gives a time of preparation for Lent itself. This period of the Triodion takes its name from the liturgical texts which we begin using today, and which we shall continue using until the end of Holy Week.

These texts are rich in meaning and teach us the true meaning of the Lenten fast. The Sundays, in particular, have themes that serve to focus our attention on the coming fast, to warn us of the dangers associated with it, and to help us discover in ever-greater depth what it really all about.

This time of preparation for Great Lent consists of the following:

The Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee (today) The week following this Sunday is a fast-free week in which the Wednesday and Friday fasts are suspended. The reason for this is to remind us of the danger of becoming proud about our fasting as the Pharisee did.

The Sunday of the Prodigal Son (28 February)

The Sunday of the Last Judgement (6 March) This is also known as **Meatfare Sunday**, because it is the last day on which meat is eaten until Pascha.

Forgiveness Sunday (13 March) This is also called the **"Expulsion of Adam from Paradise"** which is the theme of the liturgical texts, reminding us that we too have been exiled from Paradise and that our journey through Lent is a journey back to God. This Sunday is also called **Cheesefare Sunday** because it is the last day on which cheese (or dairy products) are eaten until Pascha.



On Tuesday, the Church commemorates **Saint Polycarp**, Hieromartyr and Bishop of Smyrna. He was born at Ephesus around the year 70 and was a disciple of the Apostles. His parents died as martyrs, and he was brought up by a devout lady named Callista. As a child, the Saint was so eager to follow the commandments of Christ that he repeatedly emptied his foster mother's pantry to feed the poor. Since her supplies were always miraculously renewed, Callista changed his name from Pancratius to *Polykarpos*, meaning "Much fruit."

Polycarp became a disciple of St John the Theologian, and in time became Bishop of Smyrna. He knew St Ignatius of Antioch personally, and some of their correspondence is preserved. He led his Church in holiness for more than fifty years, and became known throughout the Christian world as a true shepherd and standard-bearer of the Faith. However, when a fierce persecution broke out, St Polycarp was arrested. Accounts of his martyrdom recount how, when he was asked to deny Christ, he responded: *'For eighty-six years I have been his servant, and he has wronged me in nothing; how can I blaspheme my King and Saviour?'* Told that he would die by fire if he did not apostatize, St Polycarp replied *'You threaten me with a fire that burns for a short time and then goes out, while you know nothing of the fire of the judgement to come and of the everlasting torment awaiting the wicked. Why wait any longer? Do what you will!'*

Open to me the gates of repentance...

Today as we begin our preparation for Great Lent, the Church sings at Matins this hymn that will accompany us throughout Lent. We can see this Sunday as the gate through which we enter into this season of repentance, a sacred season which will lead us on to the joy of Easter.

This is a season in which we are called to repent. Repentance does not simply mean feeling bad about the things that we have done wrong; rather it involves taking concrete action to turn our lives around. But it is also about more than simply outward actions. The Church encourages us to pray and to fast, to give alms and to care for others. But more important than the outward actions is the changing of our hearts. We are called to be renewed in our innermost being.

We often try to avoid facing what is in our hearts and we have become adept at covering them up and presenting a good facade to the world. Indeed, we may even have come to confuse the image that we have of ourselves with the reality that is much murkier. This time of repentance, with its fasting disciplines and the services of the Church, is there to help us be honest about who we really are before God.

Genuine repentance is a gift from God. We cannot manufacture it but we need to pray to God for the gift of genuine repentance. For it is only God who can enable us to see ourselves as we truly are. And as we see the depth of our need we also see the depths of His great mercy. Repentance is therefore not about being gloomy; instead we come to experience a strange but powerful joy as we open ourselves to experiencing the depths of God's love for us.



*Open to me the gates of repentance, O Giver of Life,
For my spirit rises early to pray towards thy holy temple.
Bearing the temple of my body all defiled;
But in Thy compassion, purify me by the loving kindness of Thy mercy.*

*Lead me on the paths of salvation, O Mother of God,
For I have profaned my soul with shameful sins,
and have wasted my life in laziness.
But by your intercessions, deliver me from all impurity.*

*When I think of the many evil things I have done, wretch that I am,
I tremble at the fearful day of judgement.
But trusting in Thy living kindness, like David I cry to Thee:
Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy.*