



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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The Prodigality of our Selfishness Week of February 12, 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Conceived in iniquities, prodigal that I am, I dare not gaze upon the heights of heaven; yet, confident of Thy love for mankind, I cry: O God, cleanse me and save me, a sinner! If the righteous man can hardly be saved, where shall I, a sinner, find myself? I have not borne the burdens and heat of the day; yet, number me among them that were hired at the eleventh hour, O God, and save me!

This prayer which we say at the end of our reading of the First Kathisma of the Psalms is both a confession of and earnest supplication to the Lord for deliverance from “prodigality.” It is worthy of our attention this week, for Sunday is the “Sunday of the Prodigal Son,” the parable of which we will hear in the appointed Gospel lesson from Luke chapter 15.

“Prodigality” is the sinful quality of extravagance. The Prodigal Son, as we all remember from the Parable of our Lord, asked for his inheritance from his father. Upon receiving it, he went into a “far country” and spent it extravagantly on every manner of self-serving, sinful “loose living.” It doesn’t take much of an imagination to understand what that meant! After exhausting the fortune that he had been given, the young man found himself in dire straits; out of money, he was forced to eat the husks that would have been thrown to the swine that he had been reduced to tending. Finally, he came to his senses and realizing the miserable state that he was in, put aside his pride and decided in humility to

beg forgiveness from his father. This he did, thinking that he might be given a place outside his father's house with the hired servants, which would have been better than the miserable state to which his "prodigality" had reduced him.

We all remember how the parable goes: the father had never given up on his son, having waited for his return. Seeing his approach even from a distance, the father rejoices and shows unmerited forgiveness to his son. He gives him a signet ring and sandals of honor, elevating him from slavery to a position of respect, restoring him to his place within the family, even correcting the elder brother who protests. The father sums up his feeling at the end of the parable, "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."

This wondrous parable come to us, Brothers and Sisters, right before we enter into our time of prayer and fasting in Great Lent. In the hearing of it, the Holy Fathers who appointed it for this Sunday bid us to recognize and to turn from our own prodigality, our own extravagant waste of the vast inheritance our Heavenly Father has given to us.

Surely this is true of the many physical gifts He has given us – the beauty of the earth (which we have decimated), the abundance of food and drink (which we insist on using only for ourselves, refusing to share with those in need), the enjoyment of wealth and economic prosperity (which we deny to others who would like no less than we to have them, sending them away in disgrace back to the suffering inflicted upon them in other lands). But it is not only the physical inheritance that we take and waste; it is most shamefully also our spiritual inheritance that we greedily take and spend with prodigality on ourselves. We receive the promise of life and salvation in the Holy Mysteries, but we think those promises were meant only for us, and for us alone. We receive forgiveness of sins, but refuse to forgive others who hurt us. We consume ourselves with the desire to be saved, while we condemn others whom we consider unworthy, just as the Pharisee of last Sunday's parable looked down with disdain and judgment on the Publican. We take our inheritance and seek to use it with the same prodigality as did the Prodigal Son in our Lord's parable.

The prodigality of the son in our Lord's parable is forever a sign and reminder of our own prodigality, both physical and spiritual. If we think we have a right to what our Father in Heaven gives us freely and that we may use it all for ourselves and for ourselves alone, we are truly, to borrow the phrase from St. Paul, "of all men most to be pitied." All that we have, we are given by our Father in Heaven, not merely for our own well-being or our own salvation, but for the well-being and salvation of all mankind. As disciples of the Only-Begotten of the Father, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we are to be as is He, and we are to follow in all things His example. We are to take what we are given in true gratitude and then offer it back to our Father in Heaven; and when we do that, the greatest of all miracles occurs. Our loving Father in Heaven returns it to us, magnified, blessed, sanctified and multiplied; it becomes, in our offering it back to Him and in His return to us, Sacrament. And what would have been waste and extravagance, prodigality if we had taken and used it only for ourselves and our own well-being, now become means of sanctification and life for others. This, Brothers and Sisters, is what the parable of our Lord proclaims to us as we stand at the threshold of the Great Fast. All of our lives in every circumstance and at every moment is to be a sacrament of offering and the reception of blessing – not merely for ourselves alone, but for the good of every human being that He has made in Wisdom and Love.

To this end may the Lord direct each of us!

ALMIGHTY Master, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Thine only begotten Son, grant me a body undefiled, a pure heart, a vigilant mind, an intellect not given to prodigality, and that the Holy Spirit may come upon me, unto the acquisition and sufficiency of truth in Thy Christ, with Whom glory, honor and worship is due unto Thee, with the Holy Spirit; now, and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

In Christ our true God,

+Fr. Elias

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