

Next Services

**Thursday
February 1st**

**Great Vespers
Feast of the Presentation
of our Lord
at 5:00 pm**

**Friday
February 2nd**

**Divine Liturgy
Feast of the Presentation
of our Lord
at 10:00 am**

**Saturday
February 3rd**

**Great Vespers at 5:00
pm**

**Sunday
February 4th**

**Sunday of the
Prodigal Son
Divine Liturgy at 10:00
am**

both at

**St. Olympia Chapel
123 Main Street
Potsdam, NY**

All welcome!

**Great Lent approaches.
No Fasting all this week!**

*(Next week--normal
fasting on Wednesday
and Friday)*

Is your Spring Break real?

**30 YEARS OF BUILDING
HOPE**



"Best week of my life!" - Emma G.

Spent your Spring Break volunteering at Project Mexico & St. Innocent Orphanage! This is your opportunity to make a real difference alongside other Orthodox Christians in the service of our ministry south of the border.

Get to know the boys who are growing up at the orphanage through soccer games, worship and evening activities.

Learn how to live your faith through service both in your local community and abroad.

Spring Break: Week 1
Dates: March 9-19
Price: \$500 (Due Feb 28)

Spring Break: Week 2
Dates: March 19-24
Price: \$500 (Due Feb 28)

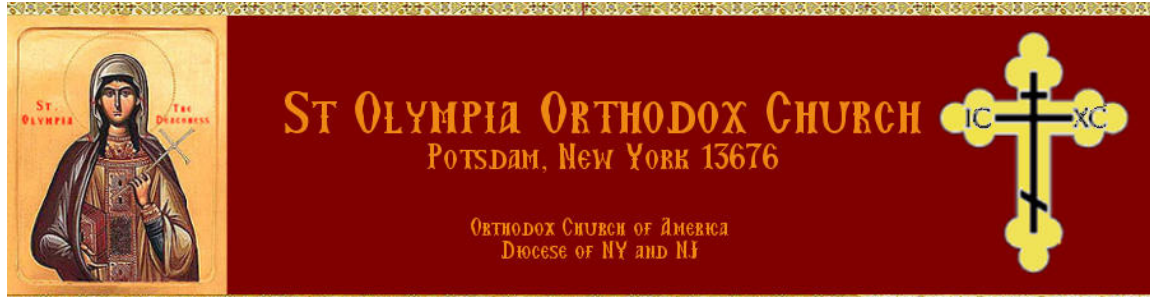
Yes! Sign Me Up!

Web addresses in this bulletin are not linked. For more information, go to:

projectmexico.org



Today, we also commemorated the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia. These were Orthodox Christians who suffered for their faith during the Soviet period (1917 to 1991). While the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia glorified (i.e., recognized as saints) the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia in 1981, immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Church under the leadership of Patriarch Alexei II began glorifying some of the New Martyrs, beginning with the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev, and Metropolitan Benjamin of Petrograd in 1992. More names continue to be added to list of New Martyrs. It is known that there were more martyrs for the Faith under the Communists in 76 years than during the early centuries of persecutions by the Romans. The Church celebrates the feast of the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia on the Sunday nearest January 25th - the date Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev's martyrdom (the first Hieromartyr of the Bolshevik Yoke).



**Welcome to St. Olympia Orthodox Church,
a young and, God willing, growing community of worshippers.**

**Join us for prayer and fellowship.
Divine Liturgies are held every Sunday and are primarily in English.
Fr. Luke Majoros is our presbyter.**

Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee (Luke 18:10-14)

*Note: the following article has been written by an anonymous contributor.
It is included here by permission.*

Have you ever noticed how some little children go through a phase where they'll say "hi" to everyone we would encounter? In the innocence of inexperience these little ones are open-hearted and welcoming, assuming that everybody they meet is a nice person. That's not true, of course. Some of those people are angry, bitter, cranky, hurting, grieving, turned in on themselves; others, the ones that give parents nightmares, are just plain dangerous, But it's interesting to notice how people react to an enthusiastic greeting from that tiny human walking by. Many of them smile. One might suspect that for some, it really makes their day, maybe even their week. Why? There's something encouraging, even healing, in an encounter with another human being who's not scared by anyone/everyone they encounter, and who's not judgmental in any way, shape or form, because it allows people to abandon what for most of us is our usual defensive crouch as we face the world and to at least dream of being our best selves.

Bearing that in mind, listen again to how the Lord Jesus sets up the parable He tells us in today's Gospel, Luke 18:10-14. Verse 9 says, "Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." Hmmm. Have you or I ever felt that, in comparison with somebody else, we were a pretty righteous person? Let's be honest: most of us realize we've got some work to do in the self-righteousness department, so as not to fall yet again into that category. All of us, at some point or another, have looked on another human being with arch disapproval and disgust: maybe not everybody, but at least somebody. And as long as we're being honest, we've probably looked on several somebodies with disapproval and disgust....which means that whether we want to hear it or not, this parable is for us.

Honestly, now: what goes through your head and mine when we encounter that guy who's drunk and it's only 10 o'clock in the morning; or that mentally or emotionally disturbed person on the bus who's carrying on a lively conversation with himself, and at high volume; or that group of teens who're "obviously" just looking for trouble; or look down, see somebody's trash just discarded on the sidewalk with no consideration for anybody else, and wonder if the person responsible was raised by wolves; or that other driver right in front of us who doesn't signal their left-hand turn until they get to the corner; or that alleged human riding his bike full tilt down the sidewalk, with no apparent regard for the pedestrians on that sidewalk? You get the idea. We have these snap negative judgments running through our heads all the time. For whatever reason, it's part of our fallen human nature.

And yes, the Lord Jesus does warn us against it. In Matthew 7:1 He says, "Judge not, that you be not judged." And then in verse 2 He tells us why: "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you." Do we really want God and/or other people measuring us by the same standard we use to measure others? Do we really want God and/or other people to be as quick to condemn as we can sometimes be? No, of course not. But we do it anyway. Similarly, in John 7:24 our Lord warns Pharisees in every generation, "Judge not according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment; don't judge unless and until you've got all the facts, the whole story." But again, we do it anyway. Maybe it's like a survival instinct, as we try to determine who's a threat and who's not. But whatever the reason, it runs counter to everything Jesus teaches us about how we should live our lives and be in relationship with one another.

To help us learn some of what that means, Jesus tells this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray." The fact that they're in the Temple tells us that they're both Jewish, because Gentiles weren't allowed in the temple itself; and because they intend to pray, they're both seeking God. The one is a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. Now, despite our preconceived notions about Pharisees and tax collectors, let's understand that the Pharisees were actually liberal in their interpretation of the Law of Moses; and their aim was to make the observance of Torah (the Jewish scriptures) available to everybody. And while the chief tax collectors were sell-outs to the Roman Empire, who inflated the tax rates to line their own pockets, they often hired other people to actually go around knocking on doors and collecting the tax money. These agents were usually locals, a Jewish man in this case. And while we might assume that perhaps they were simply doing a job, and not engaging in any "funny business," it is probable that this tax collector was also caught up in the pyramid scheme and raked in a little extra for himself before passing the dues on to the higher ups.

And what the Lord's hearers expected was a parable that went another way. They expected Jesus to tell a story about a Pharisee who prayed humbly, seeking forgiveness for his failures to more fully abide by the Law, and about a tax collector offering prayers of thanksgiving to God that business was good, that profits were up, and that he was not so wayward as that hypocritical Pharisee over there, who tries to teach others to follow the Law, but barely follows it himself. And often we wouldn't mind erasing from this parable the words "Pharisee" and "publican," and substituting an infinite number of pairings and combinations which could confirm and cater to our prejudices. The Conservative says, "God, I thank you that I am not like...this Liberal" and the Liberal prays the reverse. Or the European says, "God, I thank you that I am not like...this aboriginal." It could be black or white, college-educated or high school dropout, Eagles fan or Patriots fan; whatever. We might not actually thank God in words that we're not such-and-such or so-and-so, but we've all had that thought run through our minds on a regular basis: "At least I'm not like..."

And it's to that mindset that this parable speaks. Part of our self-righteousness and judgment of others is, like that of the Pharisee, two self-deluding beliefs. The first belief is that we can do no wrong, or that our wrongs don't really count as "bad:" "God, I thank you that I am not like other men---extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector." The second self-deluding belief is that our works justify us before God: "I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess." These days, we sum up both beliefs under the heading of, "I'm a good person." But the tax collector, crooked as he might've been, was at least spiritually honest. He knew he'd done wrong; that he wasn't good; that he had treated people unfairly and cheated them for his own benefit; that his sins were real and damning. So the tax collector simply threw himself on God's mercy: "God, be merciful to me, the sinner," as the Greek text actually reads. There's no self-righteousness here; no judgment; no thought that, "Yeah, I might've messed up, but at least I'm not a murderer." The only sinner he can see is himself; and all he offers is a plea to God for mercy. No matter how good we think we are; not matter how bad we think somebody else is; we're all of us equally dependent on God's mercy. And at the end of the day, the best any of us can do is to plead for God's mercy.

And there's now. Jesus ends the story this way: "I tell you, this man [the tax collector] went down to his house justified [in right relationship with God] rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Because the publican humbly surrendered himself to God's mercy, rather than pridefully pointing out his righteousness like the Pharisee, he was justified. But how easy it might've been for the tax collector to be standing in that same temple just a month later saying to God, "I thank you that I'm not like that adulterer over there. She's had three husbands!" And the point is that part from constant conscious and deliberate reliance upon the grace of God, even humility can quickly curdle into pride. You see, when we hear this parable, we want to put ourselves in the place of the tax collector. We think of ourselves as humble, because intellectually we know our need for God's mercy and grace. But in reality, how often do we spend our days proud of looking down upon and/or mocking the weaknesses and shortcomings of others?