

## Next Services

**Saturday  
February 10th**

**Great Vespers  
at 5:00 pm**

**Sunday  
February 11th**

**Sunday of the  
the Last Judgement  
(Meatfare Sunday)**

**Divine Liturgy  
at 10:00 am**

both at

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

**All welcome!**



**ST OLYMPIA ORTHODOX CHURCH**

POTSDAM, NEW YORK 13676

ORTHODOX CHURCH OF AMERICA  
DIOCESE OF NY AND NJ



**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 preceded by Great Vespers every Saturday evening.**

**Services are primarily in English.  
Fr. Luke Majoros is our presbyter.**

## **Sunday of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)**

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

In our run-up to Great Lent, with its special emphasis on repentance, today we read Luke 15:11-32, the parable commonly called the parable of The Prodigal Son. Perhaps frustratingly, and unlike some of our Lord's other parables, this story gives us, not just one great lesson, but several.

For example, in the prodigal son himself we see what we look like when we're following the lead of our fallen human nature. When we watch this younger son treating his own father with such disrespect and disregard as to ask for his share of the inheritance before the old man is dead, and then take the money his father sweated and slaved for, only to travel "to a far country, and there waste his possessions with prodigal [wasteful] living," we're seeing our own mind, heart, and attitudes in our fallen state. In our sinful nature we're all proud, self-centered and self-willed. We don't really care about relationship with God, much less respect God as our Creator, much less love God as our Saviour. Instead, we sing a chorus of "I'll do it my way" and head off to do our own thing. And like heedless teenagers who think there's a money-tree in the back yard, we spend our time, our talents, our strength, our abilities, and our affections---all of which come to us as pure gifts of God's providence, and not of our own making or earning---on things that don't ultimately matter and can never profit us eternally. We spend ourselves on greed, lust of power, lusts and passions of the flesh, and, at root, worship of self. And all we do is prove Isaiah 53:6 right on the mark in that "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way." Do we think the younger son is a selfish, spoiled, irresponsible brat? But are we anything other, anything better? In the younger son we see ourselves in our fallen nature writ large.



**Great Lent draws near!**

**Normal fasting  
this week**

**(Wednesday and Friday)**

***This coming Sunday  
is the last day to eat  
meat until Pascha.***

Then, secondly, we see in the younger son learning the hard way what, all too often, we have still to learn: that the fruit, the result, of sin is bitter. "But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything." For a Jew, the original audience for this parable, few things were more degrading than to take care of pigs, unclean animals. And the kid who had thrown his money around so freely was now reduced to starvation: ready to eat even pig-food, but not allowed to.

The enemy of our souls lies to us that life without God is "free;" that sin is "fun;" and most especially, that "nothing bad will happen." It's always the same old lie from Genesis 3:5, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." But those who serve sin always find out, sooner or later, that Romans 6:23 only tells the bald truth when it says that "the wages of sin is death." And we're not talking here only about things like the degradation and sometimes physical death coming from drug abuse, or a gangster shot to death by police, or the scam artist locked up for 20 years, or the adulterer left with a broken marriage and kids who hate him. We're talking about the gossipy judgmental person who ends up alone, angry and bitter because nobody wants to be friends with them. We're talking about the self-centered person who can never make a marriage work precisely because it always is all about him/her. In Galatians 6:8 St. Paul warns that "he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption;" and his meaning is clear: sin always carries hard consequences.

So what's the solution to our mess? What happens when we, like the prodigal who "came to himself," realize our situation? Too often we're like the younger son who, thirdly, thinks he can return home on his own terms: "I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" Yes, it is a good thing to wake up to the fact of our fallenness and our need of rescue. But that realization is in itself a work of grace: God loving us enough to let us see our situation. And thinking is not a change of heart. It may be the beginning of a change of heart, but as one author says, "Conviction is not conversion; it is one step, at any rate, in a right direction."

Further, the younger son mistakes the kind of person his father actually is. He assumes the old man is angry, vindictive, punishing, unforgiving; and that therefore the best he can hope for is a cot in the bunkhouse with the hired hands. And perhaps it's precisely this misreading of his father's character that led him to leave home in the first place. Perhaps the boy took "Make your bed; clean your room; wash behind your ears; eat your vegetables; do your chores; come to church; respect your elders; work hard" as bossy and needless interference, rather than a father loving his son enough to do what Proverbs 22:6 told him to do: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." We too, in our fallenness, tend to see "Love your enemies; bless those who curse you; do good to those who hate you; pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you; turn the other cheek; judge not, that ye be not judged; I was hungry and you fed Me; lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven," and the rest of Scripture as bossy and needless interference, rather than God loving us enough to lay out for us the path of righteousness, of right and healthy living. And where does that disbelief in the goodness of God's purposes come from? "Did God really say, 'You shall not eat of every tree in the garden?'" How often are you and I going to play Charlie Brown to Satan's Lucy holding the football and end up flat on our backside before we get it? God is good; His purposes are good; His way is good. And anybody who says otherwise is a flat-out liar.

Fourthly, however, we do see in the younger son's return home an image of a person turning to God with true repentance and faith: changing direction, actually getting up and going. Why, if he so misread his father's character, did he go home anyway? Desperation, plain and simple. But because both this repentance and this faith are also the work of grace, it is enough. Like our Lord's acceptance of Zacchaeus's weasel-words "If I have taken anything from anyone," the younger son's imperfect motive is enough for his father to welcome him home. You see, the person in whose heart the Holy Spirit as truly begun to work will not just feel sorry, but actually (and always and only by God's grace) break off from sin, cease to do evil, learn to do right. Like the publican that person will turn to God in humble prayer, confess their sin, and say "God, be merciful to me, the sinner." But that person is not, and knows they are not, a finished product. Being put into right relationship with God is only the beginning of a journey of becoming like God in our character. Coming home begins a journey of sanctification, not a time of resting on our laurels.

But, fifthly, we see in this parable the good news of God's gracious response to the penitent person: received readily, pardoned freely, completely accepted with God, and restored to their place in the family of God: "Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring [a signet ring with the family crest] on his hand, and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

A happy ending? Not for the elder brother! "He was angry" that his ne'er-do-well brother was welcomed back into the family, "would not go in" to the party, and with a disrespect worse than his brother's, gave his father hell, accusing the old man of being unfair. Now that's a clear picture of self-righteousness: unkind, envious, unforgiving and ill-natured. And this parable isn't directed just to the Jews who couldn't stand the idea of Gentiles also being welcomed into God's family, or the Scribes and Pharisees who complained that our Lord received sinners, and ate with them, and opened the door of salvation to publicans and harlots and other "sinners." This is also directed to Christians in every age who are happy at the idea of druggies, drunks, murderers, hookers, street people, aboriginals, immigrants and foreigners being drawn to Christ, but sure don't want such folk sitting next to them in church. But we all stand in right relationship with God only by grace through faith; even the best of us, the holiest of us, has nothing which they have not received as a gift of grace. That's why the conversion of any soul ought to be an occasion of joy to all who see it. If, as our Lord says in Luke 15:10, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents," who are we not to rejoice with the same joy with which the angels rejoiced over us? Let us rather pray for and seek out these our brothers and sisters who are lost that they may be found, and then welcome them here into God's family with the rest of us who are but debtors to grace.