



ST OLYMPIA ORTHODOX CHURCH

POTSDAM, NEW YORK 13676

ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

DIocese of NY and NJ



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

*Our priest is Fr. Paul Fedoroff, Priest-in-Charge.
You may reach him at priestpaulfedoroff@gmail.com or 518-573-7987 (cell)*

*Please join us for prayer and fellowship.***

Upcoming Services:
At the Norwood Church
February 21, 28
Hours: 9:10am
Divine Liturgy: 9:30am
February 20, 27
Vespers: 5pm

**Confessions: Saturday after
Vespers, Sunday before Liturgy,
otherwise by appointment.**

**Coffee after Liturgy! **Social
Distancing guidelines must be
observed.**

**St. Olympia Orthodox Church
34 North Main Street
Norwood, NY, 13668**

**Mailing Address:
St. Olympia Orthodox Church
PO Box 122
Canton, NY 13617**

**Annual Parish Meeting is This Sunday!!
February 21, following Liturgy**

Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee



*Brothers, let us not pray like the Pharisee!
He who exalts himself will be humbled.
Let us prepare to abase ourselves by fasting;
let us cry aloud with the voice of the Publican:
"O God, forgive us sinners!"*

*I know the value of tears, O almighty Lord:
they delivered Hezekiah from the gates of death,
and rescued the harlot from repeated sins.
Tears justified the Publican instead of the Pharisee.
I pray You, O Lord:
"Number me with the former, and have mercy on me!"*

Vespers, Lord I Call, Stikhera

The Power of Humility

In the Orthodox Church, the Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee [Luke 18:10-14] is the first of a cycle of appointed Gospel readings that inaugurates the pre-Lenten season. In other words, on an annual basis, precisely four weeks before Great Lent begins, we hear this parable proclaimed in the Liturgy. The intentions of the Lord in delivering this parable are clearly expressed in the solemn pronouncement following the parable itself: “For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted” [Luke 18:14].

The pride and self-righteousness of the pharisee—he who “exalts himself”—is rather starkly contrasted with the humility and repentance—he who “humbles himself”—of the publican. From these two examples of a revealed interior disposition, it is only the publican who is “justified,” according to Christ. With a kind of “folk wisdom” that would have resonated for his rural flock in early 20th century Serbia, Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic recasts the parable in an earthy story form that seeks to reinforce Christ’s teaching.

“A man went into the forest to choose a tree from which to make roof-beams,” he writes. “And he saw two trees, one beside the other. One was smooth and tall, but had rotted away inside, and the other was rough on the outside and ugly, but its core was healthy. The man sighed, and said to himself: ‘What use is this smooth, tall tree to me if it is rotten inside and useless for beams? The other one, even if it is rough and ugly, is at least healthy on the inside and so, if I put a bit more effort into it, I can use it for roof-beams for my house.’ And, without thinking any more about it, he chose that tree.”

Just to be certain, Bishop Nikolai drives home the moral point in the following conclusion: “So will God choose between two men for His house, and will choose, not the one who appears outwardly righteous, but the one whose heart is filled with God’s healthy righteousness.”

The pharisee acted according to the Law, keeping himself externally free from sin, fasting twice a week and paying a tithe on all that he had. It would be wonderful if members of the Church lived and acted like that with such consistency! However, it is the interior orientation of the heart that Christ is most concerned with—and it is herein that the pharisee twisted righteousness into self-righteousness, which is basically a form of idolatry, or worship of the “self.” Do any of us escape that self-deceptive trap? If not, then better to admit it, as Saint John Chrysostom reminds us, for “it is evil to sin, though help can be given; but to sin, and not to admit it—there is no help here.”

The humility of the publican is perhaps best expressed in a series of short descriptions—unwillingness to look up towards heaven, the beating of the breast, the plaintive cry, “Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner,” rather than in an intellectually constructed abstraction. Moved by an awareness of God’s holiness and his own sinfulness, the publican did not fear to openly express his humility upon entering the Temple. But why do we fear humility? How does the very concept of humility seem to frighten us, if only unconsciously? Perhaps we fear being taken advantage of, of being used by others, of “losing ground” in our struggle to not only get ahead, but to simply survive in a harsh world. We equate humility—wrongfully, I am convinced—with weakness, timidity, fear of conflict, etc. We may occasionally use the language of humility, but deep down, we “know better.” We may even practice a cautious form of humility, but only if it will allow us to remain in our “comfort zones.” But do we actually know better? Can we actually ignore a universally acclaimed Christian virtue without having experienced it ourselves? And yet, we literally depend upon the humility of Christ for our salvation! And we praise and glorify Christ precisely because of His humility! Perhaps, then, if we ever made a sustained effort to be humble, we would appraise this essential virtue differently. As Saint Isaac the Syrian writes, “Until a human person achieves humility, he will receive no reward for his works. The reward is given not for our works but for our humility.” And, to quote Saint Macarius the Great, “A humble person never falls. Being already lower than any, where can he fall? Vanity is a great humiliation, but humility is a great exalting, honor and dignity.”

The Gospel—based on the scandal of the Cross—has turned many things upside down. In God’s judgment, according to Christ, the proud are humbled and the humbled are exalted. The Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee sets this choice before us.