

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

*Our priest is Fr. Peter Irfan, Acting Rector.  
 You may reach him at 716-342-8520 (cell) or at fatherpeter777@yahoo.com.*

*Please join us for prayer and fellowship.*

**Upcoming Services:**  
**Saturday, February 15**  
 Great Vespers: 5pm

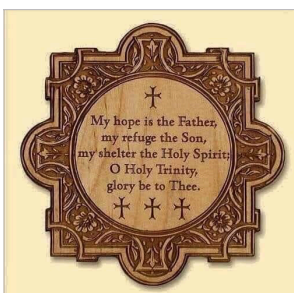
**Sunday, February 16**  
 Matins: 8:45 am  
 Divine Liturgy: 10am

**Lunch and fellowship  
 will follow the service**

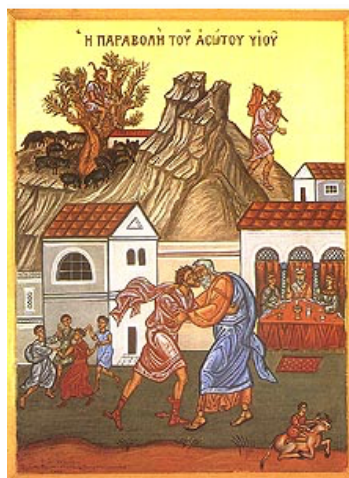
*The above services are  
 at St. Olympia Chapel  
 123 Main Street  
 Potsdam, NY, 13676*

*Daily Vespers at the  
 Hermitage of Saint  
 Olympia*

*5 PM - Monday  
 through Saturday*



**Great Lent approaches: Sunday of the Prodigal Son**



*I have recklessly forgotten Your  
 glory, O Father; / and among  
 sinners I have scattered the riches  
 which You had given me. /  
 Therefore, I cry to You like the  
 Prodigal: / "I have sinned before  
 You, O compassionate Father; /  
 receive me a penitent and make  
 me as one of Your hired  
 servants."*

Kontakion

**Sermon on the Sunday of the Prodigal Son by St. John of Kronstadt**

*I will arise and go to my father (Luke 15:18)*

Brethren! All our attention must be centered on the parable of the Prodigal Son. We all see ourselves in it as in a mirror. In a few words the Lord, the knower of hearts, has shown in the person of one man how the deceptive sweetness of sin separates us from the truly sweet life according to God. He knows how the burden of sin on the soul and body, experienced by us, impels us by the action of divine grace to return, and how it actually does turn many again to God, to a virtuous life. We will repeat it and discuss how necessary and easy it is for a sinner to return to God. One man had two sons. When they came of age, the younger one said to the father, "Give me my rightful share of the estate." And the father divided the property. The elder son did not take his portion and remained with the father, a sign that he loved his father with a pure heart, and he found satisfaction in fulfilling his will (neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment), and to depart from him he considered madness.

But the younger, in a few days, having gathered all his property, left his father's house for a distant country where he wasted all his substance, living dissolutely. From all this it is evident that he did not have a good and pure heart, that he was not sincerely disposed towards his good father, that he was burdened by his supervision and he dreamed it better to live according to the will of his own depraved heart. But let us hear what happened to him in exile from his father's house. When he had spent everything in the foreign country in a disorderly manner, a great famine came upon that country and he began to be in need. He went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would have been happy to fill his stomach with the food (acorns and chaff) that the swine ate; but no one gave him any. Having come to his senses, he said, "How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger. I will arise and go to my father and I will say unto him: Father! I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Receive me as one of thy hired servants." He arose and went to his father. When he was still afar off, his father saw him and had compassion on him and went to meet him. He embraced him and kissed him. He forgave him and led him to his house, dressed him in the finest clothes and made a feast in honor of his return. And so the lost son entered again into the love of his father.

Brethren! This is how the heavenly Father acts toward us. He does not bind us to Himself by force if we, having a depraved and ungrateful heart, do not want to live according to His commandments, but He allows us to depart from Him, and to know by experience how dangerous it is to live according to the will of one's heart, to know what an agonizing lack of peace and tranquility tries the soul, devoted to passions, by what shameful food it is nourished. For what can be more shameful than the food of the passions? God forbid that anyone remain forever in this separation from God. To be far from God is true and eternal perdition. They that remove themselves from Thee shall perish (Ps. 72:27), says the holy king and prophet David. It is necessary without fail to turn from the pernicious way of sin towards God with the whole heart. Let everyone be assured that God will see his sincere conversion, will meet him with love, and will receive him, as before, as one of His children.

Have you sinned? Say in you heart with full determination, I will arise and go to my Father, and in fact, go to Him. And just as you manage to say these words in your heart; just as you decide firmly to live according to His will, He will immediately see that you are returning to Him. He is always not far from every one of us (Acts 17:27), and will immediately pour His peace into your heart. It will be suddenly so light and pleasant for you, as it is, for example, for a bankrupt debtor when they forgive his debts, or as pleasant as it is to a poor man whom they suddenly dress in fine clothes or offer a seat at a rich table.

At the same time take notice, brethren, that as many forms as there are of sins or passions, so also are there return paths to the heavenly Father. Every sin or passion is a path to a country far from God. Did you leave by the road of faithlessness? Turn back and, further, recognize all its foolishness, feel with your whole heart its heaviness, emptiness, perdition, and stand with firm footing on the path of faith, calming, sweet, and life-giving for the heart of man, and hold on to it with your whole heart. Did you leave by the way of pride? Turn back and go the way of humility. Hate pride, knowing that God resists the proud. Did you leave by the way of envy? Turn from this diabolic road and be content with what God has sent and remember whose offspring it is—the first envier was the devil and by the envy of the devil sin entered into the world (Wisdom 2:24). Be well-disposed towards everyone. If you left by the way of enmity and hatred, turn back and go the way of meekness and love. Remember that whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer (I John 3:15). Or did you depart from God by gluttony and dissoluteness? Turn back and go the way of moderation and chastity, and remember as a rule in life the words of the Saviour, Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be overburdened with self-indulgence and drunkenness, and cares of this life (Luke 21:34), and use the words of the repentant prodigal son: We have sinned before Thee, and are no longer worthy to be called Thy sons. Receive us, even as hirelings. And He surely will receive us back as children. Amen.