

FEBRUARY 2017 The "Other" and the "Self"

It seems to come faster and faster with each year, doesn't it? Great Lent, that is. It seems not only that the Nativity Fast just ended, but that last year's Great Lent just ended also! That can be attributed to a couple of things. First, as the years pass, they fly by faster and faster with age as there are many more days behind us than ahead of us. But more importantly, Great Lent is such an important and, yes, difficult time of each year that it becomes one of the great markers of each calendar year. We anticipate it with a little dread about the rigors and efforts coming, but also with hope, because it is the tithing of the year that we offer to God Himself in effort – prayer, fasting, almsgiving and repentance. Despite the dread, anyone who makes an honest effort to keep the Fast to the best of their ability admits that it is more than worth it. We feel better physically, spiritually, even emotionally because of the effort to cleanse body, mind and soul.

Great Lent is often referred to as the School of Repentance. These seven weeks (40 days of Lent and then Holy Week) take us from our infancy and feebleness in effort at denial to a mature forging of an iron body and spirit through the hunger of our bodies being filled with the presence of God and His Spirit in anticipation of the Resurrection of His Son. The ministry, teaching, miracles, and finally, selfless death of our Lord Jesus Christ make our own transfiguration from fallen, corrupt beings destined for the grave into resurrected beings living not for this world but for the Kingdom of God. Such beings cannot be held by death or the grave!

But there is an interesting paradox in the efforts to come. First of all, we are reminded that anyone who claims to be a Christian cannot fail to see in the message of the Gospel the fact that we must find Christ in the "other." Great Lent does not just come upon us – the Church prepares us with a number of lessons to "prime the pump" so to speak for our efforts. The other is central to these lessons. The only way to even find the other is to lose oneself. That is the point of fasting and repentance. Zacchaeus had to overcome himself to see Christ. When confronted by the Lord, he pleaded his case: "I return anything I took fourfold!" He had to give of himself to the other. The Lord then rewards his faith by calling him down and staying with him.

The Publican (like Zacchaeus) simply fell down before the Lord in repentance with full knowledge of his unworthiness. He couldn't even look up to the heavens and to His Lord. He just, with bowed head and heavy heart, asked God to forgive him (and help him see beyond himself). The Pharisee, in his pride and self-righteousness, could never get past himself.

The Prodigal Son lived a life of selfishness and indulgence, and that with assets that were his father's! Yet, when he stopped living for himself and knew he had to return to the love of his true home, he was received with great joy. He gave himself back to the other - his father. His brother, however, could never get past himself.

On Meatfare Sunday (the last day we eat meat before entering the fulness of the Fast), we are given the lesson of the Great Judgment. We know the parable – the sheep and goats are separated to their destinies on the simple basis of how they lived their lives. The sheep lived their lives taking care of the sick, the hungry, the thirsty, the naked and the imprisoned, and by losing themselves in the least of the brethren served the Lord Himself. The goats, by not doing those ministries did not serve the Lord – they turned Him away. The goats could never get past themselves.

Finally, just minutes before the Fast begins, we are given the great lesson of forgiveness. The Lord reminds us all that if we can't forgive someone, we cannot expect the Lord to forgive

FEBRUARY 2017

St. Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church • Las Vegas, Nevada

<p style="text-align: center;">GREETERS</p> <p>FEB 5: WHEELER/MURPHY FEB 12: CHONG/OSBURN FEB 19: STAFFORD/CAMPBELL FEB 26: MCAULEY/DEMKO</p>	1	2	3	4		
	BAPTISM, 10:00 AM	DIVINE LITURGY, 8:00 AM MEETING OF THE LORD BLESSING OF CANDLES ERITREAN SERVICE, 9:30 AM		OCCIF BOARD MEETING SACRAMENTO, CA		
	GREAT VESPERS/LITIYA, 6:30 PM			GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS CHOIR REHEARSAL		
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
FAST FREE	FAST FREE	FAST FREE	FAST FREE	FAST FREE	FAST FREE	FAST FREE
DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: YOUTH EPISTLE: YOUTH POST-COMM: YOUTH CHURCH SCHOOL PUBLICAN AND PHARISEE			DAILY VESPERS, 6:30 PM ADULT FAITH FORUM	ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM		NO SLAVONIC LITURGY OCL OPEN FORUM 2:00 PM ARCHBISHOP'S VISIT GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: BROOKS EPISTLE: BITSKO POST-COMM: WHEELER ARCHBISHOP'S VISIT NO CHURCH SCHOOL PRODIGAL SON			DAILY VESPERS, 6:30 PM ADULT FAITH FORUM	ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM		BAPTISM, 10:00 AM GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS CHOIR REHEARSAL
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
MEAT FAST	MEAT FAST	MEAT FAST	MEAT FAST	MEAT FAST	MEAT FAST	MEAT FAST
DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: JARLSON EPISTLE: W. DEMKO POST-COMM: CHURCH SCHOOL MEATFARE	FATHER JOHN OUT OF TOWN, February 20-24, METROPOLITAN COUNCIL, SYOSSET, NY			ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM NO COFFEE CHAT		FEEDING THE HOMELESS, 10:30 AM GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS
	PARISH COUNCIL, 6:30 PM		DAILY VESPERS, 6:30 PM ADULT FAITH FORUM			
26	27	28	Mar 1	Mar 2	Mar 3	Mar 4
MEAT FAST	GREAT LENT BEGINS		Confessions, 5:30 PM LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS, 6:30 PM	ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM NO COFFEE CHAT	LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS, 9:00 AM	GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS
DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: W. DEMKO EPISTLE: HOOD POST-COMM: FORGIVENESS VESPERS NO CHURCH SCHOOL	COMPLINE with KANON OF ST. ANDREW, 6:30 PM	COMPLINE with KANON OF ST. ANDREW, 6:30 PM		COMPLINE with KANON OF ST. ANDREW, 6:30 PM		

St. Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

PO Box 12635
5400 Annie Oakley Drive
Las Vegas, Nevada 89112-0635
702.898.4800
www.lasvegasorthodox.com

RECTOR

Archpriest John J. Dresko
1747 Crystal Downs Ave
Las Vegas, NV 89123
860.833.4921 (Mobile)
fatherjohn@lasvegasorthodox.com

Father Stephen Osburn, Jr.
(702) 521-6988

CHOIR DIRECTORS

Matushka Elizabeth Dresko
Grace Brooks
Jarrod Huffman

PARISH COUNCIL

Virginia Hood, Vice-President
Karen Short, Treasurer
Catherine Wilkalis, Secretary

Gregory Brooks
James Brophy
Kevin McAuley
Karen Murphy
Litsa Osburn
Joseph Wheeler

SUB-COMMITTEES

Building & Grounds
Kevin McAuley

Eritrean & Ethiopian Outreach
Tekeste Nuguru

Russian Outreach
Natalia Minkoff

Church School/Youth
Fr. Stephen Osburn, Jr.
Amy McAuley

Fellowship Committee
Charity Committee

us. Then the Church, in her wisdom, calls us to actually do it. We face each other and ask (and grant!) forgiveness before we enter the Fast. With some encounters there is great intimacy (for example, between husbands and wives, or parents and children), for others the encounters might be more meaningful because the sin of indifference is the ultimate sin against the “other.” One who cannot forgive demonstrates that he or she cannot get past themselves.

Did you notice that the same sentence (not just written above but as a deep conviction) ended each story that is preparing us for Lent? If we can’t get past ourselves, we can’t see the other. And if we can’t see the other, we can’t see Christ.

BUT, the paradox is in the words of our Lord. What are the two great commandments according to Him? One, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And, two, you shall love your neighbor **as yourself**.

We are supposed to love ourselves! The self-denial of our Lenten efforts has the paradoxical benefit of

true self-improvement. In our culture, we diet, we exercise, we eat right, we even might resort to plastic surgery to “love ourselves.” That is not love — that is ego.

True love of self is when we discover that God Himself lives in us. That discovery can only come about when we “get past ourselves” and open our hearts and souls to His word and strive to live godly lives. The Lenten effort begins with self-denial, but that is simply the fuel that allows the engine of our spirits to do the work of God and we then truly see ourselves and Christ in the “other.”

I urge all of you, my beloved flock, to join me in making this Lenten effort a real effort. Pray, fast, give to the poor, come to the nourishing services of the life-giving oasis of the Church. And repent of sins by coming to the Sacrament of Confession. It is only in that struggle and effort that the self gets lost in the other. And then finds the true self.

The journey to Pascha begins!
Don’t miss the train!

Father John

AT A GLANCE...

Feb 2: MEETING OF THE LORD – BLESSING OF CANDLES

Feb 4: OCCIF Annual Meeting (Father out of town for the day)

Choir Rehearsal following Vespers

Feb 11-12: Visit of Archbishop Benjamin

OCL Annual Meeting and Open Forum (Forum Sat. 2:00 pm)

Feb 20-24: METROPOLITAN COUNCIL, SYOSSET, NY (FATHER JOHN OUT OF TOWN)

Feb 21: Parish Council Meeting, 6:00 PM

Feb 25: FEEDING THE HOMELESS, 10:30 AM

Choir Rehearsal following Vespers

Feb 26: FORGIVENESS VESPERS FOLLOWING LITURGY

Maslenitza at Coffee Hour

Feb 27: GREAT LENT BEGINS (See Calendar of Services)

Send email addresses and corrections to:
fatherjohn@lasvegasorthodox.com

FEASTDAYS

During February, we celebrate the following feast:

MEETING OF OUR LORD

February 2

VESPERS WITH BLESSING OF CANDLES,
6:30 PM (WED)

DIVINE LITURGY, 8:00 AM (THUR)
BLESSING OF CANDLES

SEE THE SCHEDULE OF SERVICES FOR THE FIRST WEEK OF GREAT LENT IN THE CALENDAR

BLESSING OF CANDLES

The feast of the Meeting of our Lord will be served on Feb 1-2. It is traditional to bless candles on this feastday. We will bless whatever parish stock we have, and all are welcome to bring your own for blessing. We will bless them after both Vespers and liturgy.

OCCIF

The Orthodox Church Capital Improvement Fund (OCCIF) is a dynamic and innovative effort to establish an Orthodox “mortgage bank” to become a resource to parishes looking to finance capital projects. Father John has been asked to serve on its Board. He will attend his first meeting on February 4 in Sacramento and will be out of town for that day only.

OCL

Orthodox Christian Laity is being hosted by our parish for their annual meeting on Saturday, February 11. Following their meeting, everyone is invited to an Open Forum at 2:00 PM. Dr. Gayle Woloschak, who participated in the Church Council held in Crete will speaking about the council and its effects on the Orthodox world.

NO SLAVONIC SERVICES

Father Alexander will not be here in February due to the OCL activities

and the visit of His Eminence, Archbishop Benjamin. He plans on returning as usual in March on the second Saturday of the month.

VISIT OF ARCHBISHOP BENJAMIN

His Eminence, Archbishop Benjamin, will make his annual archpastoral visit to our parish the weekend of February 11-12. During the liturgy, he will ordain Bill Demko to the subdiaconate and Fr. Stephen will receive his first award: the skufia (hat) and nabledrennik (shield). There will be a social following the liturgy. A pot luck list is available for sides and desserts for those who can help.

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

The “spring” meeting of the Metropolitan Council of the Orthodox Church in America will be held February 21-23 in Syosset, NY. Father John will be attending and will be away February 20-24. Father Stephen will be available for any pastoral needs or emergency.

FEEDING THE HOMELESS

Our next Feeding the Homeless project will be scheduled on Saturday, February 25. We will construct the lunches and bag all of the items which we distribute at 10:30 AM. We then take them downtown and distribute them and are usually done by 1:00 PM. Please join us! If you can donate any of the items needed for the lunches (or funds to provide such), it would be appreciated.

GREAT LENT

The Fast begins on Monday, February 27. We will have Forgiveness Vespers following liturgy on February 26. Every parishioner should make every sincere effort to be present of this moving and important moment in our liturgical year and entrance into Lent.

During Great Lent, every Ortho-

dox Christian of confessing age makes the journey to the Sacrament of Confession. Scheduled times are listed in the calendar, and Fr. John does not mind making appointments. Please note that after the Eve of Palm Sunday, confessions will **only** be heard by appointment.

Make a concerted effort to come to as many of the lenten services as possible. Our souls are strengthened and nourished by these services. Pray, fast and give alms.

Please note we are going to try a small schedule change this year and see how it goes: the **Friday Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts will be served at 9:00 AM, instead of 8:00 AM** to see if that helps with travel, attendance, etc. We will assess it after Lent.

IOCC

Joe Wheeler has been serving as our parish liaison to International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC). His schedule no longer allows him to carry out these duties. If you are interested in helping us out in this position, please talk to Joe to see what it entails and then see Father John.

PROJECT MEXICO

It's on! We are going to be sending another mission team to Project Mexico next summer to help build a house. We ask everyone for their prayers first of all, and the magnificent financial support shown this past year.

You can help support this trip by doing your Amazon shopping using our “smile” account:

<https://smile.amazon.com/ch/88-0242982>

Also, a gofundme page has been set up to allow direct donations. Please consider making a donation and sharing the link!

<https://www.gofundme.com/stpaulmexicotrip>

ICONOGRAPHY

The next phase of our iconography project will be to complete the east walls of the church (to the left and right of the sanctuary). Renderings are available in the church hall and you are urged to take a look. This is a MAJOR project which will require substantial funding. The two renderings posted in the hall will cost \$36,000 each, a total of \$72,000. **We are once again accepting donations to the Icon Fund. Please consider making an offering above and beyond your normal support of the parish!**

CHARITY

Our normal collections of food for Friends of the Desert continue. Needs: jelly, jam, peanut butter, canned fruit, canned tuna/chicken. Thank you!

ORTHODOX VENDORS

A list of businesses that our parish uses or are owned and operated by Orthodox Christians (some parishioners). We provide this information for you to consider if you need services.

CB Air Conditioning
Cedomir Blagojevic
(702) 493-0295

Dolphin Court Salon & Day Spa
7581 W. Lake Mead Blvd.
(702) 946-6000

Kyklos Café (Greek food)
Galleria Mall
Sophocles Frangakis
(702) 450-1515

Makeup and Hair Artist
Natalia Kasimtseva (Baker)
(I travel to client location)
Text or call: (702) 336-8300
View portfolio at:
www.facebook.com/NataliaKasBeauty

Taffer Computers
*Website Design, Marketing,
& Computer Repair*
Fr. Stephen Osburn
(702) 521-6988

PRAYER FOR OUR PARISH

We ask everyone to remember our parish in daily prayer:
Lord, God and Savior of all, we thank You for the blessing of St. Paul parish in our lives. May Your word become alive in each and every one of us who strive to follow You. Please bless and multiply all the gifts – time, talent and treasure – which are given in thanks to benefit our mission and glorify Your name. Bless and multiply the givers and help us all to make present Your Kingdom. For You are the Giver of all that is good, O Christ our God, and to You we give glory, together with Your Father who is without beginning and Your all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

SACRAMENTS/SPECIAL SERVICES

Please follow these guidelines.

- Baptisms. A personal meeting scheduled with Fr. John will be necessary to schedule any baptism requested.
- Matrimony. A date and time for weddings must be requested at least six months (preferably twelve) in advance. There will be premarital sessions for both bride and groom to attend.
- Memorials (Panikhida). Requests for a memorial must be made at least one week in advance. If possible, the service should be served on Saturday. Other requests will be met as pastorally possible.

PARISH COUNCIL SYNOPSIS JANUARY 17, 2017 MEETING

Rector's Report: Fr. John thanked all

recently installed council members for serving; encouraged them to set a good example for the parish.

Discussed possible change of council meeting time due to some members' work schedules; council decided no change – will continue to meet third Tuesday at 6:00 PM.

Reminded council he will be in New York Jan 23- 26 for OCA Chancellors/Treasurers meeting; leaving Monday, returning on Thursday.

Informed council he has been asked to join the board of OCCIF (Orthodox Church Capital Improvement Fund). Its purpose is to provide mortgage lending to parishes and missions within the Orthodox Church. Father's participation will involve monthly phone conferences except for a one-day annual board meeting each year in February. He will be away for the day in Sacramento, CA on Feb 4, 2017.

Father John informed council he will travel to New York in February for the Metropolitan Council overlapping the date of the next parish council meeting. After discussion council members decided to keep the parish council meeting date as originally scheduled on Feb 24, chaired by Father Stephen, with Father John on conference call if possible.

Associate Priest's Report: Informed council that he will serve as substitute priest for Fr Michael in Hesperia, CA Jan 28-29.

Vice President's Report: Informed council she is looking into church cleaning schedule, which has been every other Friday. The hall was cleaned this past Friday, but no invoices have been received since December.

Treasurer's Report: Karen Short distributed our financials before the meeting:

Capital Fund: \$247.42

Rainy Day: \$11,592.51
Icon Fund: \$1,796.86

Income for December was \$26,441.42, with expenses of \$22,868.87 for a surplus of \$3,572.55.

2016 FINAL FINANCIALS

2016 Inc	\$ 295,288.40
2016 Exp	\$ 250,639.26
Inc over Exp	\$ 44,649.14

Karen reported Accounts Payable is totally current. \$6,322 was contributed for the Huffman family. Suggested adding \$678 from our Charity Fund to the amount to bring the amount to an even \$7,000. Council unanimously approved of adding the \$678 as contributed by the church. Funds will be transferred directly to the Huffmans' bank account.

\$20,500 was transferred in December from the Rainy Day Savings Account to the Main Checking Account. \$42,226.32 was then wired to GoldStar to pay down the bonds. Applicable bond holders have been notified and the transaction will be completed on 1/19/2017. GoldStar will recalculate a new amortization schedule.

The December Bake Sale net was \$901.50. The proceeds were transferred to the Restricted Fund for the Icon Fund. Funds from January Chili Cook-off will be designated for Project Mexico.

COMMITTEES

Buildings and Grounds:

Church and parish hall doors: Scheduled for sweeps and closures. Due to illness of contractor door work did not get completed but is planned to be done this Saturday. Paperwork is in order.

Parking Lot Wall Repairs: Masonry repairs to the wall are complete. Kevin will schedule steel work for the

fence, and stucco work. Estimated cost is \$1100.

Sound Panels: Fr John informed council he will order additional sound panels for parish hall in January.

Courtyard: Ginny Hood discussed with Al the landscaper; river rock border too expensive, will utilize less expensive, larger landscaping rock. Cost estimate \$1900. Estimate for trimming palms \$210. Council discussed various treatments for courtyard and expense comparisons. A suggestion made to use stamped concrete instead of rocks for the courtyard border. Kevin volunteered to get estimates from a concrete specialist.

Water Concerns: Two houses on the street directly below the church property still affected by water seepage. Fr John suggested working in conjunction with the property owners to solve the problem. Two weeks ago the geotech engineer, Fr John and Kevin inspected the back of the church property and located the pipe for the French drain. Use of a camera is planned to inspect the pipe up to 100 feet for possible dips or obstructions. Kevin intends to pull original building plans from Clark County to check for the location of this or any other existing drain.

Fr John commented that the church insurance inspector will be conducting an inspection of the church premises this Friday. This inspection is done routinely every 3 years.

Charity: Reported end of year purchases and expenses. December starting balance, \$84.68; End of FY 2016 check from church, \$500.00; Total to spend by Dec 31 was \$584.68. Items purchased included nonperishable food items, hygiene kit items and socks in the amount of \$584.68 leaving a balance of \$0 for 2016 FY. The next homeless feeding will take place

Saturday, Feb 18.

IOCC: Requested resignation from the position of IOCC coordinator as he is too overextended. Father John accepted and will open the opportunity for this position to the parish.

Church School/Youth: Church school update: Second semester off to smooth start. Matushka Lindsey's class will display their classroom artwork mid Feb or early March. Junior High class is reading "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe".

Jarrod Huffman's absence leaves a need for a first High School teacher. For now there are enough second and back-up teachers to help when needed. Amy notes that no one currently feels ready to be a first teacher.

Second teachers need to be more consistent in taking responsibility for their Sunday classes. This past Sunday only two showed up – leaving first teachers to scramble to find substitutes. Not showing up without letting anyone know is inconsiderate and unacceptable.

Project Mexico: Fr. Stephen reports slots are now filled and there is a waiting list. Jamie and Pam Campbell are taking charge of the van rentals, which will decrease the final cost. A \$1900 deposit is due Jan 31. Fund-raisers are being set up.

Eritrean/Ethiopian: status quo

Fellowship: Chili cook-off is this Saturday after Vespers. Help is needed to set up. Fr. Stephen will be setting up on Friday.

Outreach/website: Reports the new website is up and running.

Russian: No Russian Liturgy in January or February; otherwise status quo; no problems.

Stewardship: Reported a total of 44 pledges have been received so far this

year representing 62 individuals, with an average amount of \$3901.

OLD BUSINESS

Iconography: Corrections to Icons in altar are finished. They will be blessed when Archbishop Benjamin arrives. There was no additional cost incurred by the parish.

Greeters Training: no report.

Sunshine Group: Ginny plans to send out friendship cards to people who don't come very often; will need help with this project.

OCL: The OCL (Orthodox Christian Laity) will hold an open forum in our parish hall before Vespers on Feb 11.

Archbishop Visit: Archbishop Benjamin will visit our parish on February 11-12. Fr John will take His Eminence to dinner after vespers. On Sunday Feb 12, a potluck dinner after Liturgy is planned, catered by Viorel Ionescu.

Bill Demko will be ordained to Subdeacon during Archbishop Benjamin's visit. Father Stephen will be awarded a skufia and shield.

The parish has an expense account to sponsor the Archbishop's visitation expenses including airfare, honorarium, and possibly hotel accommodations as needed.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

Next Council Meeting:

Tuesday, February 21, 2017, 6:00 PM

PARISH DIPTYCHS

This list of parish departed is to remind us all of those whom we love and miss and to spur us to remember them in our daily prayers.

MONTH OF FEBRUARY

Antonina Stark

February 2, 1994

Amelia Zalo

February 8, 2008

Peter Lazadoff

February 10, 1993

Samuel Berhe Tella

February 13, 1991

Gurii Mirosnicenco

February 13, 2010

Edward Grudzina

February 14, 2010

Mary Maviglia

February 18, 1998

Raicevich Harrison

February 18, 1999

Milica Primaky

February 25, 1995

Fred Leo Bell

February 25, 1996

Christina Hollis

February 26, 1998

Bekure Hailu Fesehaye

February 28, 1992

James Mezilson

February 28, 1998

Maria Jamieson

February 28, 2002

Irene Wadhams

February 28, 2002

Melvin Stokich

February 28, 2003

Fernand Marie Bica

February 28, 2016

Archpriest James Bertolini

February 29, 2016

FATHER STEPHEN'S CORNER IS IT RIGHT TO BE ANGRY WITH SINNERS?

In our weekly adult group, we recently discussed the Parable of the Prodigal Son in which the idea came up on whether or not the obedient son - the one who followed his father's rules was justified in his anger to see his brother received back into the full grace and fold of their father.

Obviously this isn't the main or even a kind of sub-theme for the parable and the Church is clear that this other son is a representation of the Pharisees misunderstanding of God's Law, but it did present an interesting question: Is it okay to be angry when we see others casually go through life, ruining themselves, spending their "inheritance," only to see them accepted back when they've wasted all other options? Is it okay to be angry when a deeply flawed and repeated sinner is welcomed back into communion with the Church - with Christ - with God? The answer is yes, but also the answer is no.

You see, initially, we can feel justified in seeing ourselves above others. We can see how good we are, how well we do in our prayer lives, how active we are in the Church and the community and how we somehow, can falsely create this illusion (which, let's be honest, we all fully believe) that we are actually good people and not the sinners we are.

Yet, that isn't the anger necessarily that is justified in this parable or even with the two brothers. The anger that can be argued as justifiable is that we (and I put all of us today - and even throughout history - in this category) gave the prodigal son a place to squander his wealth. We have normalized sin to the point that we live in a culture that has laws in place that allows and forces us be okay with legally murdering unborn children and inmates,

forces us to be okay with ignoring the needs of our veterans and homeless populations, ostracizes us for having a stance against homosexuality and gay marriage, warrants that the Church and its morality has no place or value in society because it possibly could offend or even seem backwards in the progressive culture.

This anger that we are allowed to feel is, at its core, directed not at the prodigal son but at the idea we have allowed the foundation of our reality to flourish in a broken, fallen world. Rather than aim to heal this world, letting Christ work in us, we would rather ignore it and direct our attention at the *son* and not the *sin*.

Consequently, this is where the answer to a justifiable anger becomes a resounding no. The purpose of the parable is pretty simple: No matter what happens when one of God's own children leaves, no matter how far they

have strayed, if they are truly penitent, God will receive them back into His open arms.

In turn, regardless of the circumstance of the individual, we should be happy when we see someone seek out a return to Christ. We ourselves are sinful beings and it is not our place to decide what is in the heart of another person; yet, at the same time, also not accepting their sinfulness. We embrace them, not the sin.

The purpose is to understand their struggles, offer them a hand when asked, and be thankful they are trying to obtain God's mercy. Ultimately, this is a difficult task. Seeing those who seemingly throw away every good thing and then somehow can easily return to God's fold is disheartening. This is especially the case when we work hard to be faithful stewards and see others somehow skate by.

However, it is important to

remember that God calls each of us to live life uniquely, different. As Archimandrite Roman of blessed memory once said, "It should be understood naturally that every one bears a Cross, no one is exempt even those outside the Orthodox Church...and a Cross is made of wood. Some are made of pine, some are cedar, some are oak. Each of us has our own issues to deal with and our own crosses to bear. God gives us this unique wood to help us see how we have a freedom in our lives to reject Him or seek after Him but that we are doing so differently."

At the end of this month we will begin Great Lent. A time in which we are to practice forgiveness and repentance. Let us practice early by imitating God's mercy to those who have strayed afar and away – not showing anger towards them, but a complete joy and happiness for they were once lost and have been found!

THE REAL AGE OF THE COUNCILS

A brief account of the council of Nicea, as given by Marutha of Meparkat by direction of the Patriarch Isaac .
http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/marutha_nicaea_02_text.htm

The General Council having thus received authority from the king, the fathers directed that there should be gradations in the assembly and that each Bishop should sit in his place according to his rank. Chairs were there made for all and the king entered and sat with them. He kissed the spots which were the marks of Christ in their bodies. **Of the 318 fathers, only 11 were free from such marks**, whose name were Absalom, Bishop of Edessa, and son of Mar Ephrem's sister, Jonah of Raikson, Mara of Dora, George of Shegar, Jacob of Nisibis, Marouta of Mepairkat, John of Goostia, Shimon of Diarbekir, Adai of Agal, Eusebius of Caesarea and Joseph of Nicomedia. But all the others were more or less maimed in their persecutions [15] from heretics.

Some had their eyes taken out; some had their ears cut off. Some had their teeth dug out by the roots. Some had the nails of their fingers and toes torn out; some were otherwise mutilated; in a word there was no one without marks of violence; save the above-named persons. But Thomas, Bishop of Marash, was an object almost frightful to look upon; he had been mutilated by the removal of his eyes, nose and lips; his teeth had been dug out and both his legs and arms had been cut off. He had been kept in prison 22 years by the Armanites [Armenians] who used to cut off a member of his body or mutilate him in some way every year, to induce him to consent to their blasphemy, but he conquered in this fearful contest to the glory of believers and to the manifestation of the unmercifulness of the heretics. The fathers took him with them to the Council and when [14] the king saw him, he fell down upon the ground and worshipped +him saying, "I worship thee, O thou martyr of Christ, who art adorned with many crowns."



"WHEN YOU PRAY... PRAY LIKE THIS..."

(MATTHEW 5:5-13)

A LENTEN RETREAT

SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2017

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

BISHOP ILIA (KATRE) OF PHILOMELION, SPEAKER

HIERARCH OF THE ALBANIAN ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF AMERICA

FORMER PRIEST OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST CHURCH IN LAS VEGAS

FORMER DEAN OF STUDENTS AT HOLY CROSS SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY



RETREAT SCHEDULE

9:00AM DIVINE LITURGY

10:00AM REFRESHMENTS & REGISTRATION

10:30AM RETREAT BEGINS

12:00PM LENTEN LUNCH

3:30PM RETREAT CONCLUDES

• \$15 PER PERSON, INCLUDING LUNCH

• REGISTER BY FRIDAY, MARCH 24

• CASH OR CHECK ONLY

PAYABLE TO: "ST. PAUL ORTHODOX CHURCH"

MEMO: "LENTEN RETREAT"

SPONSORED BY THE CLARK COUNTY ORTHODOX CLERGY ASSOCIATION

