

At the door of Your compassion do I knock, Lord; send aid to my scattered impulses which are intoxicated with the multitude of the passions and the power of darkness. You can see my sores hidden within me: stir up contrition—though not corresponding to the weight of my sins, for if I receive full awareness of the extent of my sins, Lord, my soul would be consumed by the bitter pain from them. Assist my feeble stirrings on the path to true repentance, and may I find alleviation from the vehemence of sins through the contrition that comes of Your gift, for without the power of Your grace I am quite unable to enter within myself, become aware of my stains, and so, at the sight of them be able to be still from great distraction.

Saint Isaac the Syrian

Sunday 16 February 2014 is the Sunday of the Prodigal Son

Matins Gospel: Matthew 28:16-20

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Gospel: Luke 15:11-32

Apolytikion:

When the stone had been sealed by the Jews, and while soldiers were guarding your most pure Body, you rose, O Saviour, on the third day, giving life to the world. Therefore the heavenly Powers cried out to you, Giver of Life: Glory to your Resurrection, O Christ! Glory to your Kingdom! Glory to your dispensation, only lover of humankind!

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: 2 Timothy 2:1-10; Luke 20:46-47; 21:1-4
Great Martyr Theodore the Tyro; Mariam Isapostola

Tuesday: 1 John 3:9-22; Mark 14:10-42
Leo the Great; Agapetus the Confessor

Wednesday: 1 John 3:21-24; 4:1-11; Mark 14:43-72; 15:1
Philemon & Archippus, of the 70; Philothei of Athens

Thursday: 1 John 4:20-21; 5:1-21; Mark 15:1-15
Leo, Bp. Of Catania; Agathus of Rome

Friday: 2 John 1:1-13; Mark 15:20,22,25,33-41
Timothy the Righteous; John, Pat. Of Constantinople

Saturday: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; Luke 21:8-9,25-27,33-36
Saturday of Souls; Uncovering of Relics at Eugenius; Righteous Thalassius and Baradatus



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

16 February 2014

Returning Home

Today, on the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, the Church continues to focus our attention on the coming season of Great Lent by holding before our eyes a well-known story of repentance. We are told of a son who had been given everything he could want and had squandered it. Finding himself in misery in exile, he resolved to return to his father's house and to ask to work as a hired labourer. However, his father, who had never ceased longing for his return, received him as a son, rejoicing that his son who had been lost was now found.

Jesus tells this parable to illustrate what true repentance is all about. This story is about the Prodigal Son, but it is also about each one of us, for we too are alienated from God. We too are in exile because of our sin and we need to return to our loving Father who eagerly seeks for our salvation.

We often tend to think of sin as breaking the law or offending God. But, although we are called to keep the commandments, sin is much deeper than what we do or don't do. It is rather a state of exile, of having missed the mark, of not being all that God created us to be, and all-too-often feeling powerless to change things.

Today's Gospel tells us that there is hope for us and that, like the Prodigal Son, we too can return to our Father from whom we have become alienated. But the crucial point in this story was when the Prodigal Son recognised his own situation. We read that he "came to himself." We are often too busy convincing ourselves that we are okay, or that other people are to blame for our troubles, that we do not see our situation for what it really is. It is only by recognising our need for God, and the fact that we have become exiled from our true home, that we are able to set out on the journey of repentance which is nothing other than a return to our Father's house, and our true home. And the purpose of Great Lent is precisely to support us on this journey.

I have wasted the wealth which the Father gave to me, and in my wretchedness I have fed with the dumb beasts... But now I return to the compassionate Father and cry out with tears: I fall down before Thy loving-kindness, receive me as a hired servant and save me.

From Vespers for the Sunday of the Prodigal Son



A Mercy of Peace, a Sacrifice of Praise

An introduction to the Divine Liturgy (continued)

Before we continue with the Liturgy, we conclude the Creed by professing:

*I await the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the age to come.*

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is at the very heart of our Christian faith. At Pascha we sing:

*Christ has risen from the dead,
by death He has trampled on death,
and to those in the graves He has given life.*

Saint Paul tells us that “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:14) As Christians we believe that it is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ



that has made our own resurrection possible. By dying, descending to the dead and rising again, He has made it possible for us to share in His victory over death.

Most religions believe in some sort of afterlife in which the soul lives on after death in one form or another. But Christians believe in more than this, for we proclaim the resurrection of the body. The material world and the body are not things that the soul escapes from after death. Rather, we believe in the transfiguration of the material world and of the body, just as Christ's body was transfigured at the Transfiguration and in the Resurrection.

If someone asks what this means then we should look to the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection of Christ, and to the faith of His first followers. There is,

significantly, no description of Christ's Resurrection, for nobody witnessed it. We cannot “prove” the Resurrection in the same way that we can prove other historical facts. What we do have, though, are powerful accounts of its effects, and especially of the effect that it had on the first disciples. What we also have are the accounts of those who encountered the Risen Christ and which show that He was both the same person, but also different and transfigured. And it was these encounters that transformed the world.



He says: “I was dead, and behold, I am alive for, evermore, amen; and you also will be alive forever. This is the meaning of the words of Him Who arose: I am the first and the last; I am He that liveth and was dead for you, for your redemption from death, and I; that is: I conquered your death by My innocent death for your sake, and behold, I am also forever and will sit with My Father on His throne; I was not separated from Him, even though I was on earth accomplishing My great work for you who are subject to sin and death. Therefore, do you also, My followers, work and struggle against sin and do righteous deeds, and where I am, there shall My servant be also—that is, in the eternal Kingdom.”

Saint John of Kronstadt

Saturday of the Departed

This coming Saturday, on the eve of the Sunday of the Last Judgement, the Church encourages us to pray for all who have “fallen asleep in the hope of resurrection and life eternal.”

This is the Church's great day of prayer for its deceased members. We are not saved as isolated individuals but as members of the Church. We are all members of Christ's Body and we need and depend on one another. The love of Christ has gathered us together and holds us in being and we are called to love one another and to bear the burdens of our brothers and sisters.

It is this mutual love that is at the foundation of the Church's prayer for the departed. If we love Christ, we also love those who are in Him and it is His love that holds us all alive.



Question Box

If you have a question about the faith and teaching of the Orthodox Church, you can send it to evangelion@goarch.co.za

A few weeks ago you published something that said that Orthodox Christians believe that Jesus Christ will come again to judge the world. I hear a lot about this from my colleagues at work, who speculate on when and how the world will end. What does the Orthodox Church believe about this?

The Scriptures speak of the “day of the Lord” that will come suddenly and will be preceded by a period of unrest, natural disasters, wars and persecutions. However, for the early Christians, the Second Coming of Christ was something that they looked to with hope and assurance, rather than dread and fear. Both Saint Peter (2 Peter 3:10) and Saint Paul (1 Thessalonians 5:2) teach that Christ will come unexpectedly and the Church calls us to be constantly vigilant and ready for Him. But, following Jesus Christ's own warning, the Church urges us not to speculate on either the details or the timing of Christ's Second Coming. (Matthew 24:4-5) We do not know when Christ will come, but what matters is that we will be prepared for Him when He does come. As the Great Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete states:

*My soul, O my soul, rise up! Why art thou sleeping!
The end draws near; and soon shalt thou be troubled.
Watch then, that Christ thy God may spare thee,
For He is everywhere present and fills all things.*