

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



**28 February 2016 is the  
Sunday of the Prodigal Son**

**Matins Gospel:** Luke 24:36-53

**Epistle:** 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

**Gospel:** Luke 15:11-32

**Resurrectional Apolytikion:**

Angelic powers were above Thy tomb, and they that guarded Thee became as dead. And Mary stood by the grave seeking Thine immaculate Body. Thou hast despoiled Hades and wast not tried thereby. Thou didst meet the Virgin and didst grant us life. O Thou Who didst arise from the dead, Lord, glory be to Thee.

**Seasonal Kontakion:**

O Father, foolishly I ran away from Your glory, and in sin, squandered the riches You gave me. Wherefore, I cry out to You with the voice of the Prodigal, "I have sinned before You Compassionate Father. Receive me in repentance and take me as one of Your hired servants."

### ***Readings and saints for this week:***

**Monday, 29 Feb:** 1 John 2:18-29; 3:1-8; Mark 11:1-11  
Meatfare Monday; John Cassian

**Tuesday, 1 March:** 1 John 3:9-22; Mark 14:10-42  
Meatfare Tuesday; Martyr Eudocia; Andonina the New Martyr

**Wednesday, 2 March:** 1 John 3:21-24; 4:1-11; Mark 14:43-72; 15:1  
Meatfare Wednesday; Martyr Hesychius; Nicholas Planas

**Thursday, 3 March:** 1 John 4:20-21; 5:1-21; Mark 15:1-15  
Meatfare Thursday; Martyrs Eutropius, Cleonicus & Basiliscus; Theodoretos the Holy Martyr of Antioch

**Friday 4 March:** 2 John 1:1-13; Mark 15:20,22,25,33-41  
Meatfare Friday; Gerasimus of the Jordan; Martyrs Paul and Julianna

**Saturday, 5 March:** 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; Luke 21:8-9,25-27,33-36  
Saturday of Souls; Conon the Gardener; Mark the Ascetic



## ***Evangelion***

***A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith***

28 February 2016

### **The Prodigal Son**

Today we continue our preparation for Great Lent by hearing the parable of the Prodigal Son. In holding this parable before us as we begin this season of repentance, the Church reminds us what repentance is all about, namely, our return to the loving God from whom we have gone astray.

In this well-known parable, Jesus Christ describes how a man took his inheritance and squandered it, travelling to a far country and becoming destitute as a result of his wild living. He eventually came to his senses and realised that he would be better off to return to his father and ask to be employed as a servant, but his father, seeing him coming, welcomed him as a son and did not hesitate to throw a lavish feast for him.

The parable of the Prodigal Son is our own story, and Jesus tells it in order to show us what true repentance means. At the heart of this story is the relationship between the father and his wayward son, and in this relationship we see our own relationship to God. God is a loving Father, who longs for us to return to Him. He is not a strict judge who weighs up what we have done, but rather a Father who does not stop longing that we will return to Him.

By rejecting God and wandering away from Him, we have become entrapped in sin. Sin is not simply the breaking of the commandments, but it is the destruction of our relationship with God. And repentance, then, is about returning to God, to our loving Father, who longs to welcome us.



I have wasted the wealth which the Father gave to me, and in my wretchedness I have fed with the dumb beasts. Yearning after their food, I remained hungry and could not eat my fill. 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

## Saint John Cassian

Tomorrow the Church commemorates Saint John Cassian, whose encounter with Egyptian monasticism in the fourth century was to have a crucially important impact on the development of monasticism in the West.



Saint John Cassian was born in Scythia (Romania), on the border between two worlds, and he travelled and lived in both East and West. Together with his friend Germanus, he was attracted to the monastic way of life and set off for the Holy Land where they became monks at a monastery in Bethlehem. After several years of communal life, they longed for the desert monasticism of the monks of Egypt. With the blessing of their abbot, they journeyed to Egypt where they spent seven years sharing the life of the desert solitaries and receiving their teaching. On returning to Bethlehem, their abbot gave them his blessing to settle in Egypt.

However, no sooner had they returned than trouble broke out in the Church there and many of the monks had to flee the desert. Our saints then travelled to Constantinople and put themselves under the protection of Saint John Chrysostom, who was patriarch at the time. But trouble erupted there too, the patriarch was forced into exile, and our saints moved on to Rome. After twelve years in Rome (where he was raised to the priesthood, having previously been ordained deacon by Saint John Chrysostom), Saint John Cassian moved to Marseilles where he founded both a men's and a women's monastery.

It was during this period that he wrote his most important works to provide guidance to the monasteries he founded. The *Conferences* describes his encounters with the Egyptian elders and presents their teaching on the spiritual life. The *Institutes* both sets out principles for ordering the monastic life and also sets out his teaching (which he derived from the Desert Fathers) on the eight chief vices that hinder those who are seeking after God, namely, gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, sadness, acedia, vainglory, and pride. In addition to showing how to counter them, he also shows his deep and subtle understanding of the human soul.

Saint John Cassian reposed in peace in the year 435. Sadly, his influence in the West was hampered by the growing popularity of some less-than-entirely Orthodox ideas. But his memory and his teaching was kept alive in the monasteries, thanks largely to Saint Benedict explicitly recommending Cassian's works to his monks.

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A man can be harmed by another only through the causes of the passions which lie within himself. It is for this reason that God, the Creator of all and the Doctor of men's souls, who alone has accurate knowledge of the soul's wounds, does not tell us to forsake the company of men; He tells us to root out the causes of evil within us and to recognize that the soul's health is achieved not by a man's separating himself from his fellows, but by his living the ascetic life in the company of holy men. When we abandon our brothers for some apparently good reason, we do not eradicate the motives for dejection but merely exchange them, since the sickness which lies hidden within us will show itself again in other circumstances.

Saint John Cassian

## To Repent is to Return from Exile...

We are often inclined to think of sin and repentance in legal terms. While God does call us to keep His commandments (because He knows what is best for us), sin is about much more than simply breaking rules. Sin is far more than any individual sin, but is more fundamentally a state of alienation of God. Like the prodigal son, and like Adam who was cast out of Paradise, we have become alienated from God. We have lost the joy that comes from a life of communion with God. We have lost the sense of life as it was meant to be. We have lost the spiritual beauty and the innocence of our first creation.

To repent means to return from exile as the prodigal son did. And in order to return from exile we first have to realise that we are indeed in a state of exile, a state of alienation from God. Yet too often we have anaesthetised ourselves to the pain of our exile: we fill our lives with entertainment and activities which may not be bad in themselves, but which can dull us to the pain of what we really feel. If we are to repent, we need to allow ourselves to realise our alienation from God. We need to allow ourselves to feel the pain of our human brokenness, and to acknowledge the depth of our longing for God.

Today, on the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, the Church sings the sad and nostalgic Psalm 136 (137) at Matins which recalls the exile of the Jews in Babylonian captivity: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, and we wept when we remembered Zion..." This has become the song of all who recognise their exile from God and, in recognising it, turn towards the God for whom they long.

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## 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.



*Thou hast willed to fashion me as a living creature from natures visible and invisible: Thou hast made my body from the earth, and given me a soul by Thy divine and quickening breath. Therefore, O Saviour, grant rest to Thy servants in the land of the living, in the tabernacles of the righteous. (From Vespers of the Saturday of the Dead)*