



PARISH INFORMATION BULLETIN

PROGRAM FOR 5—11 FEBRUARY 2017

SUNDAY 5 FEBRUARY <i>TRIDION BEGINS</i>	16th Sunday of Luke, Publican and Pharisee,: Luke 18:10-14 • 7.30– 11.00am Orthros and Divine Liturgy
FRIDAY 10 FEBRUARY <i>St Haralambos, Hieromartyr</i>	• 7.00 am Orthros and Divine Liturgy

This Sunday is the first of four Sundays that prepare us for Great Lent. This Sunday can be regarded as the gate which we pass through to the holy period that leads us to Pascha. This gate assists in directing us towards being conscious of repentance. Repentance should direct us through Great Lent.

WORDS FROM THE CHURCH FATHERS

To judge sins is the business of one who is sinless, but who is sinless except God? Whoever thinks about the multitude of his own sins in his heart never wants to make the sins of others a topic of conversation. To judge a man who has gone astray is a sign of pride, and God resists the proud. On the other hand, one who every hour prepares himself to give answer for his own sins will not quickly lift up his head to examine the mistakes of others.

- St. Gennadius of Constantinople, *The Golden Chain*, 53-55

A discerning man, when he eats grapes, takes only the ripe ones and leaves the sour. Thus also the discerning mind carefully marks the virtues which he sees in any person. A mindless man seeks out the vices and failings ... Even if you see someone sin with your own eyes, do not judge; for often even your eyes are deceived.

- St. John of the Ladder, *Ladder*, 10.16-17



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every Monday to Friday
between
4.00 and 6.00pm

for Holy Confession and
any spiritual need.

THE CHILDREN'S WORD Presvytera Alexandra Houck, myocn.net

When we hear a story, sometimes we think about how we fit into it, don't we?

Today we hear the story of the Publican and the Pharisee. Do you remember it? Two men went to the temple to pray. One of them said, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people." He went on to compare himself to other people, other sinners. He told God all the great things he did. But the other man would not even look up, and just said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

When we hear this story, we think about how we fit into it. You can ask yourself: Which way do I pray? Do I tell God all the great things I have done? Do I compare myself to the bad kids at school, and remind God that I'm not like them? OR do I tell God that I make mistakes? Do I ask Him to help me with my problems?

Which way do YOU pray?

Just think: the two men came to the same temple. They came to talk to the same God. But how different they were! Remember, God wants all of us to talk to Him, to pray to Him. But let's follow the example of the humble man. "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

SERMON FOR THE SUNDAY OF THE PUBLICAN AND PHARISEE

Luke 18:10-14

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we hear a Gospel about pride and humility - about judgment and self-condemnation. If we are to speak about pride, we may do so in the context of humility, for one stands completely opposed to the other. In today's Gospel, we hear the familiar story of the Publican (or tax collector), and the Pharisee. We know from the Holy Fathers that the Pharisee thinks himself to be something great. And anyone who thinks himself something great, loses grace and is distanced from God, as it is said: "The Lord resists the proud; but he gives grace unto the lowly." Pride, dear brothers and sisters, is a powerful force, and it can also be a subtle one. Perhaps we would never come right out in our prayer and say "I thank thee that I am not like other men" because it just sounds so conceited! But, let us not be fooled into thinking we are not like the Pharisee! If we examine ourselves honestly, we will see that we fall into his same sin but perhaps in less obvious ways. Perhaps we have become so proud, that we do not even realize that our thoughts are saying to us the exact words that the Pharisee said out loud. And so, again on this Sunday, it is an opportunity to examine ourselves. And, if we examine ourselves according to the Holy Fathers and according to the words of the Lord in the Gospel, we will perceive within ourselves how much we fall short.

Jesus has many encounters with the Pharisees, and in the Christian world the term "Pharisee" has become synonymous with hypocrite. Throughout the upcoming Great Lent and Holy Week, we will hear a lot about the Pharisees in the Gospel readings. And if we take comfort in not seeing their ways in us, then know that we may be accountable for the very sins Christ illustrates in this parable. The Pharisee was a proud man. He went to the temple to pray, as did a tax collector. Standing up front, the Pharisee thanked God that he was not an adulterer, or extortioner, or otherwise sinful man such as, for example, the tax collector. He fasted. He tithed. He was a good man. The Blessed Theophylact, in his commentary on this passage, notes that the Pharisee in this parable illustrates that when righteousness takes pride as its companion, it makes demonic what was once God-like. Whether it is pride in one's own accomplishments, or ethnic pride, or spiritual pride, the result is the same: we thank God for who or what we are (if we thank God at all), and pass judgment on to others. And this was one of the problems with the Pharisee's prayer: he compared himself to others. And in doing so, he falls away from humility, which is reality. Humility is reality; it is seeing ourselves for who we are, and we are a people who can attribute nothing good to ourselves, for any good that we do comes from God. The publican, on the other hand, was acknowledging the way things were! But, one cannot have this spiritual vision, a correct version of himself in relation to God, without a life a prayer, without a life of labor, without a life of obedience. We know from the Holy Fathers, St. Dorotheos in particular, that one cannot dig up humility. No one can express what humility is in words and how it grows within the soul, unless he learns about it through experience. It is a grace, a fruit that comes from keeping the commandments and participating in the sacramental life of the Church, from prayer, and from hard work.

There's a danger in spiritual practices when they are mixed with pride. St. Cyril of Alexandria asks, "For what profit is there in fasting twice a week, if in so doing, it serves as a pretext for ignorance and vanity, and if it makes you haughty, arrogant, and selfish?" St. Mark the Ascetic wrote, "He who seeks forgiveness of his sins loves humility, but if he condemns another he seals his own wickedness. Just as fire and water cannot be combined, so self-justification and humility exclude one another."

Now the tax collector knelt at the back of the temple, looked down, beating his chest, exclaimed, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." In those days, tax collectors were known as dishonest, self-aggrandizing men who profited at the expense, particularly, of the weak. So this man had good reason to seek mercy. He knew he was a sinner. In his repentance he compared himself to no one; he condemned no one. He was the opposite of the Pharisee. And in this parable Christ tells us that the humble, repentant tax collector was the one who was justified in God's eyes.

The humble ways of the Publican are ways that are not rewarded in a proud world. And St. Paul notes in today's Epistle that true faith and practice will be persecuted in this world. So the rewards of humility are not likely to be in this life. Saint Paul says that "evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." Surely one of the great deceptions is that of spiritual pride.

As we begin the journey toward Lent, let us ask God for help that we may at least labor a little bit. We have become so comfortable, again by this time in the year. We are given these Sundays preceding Lent as a wake-up call! Let us allow the message of this Gospel to humble us and let us remember, that with the Lenten struggle comes bodily discipline, and when the body is humbled the soul is also humbled. So, the Church gives us Great Lent so that we may continue toward the path of humility, toward the path of salvation. May we be granted the disposition of the publican always. AMEN.