



Parish Information Bulletin

Program 25 February - 2 March 2024

SUNDAY 25 FEBRUARY	16TH SUNDAY OF LUKE , Luke 18 :10-14 • 7.30am Orthros and Divine Liturgy
MONDAY 26 FEBRUARY	• 9.00am Service of Holy Unction
TUESDAY 27 FEBRUARY <i>St Prokopios the Confessor</i>	• 7.30am Orthros and Divine Liturgy
WEDNESDAY 28 FEBRUARY	• 5.00pm Paraklesis to the Theotokos • 7.00pm <u>DIVINE LITURGY IN ENGLISH</u>
SUNDAY 3 MARCH	GOSPEL READING: Luke 15:1 1-32 EPISTLE READING: 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20

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Fr Athanasios and
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at the Church every
Monday to Friday
between 4.00 and 6.00pm
for Holy Confession and
any spiritual need.

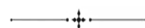
St Prokopios the Confessor

This Saint was from Decapolis of Isauria, a mountainous region of Asia Minor. In his youth, he devoted himself to a life of asceticism, and accomplished all prescribed efforts by which the heart is purified and the spirit elevated to God. When a persecution began by the nefarious Emperor Leo the Isaurian (717-741) regarding icons, Prokopios rose up in defence of icons showing that the veneration of icons is not idolatry; for Christians know that in honouring icons they do not either bow down or honour lifeless material but rather honour living saints who are depicted on the icons. Because of that, Prokopios was arrested, brutally

tortured, flogged and scrapped with an iron brush. For this he became known as a Confessor of the Faith. He endured these tortures and was imprisoned with his fellow Confessor, Saint Basil (Feb. 28). When the wicked Emperor Leo was slain in the body, for he had lost his soul earlier, icons were restored in the churches and Prokopios returned to his monastery where he spent the remainder of his days in peace and he was granted the grace to work miracles.

In old age, he was translated to the kingdom of God where he gazes with joy upon the living angels and saints, whose images on icons he honoured on earth. He reposed peacefully in 750.

Another version of his *Life* says that Saints Prokopios and Basil co-suffered during the reign of Leo V the Armenian (813-820), to which Saint Theodore the Studite addressed two epistles in which he praises them for their courage under persecution (*Epistle 2*). According to this account, Saint Prokopios became a monk in his homeland and remained there for four years. Then, with the blessing of the Abbot, he undertook a stricter way of life in solitude and continual prayer. Soon thereafter a monastery was founded around him by monks seeking his spiritual guidance. When Emperor Leo V was informed that Prokopios was an iconophile, he sent his magistrate to persuade Prokopios to desist, though this was done in vain, for Prokopios openly venerated an icon concealed in his breast before him. This was reported to the Emperor, who ordered that Prokopios be punished and exiled for his defiance. Saint Prokopios reposed in exile.



St. John Cassian: When we have attained some degree of holiness we should always repeat . . .

"When we have attained some degree of holiness we should always repeat to ourselves the words of the Apostle: 'Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me' (1 Cor. 15:10), as well as what was said by the Lord: 'Without Me you can do nothing' (John 15:5). We should also bear in mind what the prophet said: 'Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain that build it' (Ps. 127:1), and finally: 'It does not depend on man's will or effort, but on God's mercy' (Rom. 9:16). Even if someone is sedulous, serious and resolute, he cannot, so long as he is bound to flesh and blood, approach perfection except through the mercy and grace of Christ. James himself says that 'every good gift is from above' Jas. 1:17, while the Apostle Paul asks: 'What do you have which you did not receive? Now if you received it, why do you boast, as if you had not received it?' (1 Cor. 4:7). What right, then, has man to be proud as though he could achieve perfection through his own efforts?"

- St. John Cassian, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text (Vol. 1)*, "On the Eight Vices: On Pride"

Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee Luke 18:10-14 Beginning of the Triodion

Today we begin the period of the Triodion: the period of solemnity, and, I would say, the most beautiful period of the Church year. The Triodion is the liturgical book we use during the period of Great Lent and Holy Week. During the service of matins, or orthros, this book gives us verses for three odes to be sung every morning; this is why it is called the Book of Three Odes, or Triodion.

Although the Triodion is connected to Great Lent, with fasting, it begins today, four Sundays before Clean Monday. Today we have the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee, and after this come the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, the Sunday of Judgement, and the Sunday of Forgiveness. These Sundays act as an introduction to and preparation for the Fast, and each Sunday speaks of a particular virtue which is a prerequisite for true fasting, without which our fast will neither be pleasing to God nor of benefit for our spiritual life.

The Pharisee says today in the Gospel, “I fast twice a week”, but this fast didn’t benefit him. Fasting is a means, not an end, and if it is not accompanied by love, humility, charity, prayer, then it will be useless. Moreover, if our fasting is accompanied by pride and hard-heartedness, it will be not only unprofitable, but demonic, as the Church Fathers tell us; we will be like the demons who never eat nor drink, but neither show love or pray. This is why this week, the week after the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee, is always fast free; we don’t fast twice, on Wednesday and Friday, as usual, but the Church suspends the usual fast in order to remind us of the vain boast of the Pharisee, and of the fact that we are not saved by our external acts, but by the inner state of our soul, and that the power to save does not belong to man, but to God alone.

And this is where we find fundamental message of today’s parable. From the beginning of man’s creation until the end of time, the great lie, the great temptation that leads mankind astray is the idea that man is self-sufficient and independent, that we can rely on ourselves and be saved through our own efforts.

In the beginning, the Book of Genesis tells us about the lie the devil told in paradise, namely that Adam and Eve could become equal to God by turning away from him and following their own will. At the end, the Book of Revelation tells us of the number 666. These days, we hear many different opinions and theories about this number, the sign of the Beast, and so on. What it means exactly, only God knows; the only thing the Bible tells us clearly is this: “It is the number of man” (13:18). The number six is the number of man who was created on the sixth day, and 666 symbolises the complete self-sufficiency and independence of man, man’s false self-deification, the point at which man believes he has taken God’s place. Thus, the number 666 symbolises the continuation and completion of the lie that led to man’s fall from paradise.

And it is this idea of man’s self-sufficiency that is the essence of the pride and self-centredness that today’s parable speaks about. The Pharisee comes to the temple to pray, but his prayer is not a prayer; he simply comes to announce to God how he has reached perfection, and how he is better than the sinful tax-collector. By every worldly standard, the Pharisee was a “good person”. He didn’t murder, he didn’t steal, he didn’t commit adultery, he didn’t bear false witness, he honoured his mother and father, he was regular in his prayer, he gave at least a tenth of his earnings to the poor; in short, he did everything you’d expect of a “good person”. But despite all this, he wasn’t reconciled to God because he didn’t understand that he had need of him, he had himself as his ultimate point of reference rather than God. His prayer was entirely self-orientated and inward-looking — “he prayed to himself” (προς εαυτὸν προσήχετο) — he didn’t look outward and therefore couldn’t see God in order to approach him.

The tax-collector, the thief, the liar, the traitor, did not have a single good work to bring to the temple. He had only one thing: humility. He understood that he was not self-sufficient, that he needed God, and this was enough for him to be forgiven.

“For whosoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whosoever humbles himself shall be exalted”.

When man thinks he *is* something, that he can depend on himself, then he builds his house on sand and will in the end be left with nothing. But when he understands that he is nothing, “when he remembers that we are dust” (Psalm 102:14), then he leaves room in his heart for God to take up abode, to the point where he can say, “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). *This* is the point of Lent.

May God give us the deeds of the Pharisee together with the humility of the Tax-collector!

Fr Kristian Akselberg



St. Ephraim of Syria: Virtues are formed by prayer. . . .

“Virtues are formed by prayer.

Prayer preserves temperance. Prayer suppresses anger. Prayer prevents emotions of pride and envy.

Prayer draws into the soul the Holy Spirit, and raises man to Heaven.”

— St. Ephraim of Syria