



Parish Information Bulletin

Program 3—9 March 2024

SUNDAY 3 MARCH	17TH SUNDAY OF LUKE, Luke 15:11-32 • 7.30am Orthros and Divine Liturgy
MONDAY 4 MARCH	• 9.00am Service of Holy Unction
WEDNESDAY 6 MARCH	• 5.00pm Paraklesis to the Theotokos
THURSDAY 7 MARCH	• 8.00—9.00pm ➡ TEENAGE YOUTH GROUP 2024 ALL TEENAGERS WELCOME Join the group and learn about your faith, make friends, enjoy refreshments, in a friendly, relaxing environment. * In Church Hall, upstairs behind the Church
SATURDAY 9 MARCH <i>Saturday of Souls</i>	• 7.30am Orthros and Divine Liturgy
SUNDAY 10 MARCH	GOSPEL READING: Matthew 25: 31-46 EPISTLE READING: I Corinthians 8: 8-13; 9:1-2

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

DEATH AND MOURNING

One may ask, why do we pray for those that have died? It is true that there can be no repentance after we die, a person's eternal destiny is determined immediately after death, and we cannot really expect our prayers to snatch an unbeliever from a state of evil and misery to the state of sanctity and blessedness. Why then do we pray for the dead? It is because praying for the dead is an expression of love. We ask God to remember the departed because we love them. Love survives death and transcends it.

We pray for those who have died, just as we pray for those who are living because we are all members of Christ's church. Two parts are distinguished as constituting the Church: the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant. To the first belong those who are still struggling on earth and fighting the good fight of faith and piety. The Church Triumphant are those who have died, those who fought well and have been crowned.

The Fathers of the Church also describe a type of benefit of Memorial services that applies to those who have departed from the present life in repentance or at least with a sacred desire for repentance, but who may not have had the opportunity to complete it. St. John Chrysostom said that prayers for the dead offer them "a certain consolation". St Cyril of Jerusalem writes about a "very great benefit" that is derived by the souls for whom petition is made during the Divine Liturgy when the "most awesome sacrifice" is offered. P. N. Trembelas in his "Dogmatics" says that it has not been revealed to us "to what extent" and "to what degree" our prayers for the dead provide benefit and consolation.

Praying for the dead was certainly practiced by the early Church. Writings from the first few centuries testify to this. St John Chrysostom and St John of Damascus have told us that the practice of praying for the dead was established by the Apostles. That petitions for the repose and salvation of the deceased were included in daily worship. This is evident from the writings of Tertullian (200A.D.), St. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (250 A.D.), the Apostolic Constitutions (4th century), etc. Even in Old Testament times praying for the dead occurred. In 2 Maccabees 12:40-45, which is part of the Orthodox Old Testament, we read about some that prayed for the dead, and we are told that "if he had not hoped that those that were slain should rise again, it would have seemed superfluous and vain to pray for the dead", and that it is "a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins."

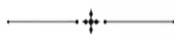
Exactly to what extent our prayers for our departed loved ones bring any benefit to them we do not know, we leave this to the mercy of God. But one thing we are certain: such prayers do benefit those who pray for the departed. They remind us that we too are going to die, they make us more diligent and cautious in getting ready for that ultimate journey. They help us realise that so much that we tend to focus on is futile. The only thing that really matters is getting to Heaven and being with God. St Anthony said, "If you want to be prepared for death, live every day of your life as if it's the last one!"

The "Kolyva" (boiled wheat) also have their symbolism in the church. The boiled wheat kernels express belief in everlasting life. Jesus said, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit"

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(John 12:24). Just as new life rises from the buried kernel of wheat, so the Church believes that the one buried will rise one day to a new life in God. The wheat is covered in sugar and sultanas to symbolise the bliss of eternal life in Heaven.

References: Nikolaos Vassiliadis. The Mystery of Death. Brotherhood of Theologians, "The Savior", Athens 1993
Anthony Coniaris. Sermons on the Major Holy Days of the Orthodox Church. Light and Life Publishing Company. Minneapolis. 1978
Fr Evagoras Constandinides. Funeral (Service Book). Merrillville Indiana 1994
<https://greekorthodox.org.au/services-and-sacraments/death-mourning/>



17TH SUNDAY OF LUKE, Luke 15:11-32

The Prodigal Son

+ In the name of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit.

"Of what great blessings in my wretchedness have I deprived myself! From what a kingdom in my misery have I fallen! I have wanted the riches that were given to me, I have transgressed the commandment. Alas, unhappy soul! You are henceforth condemned to the eternal fire. Therefore before the end cry out to Christ our God: Receive me as the Prodigal Son, and have mercy upon me."

This hymn is chanted on the Sunday of The Prodigal Son, which is celebrated in today's Liturgy. We all know the parable of the father and his two sons, the younger receiving his share of the money and going off to a far away land and squandering it all on loose living. Then suddenly finding himself poor and hungry he realizes his folly and comes to himself and goes back to his father in repentance. His Father embraces him and holds a feast in his honour for his return.

The older brother, a son who always followed his father's wishes, never left his father's side, becomes angry and jealous, refusing to partake in the joy of his brother's return. He complains to his father saying: "Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him."

In the parable we are told and in our minds we think of the younger as being the Prodigal. But which one of these two brothers is truly the Prodigal Son? Is it the younger who leaves and comes back in repentance, or the older brother who refuses to welcome him back? I tell you it is both brothers. For if we examine the parable from a different view we will see that even though the older brother always obeyed his father, he too is constantly squandering his father's riches.

How is he doing this? The Father has given all of us gifts, gifts that could be used for His glory, or squandered for our own purposes. The older son only obeys the father for he expects something in return! He has gone by the book all his life, for all the wrong reasons. He has not learned love, the perfect love that the father possesses! By not striving to be as perfect as his father is, he does things for the opposite reason, to what the father does.

He too lives in a strange land, for his actions are strange to his father, this is not the way that the Father created us to be, to live in self-centeredness, and even worse not to realize the sin of selfishness, and therefore not to feel the need to repent. His brother was lost but now is found, he was dead and now is alive again, all because of his remorse for his way of living, and his repentance in returning to the love of the even as a servant. His brother though is too blind to understand this, for he has done everything in his life by his father's law, but all has been done in vain, for he is lost in himself, and cannot be found, he is dead in his sin, and cannot arise for he is too blind to see.

How many Christians live by the book? Go to Church every service, out of duty, pray to God, but with empty words, help the Church financially, but for the wrong reasons, doing all this but never realizing the intentions of God and how we should truly live as Christians. They go home and gossip about each other, slander their neighbours' name, and do not possess even the love to forgive their transgressors! Yet they expect to be saved for their empty works.

We are entering Great Lent soon, and Christ asks us today, which of these brothers are you identified with? What will we answer? Do we truly see our sin, or just our brother's and sister's? Do we indulge in cursing, gossiping, and slandering our fellow Christian brother and sister's name? or do we come to ourselves and strive to be better every day in repentance? Do we truly treat each other with Christian love or are we holding any grudges against anyone, or does it matter, for we live by the book and feel that we will be saved anyway?

We are all prodigals in our own way, but let us be like the younger prodigal Son, let us realize that we live in a strange land full of sin, and we need to return and live in our Father's kingdom where love and peace rule. Remember the hymn I quoted at the beginning "Therefore before the end cry out to Christ our God: receive me as the Prodigal Son, O God, and have mercy upon me." Amen.