



The Orthodox Parish of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross, Lancaster

The Stavronian

a monthly magazine & newsletter published by the 'Holy Cross Synodia Press'



*The Parish of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross,
belongs to the Antiochian Orthodox Deanery of the United Kingdom and Ireland,
which is part of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of Europe.*

Our Metropolitan is His Eminence Archbishop John.

The Patriarchate of Antioch is third senior of the Orthodox Churches.

The Patriarch is His Beatitude Ignatius IV.

***The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch
(Acts 11:26)***

SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON

Luke 15:11-32

Perhaps another title for this Parable would be **“The Welcoming Father”** - for although the Prodigal son’s waywardness tells us about our rebellious and passionate nature and subsequently about the model of repentance, the central figure is not the Prodigal son but the father God who runs to meet his errant, foolish son and embraces him. *“While the prodigal son was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him...”*

No incrimination, no scolding, no punishment, but immediate acceptance, total unconditional forgiveness, an overwhelming loving response, extravagant restoration and lavish celebration. Such is the nature of God our Father who as soon as we turn to Him in repentance- runs to meet us. Isn’t that a beautiful image - the God who runs! On hearing this parable one person commented *“My father would never do that!”* But that is the whole point, not many human fathers would do that!

The prodigal son, lost in his passions had come to his right mind whilst he was so hungry that he was contemplating eating the food that he was feeding to the pigs. He could not go any lower, he had reached the depths of degradation and in his fallen state reflects and remembers how his father’s servants at home were treated with such love and generosity. Then in that very moment of realisation, he comes to a decision, he knows immediately where his salvation is to be found and rehearses what he is going to say: *“I will return and say to my father I have sinned before heaven and before you, I am no longer worthy to be called your son, take me back as one of your hired*

helpers...” He came to his right mind so sharply points to those moments of clear sightedness in our own lives when we know what we have to do, whereas hitherto we had been confused and driven by passions. When immersed in sin the sinner lives outside his true self, for sin affects every part of him; mind, soul, heart and body. Sin is not a part of our true nature but a foreign force that dwells in us. St. Paul in his letter to the Romans writes: 7:20 *Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.*



The Prodigal had left home willful, proud, arrogant, demanding his share of money as if his father was dead (for inheritance was received usually only on death) and he returns humble, penitent, sorrowful and begging forgiveness. Such a 180 degree turn about brings us to the tears, recognising in this reconciliation the very icon of our own salvation.

But consider for a moment the reaction of the older brother: 28 *“The*

older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 29 But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

We must avoid self righteousness that "older brother syndrome" that is jealous and resentful of others. One can appreciate his dutiful attributes but he is cold, distant, scornful and sees his brother as a good for nothing, a waster who had brought shame and disgrace upon himself. The older brother had thought that his brother had disappeared from the scene. The elder brother could not even acknowledge his brother: he says to his father "...this son of yours..." Some may view convert Orthodox as prodigals who have come home but **all** need to be converted and convicted by the Holy Spirit, cradle orthodox and converts, the righteous from pride, the sinners from despair. We have trace elements of both brothers in the Church. Being born Greek or Russian does not make someone Orthodox. Culture-doxy is not the same as Orthodoxy!

But the father loves his elder son equally and goes out to plead with him. 31 "My son", the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

A father who had many children was asked once. "Which of your children do you love most?" He answered "I love the one who is away from home until he returns, I love the one who is sick until he is better, I love the one who is sad until he is happy."

The prodigal was not happy away from his father -if only those who are unhappy knew the joy of being in the Father's Household, to come to their senses and leave the misery behind- fulfillment, acceptance and forgiveness is but a step away. We are not orphans, we have a home and a Father who wants to give us all the riches of His Kingdom. So if you fall don't give up -get up and make your way back home to God- and you will find him not waiting but running to meet you!



SHALL I DROWN MYSELF, OR LEAP OFF A CLIFF?

There is a beautiful story concerning the pastoral care of St Arsenios of Paros. A certain girl from Syros came to the Convent of the Transfiguration to visit her sister, who was a nun. The nun had previously been informed that her sister had fallen into a serious sin. When she learned that the girl was outside the doors of the convent, the nun screamed at her, "Go far away from here. Since you are defiled, you will defile the convent and the nuns." Instead of feeling pity for her sister, and trying to lead her to repentance, the nun and some of the other nuns

struck the poor girl and told her to go away.

The wretched girl cried, *"I have made a mistake. Forgive me!"*. The nun shrieked, *"Go away, or I will kill you to wash away the shame you have brought to our family."*

"Have you no pity, my sister, don't you share my pain?"

"No," the nun shouted, *"you are not my sister, you are a foul harlot."*

"Where shall I go?" she sobbed.

"Go and drown yourself," was the heartless reply.

The poor girl fled from the convent, bleeding and wounded, intending to kill herself. At that very moment, St Arsenios was on his way to visit the convent. Seeing the girl in such a state, he asked her what was wrong. She explained that she had been led astray by corrupt men and women. Realizing her sin, she went to the convent to ask her sister for help. *"See what they have done to me, Elder. What do you advise me to do? Shall I drown myself, or leap off a cliff?"*

"I do not advise you to do either, my child. If you wish, I shall take you with me and heal the wounds of your soul and body," he said gently.

"Where will you take me?" the miserable girl asked.

"To the convent, my child."

"I beg you not to take me there, Elder. My sister and the other nuns said they would kill me if I came back."

The saint replied, *"Do not be afraid. They will not kill you, because I shall entrust*

you to Christ, and no one will be able to harm you."

"Very well," she said, *"If you entrust me to Christ I will not be afraid of them, for Christ is more powerful than they."*

St Arsenios led her to the convent, consoling her and encouraging her to repentance and confession. After hearing her confession, he made her a nun. Then he called all the nuns into the church and severely rebuked those who wounded the girl. He reminded them of the parable of the Prodigal Son, and of how Christ had come to save sinners. He often associated with sinners, showing them great love and mercy.

"You, however, have done the opposite. Though you knew that her soul had been wounded by the devil, you did not feel sorry for her. You did not embrace her and try to save her from further sin, but you attacked her and beat her. Then you urged her to kill herself. Now I, your Spiritual Father, tell you that you are not nuns, you are not Christians, you are not even human beings. You are devoid of compassion, affection, and sympathy. You are murderers! Therefore, I forbid you to receive Holy Communion for three years, unless you recognize your sin. Repent and confess, weep and ask forgiveness from God and from me, your Spiritual Father, and from the other nuns who did not participate in your sinful behaviour."

The nuns began to weep bitterly and they repented. Thus, he lessened their penance and forgave them. He gave the girl's sister the penance of not receiving Holy Communion for a whole year. Because the other nuns had shared in this sin, he would not permit them to receive Communion for six months.



A MONK AT PRAYER



"A monk at prayer", sketch with pencil by Matthew.

Framed in God's landscape he sits
An icon of the Mother's care
Here in the garden of his thoughts
He weeds out sins through Jesus Prayer.

For company a little friend
Arrives to greet on feathered wing
This father feeds him daily bread
And they together *Orthros* sing.

Before him the Cross, the Grave
The third day resurrection
All these beheld in perfect love;
The Gethsemane's reflection.

Empowered by faith and charged through grace
His rule of cell his daily law
He works and sits and prays and waits
For Our Lord to open the door.

JAH

"Painting is poetry that is seen rather
than felt, and poetry is painting that is
felt rather than seen".

— *Leonardo da Vinci*



PHOTOS DURING PARISH MEAL AT THE "TROJAN HORSE"





and Saviour Jesus Christ assist you in your upcoming spiritual struggles!

We would also like to wish Happy Birthday to Fr. Jonathan. The birthday party was celebrated in the Q.R. with parishioners, cutting cake and drinking wine. Our best wishes to Fr. Jonathan for many spiritually fruitful years in Christ! A few photos are included below:



PARISH NEWS



Making of [Catechumen](#) Benjamin on Sunday 30th of January; Synaxis of the Three Hierarchs: Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom. God grant you many years Ben! May our Lord



MAJOR CELEBRATIONS THIS MONTH

1st Mar: St. David of Wales

2nd Mar: Our Holy father St Nicholas
Planas

7th Mar: Clean Monday; Lent starts today

13th Mar: Sunday of Orthodoxy

17th Mar: St Patrick, the Enlightener of
Ireland

20th Mar: St Cuthbert the Wonderworker,
Bishop of Lindisfarne

25th Mar: The Annunciation of our Holy
Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary

30th Mar: St John Climacus the righteous,
author of the Divine Ladder of Ascent

31st Mar: St. Innocent, Enlightener of
Siberia & Alaska

For the lives of Saints please visit the
Calendar of the Greek Orthodox Archdi-
ocese of America: www.calendar.goarch.org

Services during March*

Sat. 5 th	10:00 am	Holy Liturgy in R.C.
Fri. 11 th	6:00pm	Akathist to the Mother of God in R.C
Sat. 12 th	10:00 am	Holy Liturgy in R.C.
Fri. 18 th	6:00pm	Akathist to the Mother of God in R.C
Sat. 19 th	10:00 am	Holy Liturgy in R.C.
Fri. 25 th	6:00pm	Akathist to the Mother of God in R.C
Sun. 27 th	10:00 am	Holy Liturgy in Q.R. followed by Parish lunch

*Help setting up the church for the Holy Liturgy is greatly appreciated and starts from 9.15 a.m.

“We have been called to become unknown heroes,
visible only to the unsleeping eye of God”

- Elder Ephraim -



For further information please contact:

Father Jonathan Hemmings

67 Sibsey Str., Fairfield, Lancaster, LA1 5DQ

Tel: +44 1524 840759, +44 1524 580600

Email: frjah@yahoo.co.uk

www.antiochian-orthodox.co.uk



Sketches are created at the Holy Monastery of "The Annunciation of the Theotokos" Chios, Greece, courtesy of fr. Theodosios Dendrinos and the Apomakhi Diakonia of the Church of Greece.