

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

The Stavronian

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*The Parish of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross,
belongs to the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of the British Isles and Ireland.
The Patriarchate of Antioch is third senior of the Orthodox Churches.
Our Metropolitan is His Eminence Bishop Silouan.
Our Patriarch is His Beatitude John X.*

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

Often, goes the Christ in the stranger's guise

LOST AND FOUND

Introduction

The parable of the prodigal son is the best known of all Christ's parables. It is very different, for example, from the parable of the unjust steward that follows it (in chapter 16), which reflects Middle Eastern business life, and which is very hard for westerners to understand. But the parable of the prodigal son, although as we shall see it has eastern nuances, is about family life, and so much easier to understand and appreciate. It has been called "the Evangelium in Evangelio" and so it is – the "gospel within the gospel".

Kenneth Bailey in his book *Through Peasant Eyes*, write of this parable, "nearly everyone has a sense of awe at its inexhaustible contents".

This parable is not an allegory, for the father is not "God incognito". Yet the father in this story is a profound symbol of God the Father.

In some ways the parable has been misnamed; it should perhaps be called the parable of the elder son. Surely the punch line of the story comes at the end with the conversation between the father and his elder son. We are also told about the audience which was composed of a mixture of tax collectors, sinners and Pharisees. The Pharisees were disputing about Christ sitting at table with those they regarded as the riff-raff of society. Their attitude matched that of the elder brother when his brother returned.

The parable is a superb introduction to Lent, because the centre point of it concerns repentance. It is to challenge, so to speak, our preference for the equivalent of feeding on pig's swill rather than to dine at our father's table. Lent should be for us a change of direction. It is a return to the Father who has been waiting patiently for us to come.

The Love of the Father

Nearly sixty years ago I made an important discovery about this parable. I found that whenever I read it, or heard a sermon on it, there was always something new to learn. I have to admit that when I started preparing for this, I wondered, "Does the magic still work?" Well, I am glad to say the answer was "yes".

I want us to see two aspects of the Father's love, and it is the first that came fresh to me. For we see this love in the father's response to the demand of his son to share the inheritance with him.

Kenneth Bailey describes this as "unbelievable love". He has lived much of his life in the Middle East and North Africa. In his book he describes a period of fifteen years during which he travelled from Morocco to India and from Turkey to the Sudan, asking villagers the same question, "do you know of anyone who has asked his father for the inheritance while the father is still alive." Here is the conversation which was repeated over and over again:

"Has anyone ever made such a request in your village?"

"Never"

"Could anyone ever make such a request?"

"Impossible!"

"If anyone ever did, what would happen?"

"His father would beat him, of course!"

"Why?"

"This request means – he wants his father to die!"

L. Levison writing about this says, "There is no law or custom among the Jews or Arabs which entitles the son to a share of the father's wealth while the father is still alive".

To sum up, Kenneth Bailey writes, "It is difficult to imagine a more dramatic illustration of the quality of love than this".

An Arab, Ibrahim Said, who has written a commentary on this Gospel, has written about this, "this action is unique, something which has not been done by any father in the past".

The second aspect of the love of the Father which I want us to look at is the demonstration of it when his son returns. The father is said to be "filled with compassion". The Greek word (*splanchna*) literally refers to the bowels – the very centre of our being. Hence the way the word "guts" is used in English. This love is not primarily mental or emotional, but comes from the father's total being.

We also read that the father RAN to meet his son. There may well have been a practical reason for this – the desire to be there before the villagers, who might have given the prodigal short shrift. But Kenneth Bailey states clearly that "an oriental nobleman in flowing robes never runs anywhere." In the East it is regarded as humiliating. The Greek philosopher Aristotle once wrote, "Great

men never run in public". But the father did – as a demonstration of the intensity of his love for his son.

But more evidence of that love and acceptance follows:

The kiss of reconciliation

The Greek word means to kiss "again and again". It was not a ceremonial peck, but an outpouring of affection. In eastern villages to this day the kiss was the traditional sign of the end of a dispute.

The best robe

No doubt this was his father's own robe, and so demonstrated his father's full acceptance of him.

The ring, which meant "you are trusted"

The shoes, which signified that he was a freeman, not a slave

The fatted calf, which showed that the whole village community was involved, not just the close family. In the early church confession was normally made to the community not privately to a priest. So here the reconciliation of the father and son is seen not merely as a private and individual matter; everyone in the neighbourhood was also involved.

There is a story told about another "prodigal" who left his home and led a dissolute life, which was a disgrace to his parents. He too decided to go home, but he was uncertain what the response would be. So he wrote to his parents to tell them what he was intending to do. And he asked them to put a small white handkerchief in the top left corner of a window as a sign that he would be accepted back. As he drew near to his home he looked carefully for the handkerchief. It was not there – but in its place was a huge white sheet; the message was plain, you are welcome home and all is forgiven.

So it is with God's love for us. Yes, God does part with the inheritance if that is what we want; but when we come home the response is overwhelming – there is no period of probation, no regime of penances, and no tagging. Total acceptance – no questions asked.

In the Orthodox service of Matins for the Sunday of the Prodigal Son we read: "God restores all the signs of glory".

The Repentance of the prodigal

We see this in two main steps. First of all we are told that:

"He came to himself".

This is not repentance, and the normal Greek word for repentance – *metanoia* -- is not used. In the Syriac version we read "he came to his *nefesh*", which is certainly not the word for repentance. The words "he came to his senses", although not accurately translating the Syriac, is probably as close as we can get in English to what is being said.

It would seem important as we approach Lent that we realise our need to be arrested by it, and to realise fully the seriousness of our condition. The prodigal began to change when he realised where he was and how he needed to go home.

Then we are told that he rehearsed what he was going to say to his father:

"I have sinned against heaven and before you".

We notice again the connection between God (heaven) and the community, symbolised by his father. Both are to be joined together.

Our sins against God are also sins against the community.

The response of the elder brother

The German theologian Helmut Thielicke has written a book called *The Waiting Father*. In it he makes an interesting suggestion. What would have happened if the prodigal had met his elder brother before he met his father. He might well have gone back to the far country.

Ibrahim Said writes, "The elder brother has been living in the house with the spirit of a slave, not with the familiarity of a son". How often it must be that people never get to meet God because they meet elder brothers. Some years ago I was travelling on a Lebanese airliner and talking with one of the stewards. I asked him the question "are you a Muslim or a Christian?" His reply was "neither, I've had to live through the Civil War."

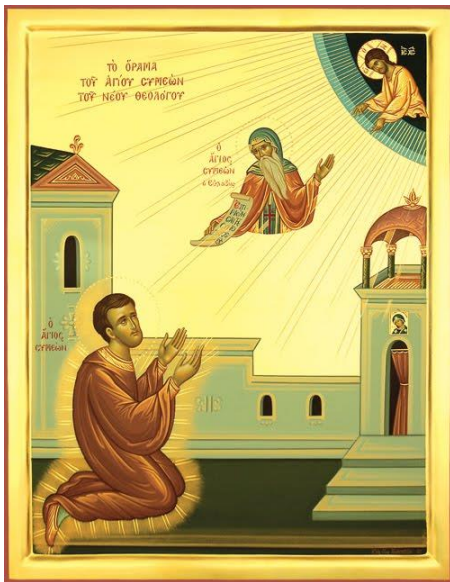
St. Paul writes that "because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying *"Abba! Father! So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child, then also an heir through God"* (Gal 4:6-7).

The elder brother, although he was living at home, had the spirit of a slave; on the other hand his brother was ready to be a slave in his father's house, but was treated by his father as a son.

Let us allow the Holy Spirit to give us that Spirit of Sonship, which will bring us from the far country to the Father's love and presence.

*A sermon preached by Fr. Michael Harper
in St. Botolph's Church, Bishopsgate,
19th February 2007
(Luke 15:11-32)*

OUR SPIRITUAL FATHER IS SERIOUSLY ILL



This icon depicts St. Symeon the New Theologian first vision of Uncreated Light, with his spiritual father (Symeon the Studite, also Symeon the Pious or Symeon Eulabes, and sometimes Symeon the Elder) at its centre, for the purity of his love and obedience. Monastery of Stoudios in Constantinople, 10th century.

Our Spiritual Father is seriously ill! How can one endure such sorrow and "silence"? Especially when all this happened so unexpectedly?! He had never been "away" from any one of us for more than a day, and now we are 3-4 weeks "apart"!

This Father is someone to whom we have opened our hearts. We offer our poor obedience to him for Christ's sake so our obedience becomes obedience to Him.

Such a profound and mutual recognition that "this is my father" and "this is my son" ; this is the

person with whom I want to work out my salvation! By all of us, his poor spiritual children. A deep awareness that this is a sacramental relationship and a most special blessing by our Lord! Christ's greatest gift to us, apart of course from giving himself to us and His Uncreated Church-His Kingdom, together with all the saints and the Mother of God leading all of them.

And now, he is "away"!

We knew we had found our spiritual father, when knowing us, we realised that he loves each one of us unconditionally. Looking at him, we saw the radiance of eternal life in his eyes, and therefore approached him and asked him to be our instructor and guide.

This relationship of love and respect has always been proven mutual in every dimension. Submission to a spiritual father means to enter into a mutual striving for salvation together (*1 Peter 5:5*). It is a relationship of the most profound intimacy and openness and a participation in Christ's own sonship to the Father, sacramental, full of grace.

Whether given birth by him or received already born, we all felt our Father's deep reverence for what the Holy Spirit was working within us. How he listened with all his experience, all his existence, and all his prayer, all his tears, all the power of the Holy Spirit working in him to what the Holy Spirit was bringing to pass in all of us, entrusted to his care! Always searching out the paths of the Holy Spirit in our lives, always in awe before what God was doing to us, always removing his shoes before treading into the Burning Bush of each soul entrusted to him. Never entering that holy ground unless God Himself commanded him, or as God Himself suggested he proceed or what words to say. (*) Always with insight and discernment (diakrisis), and the ability to love others and to make others' sufferings his own.

And now? What is to be done with him "away"?

His last words to us: *"Keep the faith and do the little things that you have heard and seen me do."* (St David's of Wales)

Thy Will be done!

One of his 'orphans'

(*) Spirituality and the Role of a Spiritual Father
by Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh
<https://orthochristian.com/54517.html>

FOR GRANTED

Taking things for granted is a trap most of us fall into. It is easy to get used to things and to stop noticing. We stop noticing God's little gifts, little gestures of love of those around us, our comforts and advantages. The last four weeks, since Father Jonathan has been taken gravely ill, have been a time of deep sadness but also of reflection and hopefulness of growth.

Familiarity is a dangerous element in our spiritual life. I have spent so much time with Father Jonathan over the last 18 years, I have relied so much on his advice, prayers, lifts to church, on his love, tolerance and good will that I think I have come to take it all for granted. In any crisis, I assume that he will be there to guide me and especially pray for me. In this crisis, for the first time, I had to pray for him and couldn't ask for his guidance. I felt lost, but I also felt more than ever the power of prayer, the strengthening bonds of fellowship and I experienced once again the manifold grace of brothers and sisters in Christ praying together.

For years now, I have felt that father joyfully carried me and every single person in his church on his back like a cross. His care and prayers make up for our negligence and lack of zeal, for all our lack of love towards God, the church and others. As a community, especially the cradle Orthodox, we always take for granted that we shall have a church where the Holy Liturgy will be served every Sunday (take it or leave it as it suits us), that there will be a Father to come bless our house, cars, food and visit us when we are ill, that there will be a Father to sign the papers of church attendance for our children to get a place at a desired school and give us a reference of good character, that this Father will pray for us whenever we ask him, that he will be there to hear our confession whenever we feel burdened, that he will settle our little squabbles, that he will baptise our children and read us the prayers on our death bed and serve at our funeral. In the case of Holy Cross, we take for granted even more than that, that our Father will make sure everyone has transport to get to church, that he will answer the phone to hear our little troubles at any hour of the day or night, that he will arrive first in church and leave last and generally make sure that everything is well with the church and in our life. The last weeks have forcefully reminded me that all these are not our

due or by any means guaranteed to be there and that we are blessed to have had all these for so many years through God's grace and Father Jonathan's love, faith and energy.

Umberto Eco said: *"Absence is to love as wind is to fire: it extinguishes the little flame, it fans the big."* I cannot exactly quantify my affection for Father Jonathan, but I have thought of him more over the last month than ever before. In his absence, so many touching memories and images came flooding in bringing along both sadness and joy. One of my favourite mental snapshots is of Father looking up to see somebody come through the church door. Every time his eyes light up with joy when his gaze rests on you as you come in through the door and I noticed that Father's joy is even greater when someone comes who has not been to the church in months or years. This joyful, loving gaze makes you feel so welcome and loved and somehow special. It makes you feel that you are coming home. And this image lead on to another memory of Father crying when he reads the Gospel of the Return of the prodigal son. I cannot remember him ever reading it without tears in his eyes. His love for all these many prodigal children that we are is so great that he stands by us in prayer before God no matter what we are or have done. I know for sure he has stood by me with gentleness and patience even when I disobeyed his spiritual guidance or I argued back or wanted to leave the church.

St John of the Ladder teaches that it is more fearful to anger your Spiritual Father than to disobey and anger God himself. If we anger God, our spiritual father has the grace to pray for us, to intercede and obtain forgiveness for us, but if our spiritual father turns away from us, we have no defence or advocate before God.

This is how I have felt about my Spiritual Father, about Father Jonathan. He has been my advocate before God, my safety rope for the rock climbing. This rope has kept me connected to the rock when I fell, it stopped me from walking away and giving up when the going got too hard.

Fr Seraphim of Mull Monastery tells the story of the advice he received from his spiritual father just before he was ordained. He told him that the value of his priesthood will be measured in the madness of his love for every single human being who will stand before him irrespective of what they look like, who they are, where they come from, what they have done. This is exactly

how I see Father's ministry. In his love of all people and in his joyful daily sacrifices for us, I see the reflection of God's love for all his children. By knowing Father, I feel I have come a step closer to understanding God's love for every single one of us.

The church or monastery is like a beehive. The spirit of the queen permeates the whole hive and sets the tone for all the bees. If the queen bee is aggressive the whole hive will be an aggressive one, just so when a community has a very loving father, like us, the whole community is loving and gentle. And if at times this isn't the case, Father dissipates all tension by his prayers and mild spirit.

As Father is recovering from his illness and there is a general sigh of relief in the community and a sense of joy and expectation, I have made a vow not to take my spiritual father for granted ever again or any of God's gifts to our community, but rejoice in each of them and see them for what they are – signs of God's love: the beautiful church filled with the gifts from Old stavronians, the people who have prepared the prosphoro, brought the wine, oil and candles and cleaned the church, the people who have come to give and receive and most of all the presence of a father through whose hand a gentle and humble God reaches out to his people. None of my or anyone's giving of time, money or energy can match the wonder of these gifts.

Alexandra McCafferty

PARISH NEWS

Fr Jonathan's absence

As most of you already know, Fr Jonathan, our beloved shepherd of the Lancaster parish, has been facing serious medical difficulties over the past few weeks. Thanks be to God, his state is getting better, but he still remains at the hospital. His recovery remains long.

As Fr Jonathan still remains quite frail, please be advised that until he -- directly or through his family -- invites visitors, the doctors and family **INSIST** on not disturbing him. So, until further notice **NO VISITORS PLEASE!** This has been agreed with Fr. Gregory and endorsed by Metropolitan Silouan. Please stay reassured that

Father is taken care of well, both medically and spiritually, and he needs to be given time and quiet to recover.

Using this opportunity, it is also important to emphasise the importance of prayers for Fr Jonathan's quick and full recovery. Every word matters when it comes from the heart!

Services at the Holy Cross in Fr Jonathan's absence

For the time Fr Jonathan remains in hospital and cannot minister to the community, Sayedna Silouan blessed Fr Gregory Hallam and Fr Daniel Codreanu -- the clergy of St Aidan's parish in Manchester -- to celebrate Divine Liturgy at our church **once a month on the 2nd Sunday of every month.**

Fr Gregory Hallam served the first Liturgy on the 11th of February. Fr Daniel will come to celebrate next Liturgy on Sunday, 10th of March. On the remaining Sundays, parishioners will do the readers Hours and Typika.

We thank His Eminence Sayedna Silouan, Fr Gregory and Fr Daniel for their care and support. Please remember them in your prayers.

NAMES OF DEPARTED LOVED ONES TO BE REMEMBERED THIS MONTH

Mar. 4: *Nikolaos*

Mar. 12: *Georgianna, Theodora*

Mar. 18: *Fr. Thomas Hopko*

Mar. 19: *Metropolitan Philip of North America,
Fr. Georgios Myrou*

MEMORY ETERNAL!

Please send us the names of your departed loved ones and date of their departure in order for them to be remembered.



MAJOR CELEBRATIONS THIS MONTH

1st Mar: St. David of Wales (†589)

2nd Mar: Our Holy fathers St Nicholas Planas & St Joachim of Ithaca and Vatopaedi

17th Mar: St Patrick, the Enlightener of Ireland (†492). Forgiveness Sunday

20th Mar: St Cuthbert the Wonderworker, Bishop of Lindisfarne (†687)

24th Mar: Sunday of Orthodoxy

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 Archdiocese of America:
www.calendar.goarch.org

Online

Prayer Meeting

Weekly

on **Wednesday**
(during Great Lent
– on Monday and
Wednesday)

7:30 PM

via **Skype**



Click here to join the meeting
(no account needed):

<https://join.skype.com/K1CF0gMGxDQU>

The Orthodox Christian Parish of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross – Lancaster invites you to join our Online Prayer Group “Saint Seraphim & Saint Etheldreda”.

With the blessing of Fr Jonathan Hemmings, though without him until he recovers, the prayer meetings of our parish group are back.

Included: readers version of the Supplication to the Theotokos / St Luke of Simferopol to pray for the health of Fr. Jonathan

Services at St Martin's in March








Sun. 3 rd	09:45	Readers Hours and Typika
Wed. 6 th	19:30	Online Prayer Meeting*
Sun. 10 th	09:45	Divine Liturgy**
Wed. 13 th	19:30	Online Prayer Meeting*
Sun. 17 th	09:45	Readers Hours and Typika
Mon. 18 th	19:30	Great Compline*
Wed. 20 th	19:30	Supplication to the Theotokos / St Luke of Simferopol*
Fri. 22 nd	19:00	1 st Stasis of Akathist Hymn to the Theotokos (in Church)
Sun. 24 th	09:45	Readers Hours and Typika
Mon. 25 th	19:30	Great Compline*
Wed. 27 th	19:30	Supplication to Theotokos / St Luke of Simferopol*
Fri. 29 th	19:00	2 nd Stasis of Akathist Hymn to the Theotokos (in Church)
Sun. 31 st	09:45	Readers Hours and Typika

*Online on Skype at <https://join.skype.com/K1CF0gMGxDQU>

**With the blessing of His Eminence Silouan, Fr Gregory or Fr Daniel will serve Divine Liturgy once a month. Please remember them in your prayers, along with our dear Fr Jonathan.

OUR JOURNEY TO PASCHA! 2024

Created by Fr. Jonathan Bannon (ACROD)

SUNDAYS		THEMES / GOSPEL READING	HOW TO PARTICIPATE:
Fast - Free Week FEBRUARY 25th		<i>TRIDION WEEKS</i> Publican and the Pharisee Epistle: 2 Timothy 3:10-15 Gospel: Luke 18:10-14	Show compassion on the poor and distressed. Trust in God, not yourself and ask for His help before every task this week.
Normal Fast Week MARCH 3rd		The Prodigal Son Returns! Epistle: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 Gospel: Luke 15:11-32	Schedule a Confession. Every morning say, "Today I will be humble." Use up/freeze meats this week.
Meatfare MARCH 10th FAREWELL TO MEAT TODAY		The Last Judgement Epistle: 1 Corinthians 8:8-9;2 Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46	Pray facing East this week. Christ is returning from the East and we wait for Him! Use up/freeze dairy this week.
Cheesefare MARCH 17th FAREWELL TO CHEESE TODAY		Adam and Eve are cast from Paradise! <i>FORGIVENESS SUNDAY</i> Epistle: Romans 13:11-14;4 Gospel: Matthew 6:14-21	Ask each other for forgiveness each evening this week before bed.
1st Sunday of Lent MARCH 24th		<i>GREAT LENT BEGINS WITH FORGIVENESS VESPERS</i> SUNDAY of ORTHODOXY Epistle: Hebrews 11:24-26, 32-12:2 Gospel: John 1:43-51	Bring an icon to church for a procession.
2nd Sunday of Lent MARCH 31st		ST GREGORY PALAMAS Epistle: Hebrews 1:10-2:3 Gospel: Mark 2:1-12	Bring a prayer rope to be blessed today! Use it and pray the Jesus Prayer each day this week.
3rd Sunday of Lent APRIL 7th		VENERATION OF THE HOLY CROSS <i>HALF WAY TO PASCHA!</i> Epistle: Hebrews 4:14-5:6 Gospel: Mark 8:34-9:1	Wear your cross to church and kiss the cross each morning with a bow!
4th Sunday of Lent APRIL 14th		ST JOHN of the LADDER Epistle: Hebrews 6:13-20 Gospel: Mark 9:17-31	Every time you climb stairs this week ask St. John to help you reach Paradise with the sign of the cross!
5th Sunday of Lent APRIL 21st		ST MARY of EGYPT Epistle: Hebrews 9:11-14 Gospel: Mark 10:32-45	Ask the Theotokos to offer you and the world pure thoughts and ideas this week.
FLOWERY (PALM) SUNDAY APRIL 28th GREAT WEEK BEGINS		<i>GREAT AND HOLY WEEK</i> ENTRY OF OUR LORD INTO JERUSALEM Epistle: Philippians 4:4-9 Gospel: John 12:1-18	Place your palm branches and pussywillows behind an icon at home and in your car!
GREAT AND HOLY FRIDAY MAY 3rd		GREAT AND HOLY FRIDAY <i>JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS</i> CHECK WITH YOUR PARISH FOR ROYAL HOURS AND VESPERS SCHEDULE	Refrain from TV, Internet & Phones to honor Christ's Death.
FEAST OF FEASTS! MAY 5th NO FASTING!		<i>BRIGHT WEEK</i> HOLY PASCHA! (CHRIST IS RISEN!) Epistle: Acts 1:1-8 Gospel: John 1:1-17	Greet everyone with "CHRIST IS RISEN!" & say it before good morning and goodnight!

“God cares for everyone. Despair is in effect a lack of faith”
-- St. George Karslides –



For further information please visit:

The Orthodox Parish of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross:

www.orthodox-lancaster.org.uk

The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of
the British Isles and Ireland: www.antiochian-orthodox.com

Orthodox online liturgical guide: www.antiochian.org/liturgicday

The following blogs of Old Stavronians are available in English at orthodoxcityhermit.com

