

Homily for the Sunday of the Prodigal Son (Saint Luke) **(04/02/2018)**

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In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God.

In today's Gospel reading of Saint Luke we heard the story of a father who has two sons.

The younger son asked for and received his share of his money and went off to a faraway land.

He squandered all his money with womanising and drinking and other wasteful ways.

Then, what did he expect, he finds himself with no money, no food and nobody he cares for. He has become the lowest of the lowest.

He realises his foolishness and decides to go back to his father in repentance.

His father runs to him to embrace him and then slaughters the fatted calf to honour his return.

The older brother has always been the exemplary son, and has always followed his father's wishes. He always remained at his father's side.

But all is not what it seems. The older brother becomes angry and envious of his brother. He refuses to take part in the joy of his father upon the return of his younger brother.

He thought that, once he had accomplished everything that had been expected of him, this would mean that he was righteous.

He goes to his father to complain, saying: **“Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid that I might make merry with my friends.**

But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!”

In this parable, the theme of repentance which started three weeks ago is continued.

We are being told another part of the story on repentance.

Today, the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, is another Sunday which prepares us for the start of Great Lent, which is only a fortnight away.

But let me return to the theme of repentance. The Church has important things to say about repentance.

One aspect of repentance is humility. In the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican we saw how the humility of the Publican saved him.

His humility was with knowledge, because with humility comes knowledge of God.

He was very humble and would not even look up to heaven, but he was very bold in his prayer asking God for mercy, because, he knew God would give him mercy.

The Sunday before, we read the parable of Zacchaeus. He was a bad man but he changed his ways.

That is where repentance comes in, because it involves changing the way you live, the way you think.

It also involves restitution. And Zacchaeus also did that.

Not that restitution will save us, because there is nothing we can do to earn our salvation.

We should try and desire to make ourselves better in those things in which we have been lax and lacking.

Whatever our sins may be, the one thing we must do is desire and struggle to be better.

Today's Gospel reading shows us another aspect of repentance that is very important, especially in light of what we will be hearing in next Sunday's Gospel reading.

That aspect is that God receives a man's repentance. This is an obvious statement, but a lot of people do not really believe that God will receive their repentance, or that they can truly change.

Reading today's parable we are truly shown how marvellous God's mercy is. The father in the parable is God, the Heavenly Father.

The younger son represents the Gentiles. The older son represents the Jewish people.

God has given us all part of the estate, which we received as gifts: life, the fruits of the earth, peaceful times, love, friends and family. We should really cherish those gifts, because they are from God.

And do we cherish these gifts of God. No, we don't. We squander them, just like the Prodigal son.

We just use those gifts of the Lord as it befits us, without any thought of who gave them to us.

We do not pray, because, we haven't got the time, or something else is more important.

We prefer to have a lie-in on Sunday morning, saying to ourselves that we had a terrible week and that it is just a one-off, and that we will attend extra early next Sunday to make up for this week's absence. Or we show up really late for the Divine Liturgy, because we were partying on Saturday night and did not get out of bed in time to get to church in time.

We put ourselves first and do not think of others, and especially not of those in need. We sin and do not worry too much about our sins.

In today's parable of the Prodigal Son, everything points to the younger son being the prodigal son. But is that really so?

Is it really the younger son who leaves and squanders his part of the estate, and who comes back in repentance?

Or is it the other brother, bitter and jealous, who refuses to welcome his younger brother back?

In fact it is both brothers!

If we look closer, we can see that although the older son always obeyed his father, he too is constantly squandering the riches of his father.

How is he doing this? I already told you about the gifts God has given us, gifts that should be used for his glory, or squandered and wasted for our own purposes.

The older son has only obeyed his father because he expected something in return. He has gone by the book all of his life, for all the wrong reasons.

He has not learned love, the perfect love that the Father possesses.

In so many ways he also lives in a strange faraway land. His actions are strange to his father.

This is not the way the Father created us to be, he definitely does not want us to live in self-centredness, which has become the motto of our modern society.

And what is even worse, is that we are not conscious about the sin of our selfishness, which leads us not to feel the need that we should repent.

His younger brother was lost but now has been found again, he was dead and now is alive again, all because he showed repentance.

Unfortunately, his older brother is too blind to see this, for he has done everything in his life according to the will of his father. But it was all in vain, because he is lost in himself.

He cannot be found. He is dead in his sin.

How many Christians really live by the Holy Book? How many go to every Church service, out of duty, pray to God, but with empty words, fast but boast about it to others.

They seem to be doing all the right things, and I do stress the word "seem", but they never realise the intentions of God and how we should truly live as Christians.

When they go home, they gossip about each other, slander their neighbour's name, and do not possess even the love to forgive their transgressors.

Still, because they feel so righteous, they do expect to be saved for their empty works.

But regardless of all this, the Heavenly Father loves us anyway. He loves us in any form.

He loves us when we resemble the older son, who himself seemingly did everything right, but was envious of others, angry, and embittered with everyone.

And he loves us when we resemble the younger son, wasting everything and giving no thought to the Father of this world.

The son said: **“It’s time to return to Father!”**

He went home, expecting nothing, and receiving everything.

The Church makes it clear that we, too, need to return to the Heavenly Father, and turn our back on selfish lives and squandering ways.

Now, today, Christ is asking us: “Which of these brothers do you identify with?”

What will we answer? Do we truly see our sin, or just the sins of our brothers and sisters?

Do we indulge in cursing, gossiping, and slandering our fellow Christian brothers and sisters names?

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 not matter, because we live by the Book and feel that we will be saved anyway?

We are all prodigal sons in our own way, but let us be like the younger prodigal Son.

Let us all reflect on the Kontakion for the Prodigal Son:

“When I disobeyed in ignorance thy fatherly glory, I wasted in iniquities the riches that thou gavest me.

Wherefore, I cry to thee with the voice of the prodigal son, saying, I have sinned before thee, O compassionate father, receive me repentant; and make me as one of thy hired servants.”

Amen.