

The Sunday of the Prodigal Son

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

In today's Gospel reading we heard one of the most familiar yet most moving of the Lord's parables – the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Like many of the Lord's parables, this wonderful story of repentance and reconciliation can and should be understood on a variety of levels.

First, on the cosmic level we see the Prodigal Son representing the entire human race: a race created in the image and likeness of God and therefore destined to inherit all the good things of the Heavenly Father, but also a race who chose to use its God-given freedom to depart from the Lord's House, from Paradise, and to journey into a far country – a country subject to sin, corruption, and death – all in search of autonomy and freedom from God.

And in a second way, on the historical level, we see the Prodigal Son representing the Gentile people, a people who, unlike the Jews who can be likened to the older more faithful son in the parable, wandered about in profligate living, giving themselves up to pleasure-seeking and the worship of idols, feeding upon irrational pleasures as the pigs in the parable fed on their pods.

In both of these cases, we see the Prodigal Son as the one who chose to leave God in order to live according to his own ways and ideas, according to his own agenda, according to what he wants rather than what the Lord knows is best. And in both cases, we see the pitiful state to which this ungodly freedom leads.

In the first case, the human race found itself subject to sin, the devil, and death. And in the second case, the Gentile people found themselves subject to their passions and under the influence of false gods.

Yet, we know that in Christ, God has called back both the Gentiles and the entire human race, giving all men the opportunity to be cleansed of their sins in the waters of baptism and to be adopted as children of God through the descent of the Holy Spirit.

And so for us Christians, this parable of the Prodigal Son is something of a recap of salvation history: through sin we departed from God into the far country of sin, death, and corruption, but then later through Christ we were granted reentrance to His Father's house, not as slaves but as adopted sons and daughters, joint heirs of the riches of heaven.

However, as we know this parable is much more than a mere summary of salvation history. For in this parable we see not only a poetic retelling of the turning of the

Gentiles and the entire human race back to God, but we also see an illustration of our own personal turning to the Lord – a retelling of our own personal salvation history.

If last week, in the parable of the Publican and Pharisee, we saw ourselves as people who embodied both the virtues and vices of each character, being at times prideful with the Pharisee and at other times humble with the Publican – and at times practicing the good works of the Pharisee and at times falling into the sinful life of the Publican:

In today's parable of the Prodigal Son we can most certainly see ourselves in each one of the Father's two sons.

At times, we turn away from God and His ways, preferring to exercise the gift of our free will on our own terms and according to our own ways, and in doing so we resemble the Prodigal. But at other times, we are faithful to the Lord, serving Him with diligence, setting aside the ways of the world to keep the life-bearing commandments of Christ, and in doing so we resemble the Father's faithful son.

And at other times, we again resemble the prodigal when we grow sick of a life of selfishness and worldly ambitions, and we make the long and difficult journey back to our heavenly Father – the Father who meets us with compassion when we are still far away. Yet still at other times, we get upset when our Lord so easily receives back those who have fallen into sin, or those who have not served the Lord as faithfully as we think we ourselves serve Him.

And as difficult as it is for us to sometimes admit, we find ourselves fluctuating between the height of virtue and the depths of the sin – in one moment we can play the part of the saint, and in the very next, the part of the sinner.

And why is this? Why do we find ourselves one minute praising God or asking for His mercy, and the next minute exalting ourselves and refusing to show mercy to our neighbor?

Is it not because as St. Paul says, there are two laws at war with us – the law of the flesh and the law of the spirit. The law of the flesh desires the things of the earth, while the law of the spirit desires the things of God.

And for this reason the Christian life is a constant struggle, a struggle to put to death the old man and his lusts and to live to the new man, Jesus Christ. A struggle to attain the works of the Pharisee while acquiring the humility of the Publican. A struggle to leave the far off country of individualism and pleasure seeking and to return to our Heavenly Father. And at the same time a struggle to remain faithful to our Heavenly Father without condemning our brother for his prodigality.

And so, brothers and sisters, as we prepare for this upcoming Lenten season, let us take a spiritual inventory of ourselves, taking heed from the lessons of the Lord's parables, for only in this way will we struggle worthily and in the end find ourselves celebrating

not only the Lord's Pascha but also our own Passover from spiritual death to eternal life
– our own return to our divine inheritance in the House of our Heavenly Father.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!