



Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Sunday of the Prodigal Son

February 28, 2016

**Father Robert E. Lucas, Pastor;
Subdeacon Daniel J. Korba and Nikitas Tsokris,
Cantors**

Rectory 215-862-9227; Parish Center 732-780-3158

We Are A Stewardship Parish Of Time, Talent and Treasure

The mission of our parish faith community is to teach the Gospel message in the rich tradition of the Orthodox Church; to enable people to reflect the image of Jesus Christ in every day activities of life; to offer spiritual formation through changing times; and to celebrate community among Orthodox believers in our Freehold area.

We of St. Paul the Apostle Parish dedicate ourselves to maintaining the sanctity of worship and spiritual enlightenment in a family environment that reaches and involves all ages and unifies all people.

We believe in the spirit of ecumenism in which we share our faith by word and example and extend our spiritual insights to all people.

We accept the responsibility of Christian Stewardship that through generous giving we may all experience a faith communion with Christ as the Center of our lives.

We dedicate ourselves to insuring the well-being of all people so that we may truly experience the message of Christ's salutary gospel.

We are a beacon on a hill with the eyes of many upon us; that beacon is the inspired Light of Christ which must shine brightly in our lives.

It is not ourselves we preach but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. This treasure we possess in earthen vessels to make it clear that its surpassing power comes from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way possible, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us. 2 Corinthians 4: 5-8.

GLAD TIDINGS

+++ The first All Soul Saturday will occur this week. The Divine Liturgy and Memorial Service will be celebrated at 9:00 AM. Please submit names of departed souls immediately and come and join us in prayer and praise.

+++ There will be no Pirohi Sale in March. The Bake Sale will take place on Friday and Saturday, March 11 and 12.

+++ Today, at 9:15 AM we have a Memorial Service for the repose of the soul of +Paul Pallas offered by his beloved family. We pray the merciful Lord comforts the family in their loss and grants a blessed repose to +Paul and creates for him Eternal Memory!

+++ Please keep the intentions of these members of our parish intercession community in your daily prayers: Barbara, Betty, James, Yevlogia, Nicholas, Maria, Cynthia, Patricia, Pani Anna Marie and Andrea.

+++ The sign-up sheet for both the Web Site and Bulletin sponsors is on the bulletin board in the kitchen. Please sign up as soon as possible. Do NOT make payment until your sign-up month has arrived. This will make it easier for Father to keep track of payments. Thanks in advance to all who support the parish in this way.

+++ We offer thanks to the Blessed Trinity for inspiring generosity in the souls of our faithful and the blessing of abundant grace in our midst with the offering received last Sunday: Tithe Offering, \$305.00; Candles, \$15.00; Kitchen, \$468.00; Parish Dues, \$25.00; Diocesan Dues, \$195.00, for a total of \$1008.00. We express our profound gratitude to the parishioner communicants who offer their God-given treasure and labored for the sake of the Lord and the good of our parish. God bless and reward you good and faithful souls!

+++ As faithful believers, we intercede and associate ourselves in prayer with the following who have prayed and offered seven day lights for their intentions: Father Lucas, Maria Idronmenos, Anna Zacharyczuk, Bob Gorbich, Marilyn Korba and Pani Buletza.

+++ We make a **PENNIES FROM HEAVEN** Canister available for our faithful to bring in pennies for our altar and its appointments. We are already in receipt of **\$1860.00** from this apostolate. Even your pennies can help and are a blessing to our parish.

+++ Please be certain to see a member of the Parish Council if you would like to help our parish by using **Shop Rite Food Coupons** available in \$20.00 denominations. We invite **ALL** to be caring and supportive and use Grocery Coupons for food shopping as we have gratefully realized \$6750 on this project to date!

+++ The Clothing Drive is a permanent on-going project in our parish. Please bring any type of clothing and fabrics along with stuffed animals and shoes for the benefit of our parish. The bags can be left in the vestibule or on the front porch of the rectory. Please invite your friends and neighbors to assist us in disposing of unwanted clothing, shoes and fabrics.

+++ We invite all pray the Lord our God grants us the grace of enrichment of our spiritual lives for his glory.

LORD



TEACH
US

Hate

Do not correct an arrogant man because he will hate you; correct a wise man and he will love you Proverbs 9: 8.

Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house, lest he have more than enough of you and hate you Proverbs 25: 17.

Bloodthirsty men hate the honest man, but the upright show concern for his life Proverbs 29: 10.

There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens, a time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace Ecclesiastes 3: 1, 8.

Therefore I stretched out my hand against you. I diminished your allowance and delivered you over to the will of those who hate you Ezekiel 16: 27.

They hate him who corrects them at the gate and abhor him who speaks the truth Amos 5: 10.

Hate evil and love good Amos 5: 15.

Is it not your duty to know what is right, you who hate what is good and love evil?...when they cry to the Lord, he shall not answer them; rather shall he hide his face from them at that time because of the evil they have done Micah 3: 1, 4.

You have heard the commandment, 'You shall love your countrymen but hate your enemy.' My command to you is: 'love your enemies, pray for your persecutors. This will prove you are sons of your heavenly Father Matthew 5: 43, 44.

WISDOM! BE ATTENTIVE

When I foolishly separated myself from Your fatherly glory, I squandered in wickedness the riches You had given me. So now I cry out to You with the voice of the Prodigal Son saying: "I have sinned before You, O merciful Father, receive me repentant and make me as one of your hired servants." Kontakion, Sunday of the Prodigal Son.

I have sown sin in a land of innocence and life and have harvested the ears of thoughtlessness. I have gathered my actions into bundles of sheaves, but I have not placed them on the threshing floor of repentance. And now I pray to You, O my God, for You are the pre-eternal tiller of our fields: With the breath of Your loving kindness, winnow the grain of my actions, feed my soul with Your grace and forgiveness. Vesper Hymn, Sunday of the Prodigal Son.

O faithful, let us discover the power of the divine mystery. The Prodigal came back from his sin and returned to his father's house; in his loving kindness his father came out to meet him and kissed him. He restored him to the glory of His house and prepared a mystical banquet on high. He killed the fatted calf so that we may share in his joy; the joy of the Father Who offers with love, and the joy of the Lamb Who gives Himself for us; for He is Christ the Saviour of our souls. Vesper Hymn, Sunday of the Prodigal Son.

I have wasted the treasure that my Father gave to me; I have lived among senseless animals; I have longed to eat the food of the swine, and because no one offered it to me I remained hungry. But now I return to my Father Who is so good, and with tears I cry out: Treat me as one of Your servants, for I no longer deserve Your love, and in Your mercy, save me. Vesper Hymn, Sunday of the Prodigal Son.

When I think upon the multitude of my evil deeds, I tremble for the terrible Day of Judgment. But trusting in the compassion of Your mercy, O Lord, I cry out to You like David: Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your great mercy. Matins Hymn, Sunday of the Prodigal Son.

O Jesus, now receive my repentance, for I have sinned as the Prodigal Son: I have spent my life in carelessness, thus provoking the anger of my God. I have foolishly wasted the divine treasure of the heritage You once gave me. By my senseless life I have separated myself from You. Accept me, O Father, in Your goodness, as I now return to You. Receive me now, Lord, as You once received the Prodigal. Open to me Your fatherly arms, and in thanksgiving I will sing of Your glory and goodness. Matins Hymn, Sunday of the Prodigal Son.

The Missing Dimension

Humanity is plagued with fears, worries and explaining and revealing the causes of depression is our purpose here. The missing knowledge about depression is revealed in Scripture. Here is spiritual knowledge that unveils both the causes and solution to most mental ills, fears, and worries. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge (and that includes spiritual knowledge..." Why? "...because you have rejected knowledge..." Hosea 4: 6, reveals our Creator .

Mental ill health is the result and direct manifestation of broken spiritual and possibly, physical laws which God set in motion when He created us and which mankind in general has rejected. A problem exists with the inner equilibrium of the soul if it manifests itself as depressed behavior. Many modern minds think they are educated to automatically reject God's revelation and the reality of immutable moral laws. They mistakenly think God's revelation is simply for the soul, not the body and they further mistakenly think the body is not prompted to behavior or responds in particular ways when its motivating factor, its *psyche* is abused and short-changed. Modern man has yet to learn if we violate and break the rules of behavior God set for man, we will be breaking ourselves.

Christ taught us, "If you live according to my teaching, you are truly my disciples; then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" John 8: 31, 32. God's written word is truth. What the Church teaches is truth. It does set us free, free of mental depression, free of spiritual depression, free of sin. "Love has no room for fear; rather perfect love casts out all fear. And since fear has to do with punishment, love is not yet perfect in one who is afraid" 1 John 4: 18.

The truth that is missing in so many lives and in education in general is the true and correct understanding of the purpose of human life and of the laws, values, and attitudes that produce peace of mind, joy, fulfillment and happiness. So many are at cross purposes with themselves. They as outward human beings live near lives of animals and even lower life beings. They are in opposition to their own very nature. So many have been blinded to the understanding of how they can receive the spiritual help and power they need to overcome their damaging human tugs and fears, for how to deal with every adverse situation in life with hope and faith, to "pray and not to faint." Luke 18: 1, as Jesus taught us.

We have yet to learn that we must prayerfully struggle, cooperate with God's grace to "...to become one in faith and in the knowledge of God's Son and form that perfect man who is Christ, come to full stature. Let us then, be children no longer, tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine that originates in human trickery and skill in proposing error. Rather, let us profess the truth in love and grow to the full maturity of Christ the head. Through him the whole body grows and with proper functioning of the members joined firmly together by each supporting ligament, builds itself up in love" Ephesians 4: 13 - 16. Renewal in Christ can only take place if it is ardently desired and sought after. "I declare and solemnly attest in the Lord that you must no longer live as the pagans do, their minds empty, their understanding darkened. They are estranged from a life in God because of their ignorance and in their resistance without remorse they have abandoned themselves to lust and the indulgence of every sort... You must put on that new man created in God's image whose justice and holiness are born of truth" Ephesians 4: 17 - 19, 24.



The Old Country Priest says...

When we show respect for others, it is because we exhibit the self respect we possess because we belong to Christ. We see inherent value in others because we are loved by God Who has made us all in His own image. We are the choice rational creation of our heavenly Father, with Jesus Christ as our saving brother. We are not isolated islands, but a part of the family of God. If we genuinely love ourselves as we ought, because God first loved us, we perceive that same love of God for our brothers and sisters. We then relate to them as God relates to us.

"Offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life"
Romans 6: 13.

Being devoted and consecrated to God is an important element in Christian faith commitment. A man who worshipped at a recent holy day Liturgy heard the parish priest assure his flock, "O Lord, You know we can trust Your Son Who died for us." On his way home, he deeply pondered the meaning of the message. He often worried what being devoted to the Lord would mean for his life. He was afraid of the personal cost and suddenly, above the noise of street traffic came this message: "You can trust the Son of God Who died for you." As he further thought about it, he kept returning to his former thinking. Making Christ first and foremost would be so difficult. He thought of the changes, the sacrifices, the disappointments that devotion to the Lord above everything else in life would mean for him. He was still afraid.

Upon arriving at home, he went straight to his room, fell on his knees and saw his life pass before his eyes. He was considered a faithful believer, even served on the parish council and always responded when the parish priest called for volunteers. But he never yielded his life to God with a definite act of will. There was always a reservation in everything he did for God and the church. There was a considerable portion, something he held back. He did not yield wholly to God. After all, he often thought, he did have his own life to lead and that demanded time and interest. Yes, he sacrificed himself many times, but it was still not a true surrender of self to God. He kept the best part of himself for himself. Yet as he thought of his own 'precious' plans that might be thwarted, his beloved hopes to be surrendered and his chosen profession that would be abandoned, he was still afraid.

He failed to see the better things God had for him, so his soul was running from the Source of Life. And then for the last time, with a swift force of convicting power to his innermost heart, came the searching message: "My child, you can trust the Son of God Who died for you. If you cannot trust Him, then whom can you trust?" Finally, that seemed to settle it. In a flash of light he gazed upward to face the Son of God Who loved him enough to die for him with a genuine concern for the life He saved.

We can trust the Son of God Who died for us. You can also trust Him to thwart each plan that should be abandoned and stopped and redirected to be then completed with results for His great glory and your highest good. If you do not sense His redirection, His pushing you in another direction it is because you are spiritually indifferent, perhaps even dead of soul. But never forget this: You can trust the Son of God to push you down the path that is the very best in this world only for you!

Jesus looked up and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me'"
John 11: 41.

The sequence of events in this passage seems strange and unusual. Lazarus was still in his tomb, yet Jesus' thanksgiving preceded the miracle of raising him from the dead. It seems that thanks would only have been lifted up once the great miracle had been accomplished and Lazarus had been restored to life. But Jesus gives thanks for what He was about to receive. His gratitude sprang up *before* the blessing actually was manifest, in an expression of assurance that it was certainly on its way. The faith of Christ is living faith, abundant faith! The song of victory was sung before the battle had been fought. It was the Sower singing the song of harvest; it was thanksgiving before the miracle!

Whoever thinks of announcing a victory song as the army is just heading out to the battlefield? And where do we ever hear a song of gratitude and thanksgiving for an answer not yet received?

Yet in this revelation from God Himself there is nothing strange, forced, or unreasonable to the Master's sequence of praise before the miracle is made known! Praise is actually the most vital preparation to the working of miracles. Miracles are performed through spirited power and our spiritual power is always in proportion to our faith. Do we then need wonder why at the Divine Liturgy, the Church properly approaches the confection of the heavenly Eucharist only after extensively singing the praises of the blessed Trinity? Must we think about incessantly and reason within ourselves why worship of God is so vital for daily blessings to manifest themselves in our lives? Is there not a direct association between what we do on Sundays and holy days to honor the Lord's day and the munificent bounties we enjoy then and at other times?

Nothing pleases our God more than praise as part of our prayer life and nothing blesses someone who prays as much as the praise that is offered. A man speaks of receiving a great blessing after having received bad news from home and deep shadows of darkness seemed to cover his soul. He prayed for deliverance, but the darkness remained. He forced himself to endure but the shadows only deepened. Then suddenly, one day as he entered the parish rectory office to speak with his pastor, he saw the sign on the wall, "Try giving thanks." So he did and in a moment every shadow was gone, never to return. He thanked God even for the sadness he received because he then trusted God endowed him with the necessary grace and strength to overcome. Yes, the Psalmist was right, "It is good to praise the Lord" Psalms 92: 1.

An ornate, symmetrical decorative border in a dark, textured style. It features intricate scrollwork, floral motifs, and a central oval frame that encloses the text. The border is composed of multiple layers, with the innermost being a simple line and the outermost being a thick, dark band.

I

Can Do All Things

Through

CHRIST

Who Strengthens

Me

Philippians 4: 13.

Did You Know That ...

- ...everything worthwhile, everything of value has the price of genuine effort?
- ...if you want to grow in the spiritual life, associate with people whose spiritual achievement exceeds your own and model the growth you desire?
- ...the height of your accomplishments will equal the depth of your convictions?
- ...research is what I am doing when I don't know what I am doing?
- ...success is when you do more than you need to do before you are asked to do it, not because you're asked to do it, but because you want to do it?
- ...the one common experience of all humanity is the challenge of problems in life?
- ...you cannot turn back the clock, but you can wind it up again?
- ...the goal of life is to die young, as late as possible?
- ...the world would be a great place if the power of love replaced love of power?
- ...if you do not want to hit bottom, stop digging the hole?
- ...if you have a good time playing the game, you are a winner even if you lose?
- ...opportunity does not travel on any schedule; you just have to watch for it?
- ...we should never try quitting and never quit trying?
- ...when people are highly motivated, it is easy to accomplish the impossible; when they are not, it is impossible to accomplish the easy?
- ...some of us are like wheelbarrows, only useful when pushed and very easily upset?
- ...two distinct marks of a holy person are giving and forgiving?
- ...instead of finding fault, find a remedy?

God's Revealed Precedent for Violence

We are making a controversial but historical and accurate point about the ever-increasing violence we in the West principally and the rest of the world are experiencing and witnessing from radical Islamists. It is not proposed as the only explanation for our troubles today but as a focus on what is obvious from the perspective of God's revelation to man. The main goal is to explain and explore a historical biblical theme of how our Creator God explains some of the hatred and violence from enemies and to show that it has something to say for the violence, evil and instability of our times. History does repeat itself! And we are presently living in that distinctly imperative time.

Very simply put, our Creator God is permitting increased violence and not restraining it, as a kind of chastisement on the increasingly secular pagan West for our progressively growing unbelief.

This is a common revealed biblical theme development by the prophets to explain to Israel, the Chosen People of God, in both dispensations why and how our heavenly Father allows the Syrians and Babylonians to wreak terrible suffering on Israel and Judah yesterday and today.

This binding prophetic tradition actually began in the Book of Moses. Consider this passage from the book which contains the giving once again of the law God expects us to seriously pursue in our daily living. In it He warns what will happen to an unbelieving nation.



CHAPTER 32

A.

- 1 Give ear, O heavens, while I speak; *
let the earth hearken to the words of
my mouth!
- 2 May my instruction soak in like the
rain,
and my discourse permeate like the
dew,
Like a downpour upon the grass,
like a shower upon the crops:
- 3 For I will sing the LORD's renown.
Oh, proclaim the greatness of our
God!
- 4 The Rock—how faultless are his deeds,
how right all his ways!
A faithful God, without deceit,
how just and upright he is! ^b
- 5 Yet basely has he been treated by his
degenerate children,
a perverse and crooked race! ⁱ
- 6 Is the LORD to be thus repaid by you,
O stupid and foolish people?
Is he not your father who created you?
Has he not made you and estab-
lished you? ⁱ
- 7 Think back on the days of old,
reflect on the years of age upon age.
Ask your father and he will inform
you,
ask your elders and they will tell
you: ^k
- 8 When the Most High assigned the na-
tions their heritage,
when he parceled out the descen-
dants of Adam, ^l
He set up the boundaries of the peo-
ples
after the number of the sons of
God; *

9 While the LORD's own portion was
Jacob,
His hereditary share was Israel. ^m

10 He found them in a wilderness,
a wasteland of howling desert.
He shielded them and cared for them,
guarding them as the apple of his
eye. ⁿ

11 As an eagle incites its nestlings forth
by hovering over its brood,

So he spread his wings to receive them
and bore them up on his pinions. ^o

12 The LORD alone was their leader,
no strange god was with him.

13 He had them ride triumphant over the
summits of the land *

and live off the products of its fields,
Giving them honey to suck from its
rocks

and olive oil from its hard, stony
ground;

14 Butter from its cows and milk from
its sheep,

with the fat of its lambs and rams;

Its Bashan * bulls and its goats,
with the cream of its finest wheat;
and the foaming blood of its grapes
you drank.

B

15 [So Jacob ate his fill,]
the darling * grew fat and frisky;
you became fat and gross and
gorged.

They spurned the God who made them
and scorned their saving Rock. ^p

16 They provoked him with strange gods
and angered him with abominable
idols. ^q

- 17 They offered sacrifice to demons, to
"no-gods,"
to gods whom they had not known
before,
To newcomers just arrived,
of whom their fathers had never
stood in awe.
- 18 You were unmindful of the Rock that
begot you,
You forgot the God who gave you
birth.
- 19 When the LORD saw this, he was filled
with loathing
and anger toward his sons and
daughters.
- 20 "I will hide my face from them," he
said,
"and see what will then become of
them.
What a fickle race they are,
sons with no loyalty in them!"
- 21 "Since they have provoked me with
their 'no-god'
and angered me with their vain
idols,
I will provoke them with a 'no-people';
with a foolish nation I will anger
them."
- 22 "For by my wrath a fire is enkindled
that shall rage to the depths of the
nether world,
Consuming the earth with its yield,
and licking with flames the roots
of the mountains."
- 23 I will spend on them woe upon woe
and exhaust all my arrows against
them:
- 24 "Emaciating hunger and consuming
fever
and bitter pestilence,
And the teeth of wild beasts I will
send among them,

- with the venom of reptiles gliding
in the dust.
- 25 "Snatched away by the sword in the
street
and by sheer terror at home
Shall be the youth and the maiden
alike,
the nursing babe as well as the
hoary old man."
- 26 "I would have said, 'I will make an end
of them
and blot out their name from men's
memories,'
- 27 Had I not feared the insolence of their
enemies,
feared that these foes would mis-
takenly boast,
'Our own hand won the victory;
the LORD had nothing to do with
it.'"
- 28 For they are a people devoid of
reason,*
having no understanding.
- 29 If they had insight they would realize
what happened,
they would understand their future
and say,

C

- 30 "How could one man rout a thousand,
or two men put ten thousand to
flight,
Unless it was because their Rock sold
them
and the LORD delivered them up?"

^a Ex 19, 4.—^b Dt 31, 20.—^c Nm 25, 21; Ps 78, 58.—^d Jer 2, 32.—^e Dt 31, 17.—^f Rom 10, 19.—^g Lam 4, 11.—^h Lv 26, 25.

32, 13: The land: Canaan.

32, 14: Bashan: a fertile grazing land east of the Jordan, famous for its strong cattle. Cf Ps 22, 13; Ez 39, 18; Am 4, 1.

32, 15: The darling: a probable meaning of the Hebrew word yeshurun, a term of endearment for 'Israel.' Cf Dt 33, 5, 26; Is 44, 2.

32, 28-35: The reference is to the pagan nations, not to Israel.

31 Indeed, their "rock" is not like our
Rock,
and our foes are under condemna-
tion.

32 They are a branch of Sodom's vine-
stock,
from the vineyards of Gomorrah.
Poisonous are their grapes
and bitter their clusters.

33 Their wine is the venom of dragons
and the cruel poison of cobras.

34 "Is not this preserved in my treasury,
sealed up in my storehouse,

35 Against the day of vengeance and re-
quital,
against the time they lose their foot-
ing?"

Close at hand is the day of their
disaster,
and their doom is rushing upon
them!

36 Surely, the LORD shall do justice for
his people;
on his servants he shall have pity.
When he sees their strength failing,
and their protected and unprotected *
alike disappearing,"

37 He will say, "Where are their gods *
whom they relied on as their 'rock'?"

38 Let those who ate the fat of your
sacrifices
and drank the wine of your liba-
tions

Rise up now and help you!

Let them be your protection!

39 "Learn then that I, I alone, am God,
and there is no god besides me.

It is I who bring both death and life,
I who inflict wounds and heal them,
and from my hand there is no
rescue. 7

40 "To the heavens I raise my hand and swear:

As surely as I live forever,

41 I will sharpen my flashing sword,
and my hand shall lay hold of my

w 2 Mo 7, 6.—x 37f: Jgs 10, 14: Jer 2, 28.—y Dt 4, 35;
yb 13, 2: Wis 16, 13.—z Dt 4, 9.—a Nm 27, 12: 33, 47f.—
b Nm 20, 24ff. 28; 27, 13: 33, 38.—c Nmi 20, 12; 27, 14.
—d Dt 3, 27; 34, 4.

32, 36: Their protected and unprotected: the meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain; according to some, the idea is "slaves and freemen."

33, 2-5, 26-29: These verses seem to form an independent hymn describing, in the form of a theophany, the conquest of Canaan. The first section of this hymn (vv 2-5) serves here as an introduction to the various "blessings"; the second section (vv 26-29), as their conclusion.

quiver.

"With vengeance I will repay my foes
and requite those who hate me.

42 I will make my arrows drunk with
blood,
and my sword shall gorge itself with
flesh—

With the blood of the slain and the
captured,

Flesh from the heads of the enemy
leaders."

43 Exult with him, you heavens,
glorify him, all you angels of God;
For he avenges the blood of his serv-
ants

and purges his people's land.

44 So Moses, together with Joshua, son
of Nun, went and recited all the words of
this song for the people to hear.

Final Appeal. 45 When Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel, 46 he said, "Take to heart all the warning which I have now given you and which you must impress on your children, that you may carry out carefully every word of this law. 47 For this is no trivial matter for you; rather, it means your very

life, since it is by this means that you are to enjoy a long life on the land which you will cross the Jordan to occupy."

Moses to View Canaan. ⁴⁸ On that very day the LORD said to Moses, ⁴⁹ "Go up on Mount Nebo, here in the Abarim Mountains [it is in the land of Moab facing Jericho], and view the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites as their possession."⁵⁰ Then you shall die on the mountain you have climbed, and shall be taken to your people, just as your brother Aaron died on Mount Hor and there was taken to his people;^b ⁵¹ because both of you broke faith with me among the Israelites at the waters of Meribath-kadesh in the desert of Zin by failing to manifest my sanctity among the Israelites.^c ⁵² You may indeed view the land at a distance, but you shall not enter that land which I am giving to the Israelites."^d



Now this is a common biblical theme echoed and resonated by just about every prophet. It is the consistent single – minded message from heaven. Violent wrath from one's enemies is, to some extent punishment permitted by our heavenly Father due to abhorrent sin and unbelief among his people. The passage makes plainly that very case.

Some limited in mind contend, "Is this not to some extent, to blame the victim?" Yes, in some ways, it is. It does not mean that those who die are more to blame than others. Neither does it mean that there would be no violent attacks at all if we were a nation holier and steadfast in our faith commitment. But other things being equal, the biblical tradition does indicate a correlation between violent attacks and a permitted punishment of God due to sin and unbelief. And such a correlation or connection is surely made.

The basic argument and plan of God has the following elements: Israel has become unmindful of God, provocatively sinful, perverse and unfaithful, devoid of counsel and lacking in understanding. As such, the Creator will seek to purify them and draw them back by allowing punishment to overcome them. In other words, by not following the plainly issued directives of God, which are given for protection and blessing, man insists on his own way, his own interpretation of daily living. Man prefers his own understanding and outrightly ignores the will of God. God will give him what he so ardently desires. As such, God will seek to purify him and draw him back by allowing actually self-inflicted punishment to overcome him, as he sees blessings and victories go to others. God will permit violence and the sword to reach him, even to teach him, in more numerous ways, and, sadly, even the young and very old and the innocent will suffer inadvertently in this learning experience.

Today, much of the passage fits directly and perfectly. We even have openly tolerate godless leaders who profess belief but live without it. Whoever heard of a national leader defending the killing of unborn children by saying he wanted his daughters to have this benefit if they ever needed it? Under what circumstances can a national pagan court alter the prescription for marriage as to the opposite of what God mandated and God identified? Marriage is a divine institution between a man and woman, not a human invention.

We have pushed God to the periphery. We have collectively become unmindful of God. We have pushed him into the ends of our culture and society.. Speculation is rampant, church attendance and genuine worship is down to an all time low. And even for those who do believe, there is a widespread tendency among many to engage in a kind of false religion that features a designer god, a god of their own making and imagination and understanding who just happens to agree with all of us on everything we do. People in the Roman Church have lost faith because so many gay bishops have allowed and tolerated gay priests. Bishops in the Orthodox Church are less than leaders and their priests do not know how to be shepherds and lead the flock to Christ because of the gladly assumed limitations that lay people place on their functioning. Protestantism has degenerated into a nice social club which is intensifying itself among Orthodox believers where parishes are more clubs than faith communities. Good and devoted priests and people are ignored and find it most difficult to remain faithful in their isolation. The Scriptures call this and identify it plainly as idolatry. Those who worship the God who reveals himself in Scripture are fewer and fewer. So we are in an unbelieving and increasingly unfaithful nation.

And we are perverse. Indeed, almost every kind of perversity is on display and worse yet, is approved and even celebrated by many. We have aborted more than sixty million of our babies. Promiscuity is rampant as cohabitation, divorce and the outright celebration of homosexuality by many. We brag we don't accept many of these things for ourselves but respect them in others! Astounding nonsense! Whereas such things used to cause shock and shame, today they are openly approved and made the stuff of entertainment and cultural appreciation. A recent television show featured a woman getting an abortion with the song, *Silent Night* playing in the background. This is not only perverse, but outright blasphemous!

And we wonder why our God and Creator cannot offer his blessing to our efforts?

And we are devoid of counsel and lacking understanding primarily because of political correctness. There are few today who will either counsel or be counseled. Not understanding fundamental meaning in revelation we dismiss others by saying, "Do not

judge...." instead of being eager to hear a corrective insight. Who is there for the weak and timid? Why are pulpits silent? So are kitchen tables and other parental forums. Parents are so busy being friends and buddies to their infantile children, they refrain from any common sense. Roberts Rules of Order are more prevalently practiced in the parishes than any copy of Scripture or Code of Canon Law! And those priests and parents who do seek to give counsel are often vigorously resisted and even punished for their admonitions. One priest was even called a "control freak" by a parishioner!

Understanding, too, is on vacation since so very few really understand what ails us and why it is wrong. Even many who would defend the faith do not often understand what is taught or how to coherently apply the faith fundamentals to life. Catechesis and teaching of basic virtue has been on vacation for an awfully long time that many do not even know the question, let alone the simple answers. Bishops in the Orthodox Church still ordain men without any formation and spiritual preparation, hopefully praying some how the Holy Spirit will supply what is missing because they themselves do not understand the prayer in the ordination form.

And all of this exists in a stubbornly unrepentant way. Beyond a small and faithful remnant and a small but unsteady stream of converts, there is in the wider culture a stubborn refusal to change. Indeed, there is a doubling down of our culture into deeper sin and defiance because of what they identify as no retribution for their atrocious behavior.

And thus the text said of ancient Israel, that God will trouble us with those who are no people. And those who are foolish nations. It is an interesting fact that most of those who terrorize us are not from any particular nation. While many have Arab names, they actually come from all over, and from no particular place. We are not under attack by a nation per se, but a philosophy or religion that is interpreted in the literal extreme. And the people who do this do not come from one nation; they include people in our own country as well. We are not under attack by Saudi Arabia or Indonesia or Syria. Those who attack us come from all over the self -- forsaken world, even from places like England and France. They subscribe to a radical sort of Islam, which in reality is the ordinary normal understanding under coalitions called ISIS, al Qaeda, and so forth. But they are a "no people," in the sense they are not a stable nation. At least not yet.

And what of them being a foolish nation? Here some care is required. In American English, "foolish" means a form of being stupid, confused, immature, or knuckle-headed. But in the biblical tradition, to be "foolish" means that one does not partake in God's revealed wisdom. The foolish were the unwise. It does not mean they are stupid or unable to mount a very serious opposition that was strong and organized. Ancient Assyria and Babylon did not participate in God's revealed wisdom, but they were not stupid or disorganized.

And in this we must give our current opponents credit for a kind of dedication, determination and organization that we so very often lack. We have become soft, and our core beliefs in the decadent West are almost nonexistent. Practically, the only virtues left are tolerance and being nice, inoffensive. Just about every other value and virtue are up for sale or away on almost permanent vacation. What is the average American willing to die for today? Almost nothing. What is the average American willing to make a sacrifice for? Little else than the material possessions tucked under the notion of the "American Dream."

Time after time, our God had to chastise his people because they fell to the side, easily seduced by values in the world. They were jealous of their pagan neighbors and wanted, not the rule of God, but of a king. They like the sound of the word and its idea. God gave them what they wanted and before you know it, it became a curse for them. Since it was so important for them, God continued to let them have a king, but pagan king, Nebuchadnezzar, since they did not know how to relate to one of their own. Neither the Israelite king nor his people could get along with their Creator. It is ironic that God's people did not know how to relate to God, but a pagan did. Although it was the Israelites whom God chose and befriended, it was not they who gladly do his bidding. Yet it was to the Israelites that originally God entered into a covenant "Abraham is called a friend of God" James 2: 21; "He entered into a covenant of perpetual friendship with Abraham and his seed forever" Genesis 12: 2.

"The Lord will name you 'Terror on every side.' For thus says the Lord. Indeed I will deliver you to terror and all your friends. Your own eyes shall see them fall by the swords of their enemies. All Judah I will deliver up to the king of Babylon or slay them with the sword. All the wealth of this city, all it has toiled for and holds dear, all the

treasures of the kings of Judah, I will give as plunder into the hands of their foes who shall seize it and carry it away to Babylon" Jeremiah 20: 3 – 5,

It is not with surprise we read, "It was I who made the earth and man and beast on the face of the earth by my great power, with my outstretched arm and I can give them to whomever I think fit. Now I have given all the lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon my servant...." Jeremiah 27: 6. The enemy of God's people becomes the servant of God when the followers wanted to be leaders without grace. They wanted pagan values; pagan values will teach and discipline them into believers once again.

Collectively, we lack resolve. Our leaders are cautious, without conviction and think more about re – election and temporary worldly comfort than pursuing ideals for the good of the people. Our leaders are not right nor possessed of courage. We are even scared to try to identify the enemy lest we be accused of the cursed paltry notion of profiling. Our simplistic minds teach us to be fretful, anxious, dominated by political hacks and speech correctness so that no sin is described and corrected. We are locked into decadent distractions like sports, shopping and frivolous entertainments and preoccupied corruptedly with our physical appearance. Meanwhile we face opponents with most, if not all of the corrupted versions of virtues we lack, but sadly, they possess them for the explicit purpose of our destruction and we are too blinded to recognize the roots and reality of our fateful condition.

Yes, our God is troubling us with those who are "no people" and a "foolish nation." By our invitation, they live stealthily among us, emerge as if out of nowhere and strike with a ruthlessness that shocks, even more because we are so soft and schooled in the "Happy Ending" philosophy of grade school plays. And their wickedness is intense because they are a foolish nation, not partaking of God's revealed wisdom and thus they lack any Christian notion of the sacredness of human life and that outright murder cannot be justified. Hating our decadence and perceiving that we are without conviction, they exploit our weakness.

Yes, we are weak, soft, decadent, because collectively we have forsaken God and have become perverse and lacking in counsel or understanding. We are an easy target. On all our backs is written the polite invitation: "Come and get me!"

All because we have refused to understand or believe the words and promise of our Creator, we collectively have forsaken God, founded our own religions and gloat at ourselves in satisfaction as we pursue our own truth and ignore outright the literal facts of God's revelation to us.

We forgot the verity of the Creator's contention for us: "How they could have chased a thousand and two have put ten thousand to flight, if their Rock had not sold them, if the Lord had not given them up!" And why did He do this to ancient Israel? Because they needed to learn to avoid something even worse, hell. It is surely the same for us. Once a flawed but Christian nation, now we are increasingly just a flawed, stubborn, decadent and becoming increasingly pagan nation, and many of us may well be heading for hell. Time for strong medicine? We each have to decide!

Are we blaming the victim? Yes, to some extent and other things besides, the collective victims of our entire nation, allowing itself to be led not by pursuing holiness and vision and truth, but by the stench and beckoning allure of pagan decadence. All of us are a part of this nonsensical objective because we go along with it. Yes, we share all the blame for what is happening to us. There are many factors at work in the current terror and horror, but among them we cannot neglect the consistent revealed biblical message that sin makes us weak and an easy target. At a certain point, God hands us over to experience the fuller consequences of our rejection of his plan.

This does not give any approval to the evil actions or to those who perpetrate them or to the doctrines of demons that inspire them. The perpetrators are wicked and will answer to God for what they have done.

And for us, the way back is clear enough. The Lord says, "Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over in their stubborn hearts to follow their own counsels. But, oh,

that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways! I would soon subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes” Psalms 81: 11 – 14.

Or again, “Oh that my people’s hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always so that it might go well with them and their children forever” Deuteronomy 5: 29.

Or yet, again, “If my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land” 2 Chronicles 17: 14.



GOD'S COVENANT WITH ISRAEL
AT MT. SINAI

Mercy Prayer

Lord, God and Saviour,
Jesus Christ,

You taught us to be merciful like the
Heavenly Father, and tell us
whoever sees you, also perceives the Father.
Show us your face of mercy and we will be saved.
Your loving gaze freed Zachaeus and Matthew
from being enslaved by money;
the adulteress from seeking happiness only in created things;
made Peter weep after his betrayal
and assured Paradise to the repentant thief.

We so desperately need your mercy; may we hear, as if addressed
to each of us, the words you tenderly spoke to the Samaritan woman:
"If only you knew the gift of God!"

You are the visible face of the invisible Father, of the God
Who manifests his power by forgiveness and mercy. Grant us the grace to your power
that we may be forgiving and merciful to each other; that we may be recipients of your
mercy as desperately as we need it.

Let us be so inspired by your merciful grace that in our countenance
may also be identified and witnessed loving mercy to be
generously and eagerly shared with others.

You clothed your priests in human weakness in order that they would feel compassion
for those in ignorance and error that everyone who approaches them might experience
love and forgiveness from heaven and share in divine mercy.

Grant us to know the forgiveness of the Father, send your Holy Spirit
to consecrate each of us with blessed anointing
that we, too, might with renewed enthusiasm, bring good news to the poor,
proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed
and restore sight to the blind.

Grant us the measure of mercy we so desperately need!

TWO SONS . . . AND TWO LESSONS FOR US TODAY

There are masterpieces in every field of human endeavor. These works in music, in art, in literature, in architecture have endured for centuries and will continue to be cherished till the end of time.

There are masterpieces in stories, too, particularly those that convey profound lessons of life. Among these are the parables that Jesus told. And above them all, shining as a precious jewel, is the **PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON**. It is an eternal narrative, true in any and every age. It reveals in a most graphic way what both man and God are like.

Christ begins the parable with the words: "A certain man had two sons." It behooves us, therefore, to look at both of them. One was the prodigal who left the father and went to a far country where he squandered his wealth and fell into sin. But the older son sinned, too, for he refused to love, to rejoice and to be reconciled with his brother. Through all of this, the loving character of the father provides an icon for us of the mercy and goodness of God.

The parable, brief as it is, encompasses the whole of human nature, of God's nature, of time and eternity in its message. It would profit us to ponder this story, and to recognize the Church's wisdom in having it read on this particular Sunday year after year.

Joan by Sister Ruth - Keene, NH

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