

IC

XC

W

N

ἮΓΟΦΙΑ

ΤΥ ΘΥ

ΑΙ  
ΑΜ  
\*  
THE  
LIGHT  
OF THE  
WORLD

# Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Sunday of the Prodigal Son

February 12, 2012

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

+++ Yesterday was the feast of St. Blaise, priestmartyr. Throats are blessed today after the Divine Liturgy.

+++ This Saturday is the first All Souls' Day. The Divine Liturgy and Memorial Service is celebrated at 9: 00 AM. Please join us in prayer and remembrance of our beloved departed souls. All are asked to turn in the names of family departed souls.

+++ The Great Fast begins Monday, February 27. On Sunday, February 26, we will have our Parish Luncheon. Please sign up for the food donation listing and plan on being here in prayer and preparation for the Forgiveness Vespers which will follow.

+++ The Pre-Great Fast Luncheon will take place the last Sunday of this month. The sign-up sheet is on the kitchen table to be filled in with suggested prepared foods.

+++ Today we honor both our Boy and Girl Scouts who are present in their uniforms. We invoke the blessings of the Lord upon them for good health, spiritual and physical, that they continue in this praiseworthy endeavor!

+++ 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 this past week: Tithe Offering, \$1,000.00; Candles, \$200.00; Food Coupons, \$200.00; Holy Day, \$150.00; Kitchen, \$1750.00; Christian Fellowship, \$50.00, for a total of \$2,400.00. We express our profound gratitude to the parishioner communicants who offered 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! The attendance was 44 adults and 13 children last Sunday.

+++ 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, Pani Lucas, Robert Gorbich, Anna Zacharyczuk, Eleni Pallas, Debra Szmaida, Paul Szmaida, and Pani Buletza.

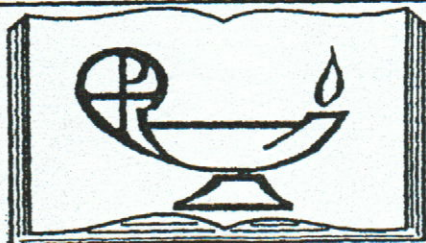
+++ We make a **PENNIES FROM HEAVEN** Canister available for our faithful to bring in pennies for our altar and its appointments. We are already in receipt of \$1650.00 from this apostolate. Even your pennies can help and are a blessing to our parish.

+++ For the expansion of our much needed parochial facilities, our parish pledge support to date totals \$110,000.00. As we thank the Lord for inspiring generosity in the hearts of our faithful, we also thank the donors for accepting the challenge of the Lord in building up His Body. We cordially invite and look forward to receiving additional and increased pledges from all our devoted parishioners.

+++ 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 \$30,000 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.**

LORD



TEACH  
US

## God's Purpose

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself* Matthew 22: 37- 39.

*It is God's purpose that your way of life may not be unclean but holy* 1 Thessalonians 4: 7.

*The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth* Psalms 34: 16.

*For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that you should abstain from sexual immorality* 1 Thessalonians 4: 3.

*You cry out, "Why has the Lord abandoned us?" I will tell you why! Because the lord witnessed the vows of you and your wife made to each other on your wedding day when you were young. But you have been disloyal to her, though she remained your faithful companion, the wife of your marriage vows. Did not the Lord make you one with your wife? In body and spirit you are his. And what does he want? Godly children from your union. So guard yourself, remain loyal to the wife of your youth "For I hate divorce" says the Lord, the God of Israel. "It is cruel as putting on a victim's bloodstained coat," says the Lord Almighty. "So guard yourself; always remain loyal to your wife" Malachi 2: 14 - 16.*

*You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised* Hebrews 10: 36.

## Prodigal Son

Today God's revelation to us in Scripture presents us with a mirror reflecting our Creator God and his choice creation, man. Unquestionably as each faithful and thinking believer attempts to fathom the mystery of God, we come to a most excellent understanding and clear perception of precisely who and what our God is like from the prescribed gospel narrative today. Our Lord continually described himself in relation to our heavenly Father. Insisting both He and the Father are one, in essence, in purpose and mind. Unquestionably with all the strokes painted for us by the hand of our Saviour, we come to receive a perfect portrait of our God.

But no more sublime, no more perfect, no more complete picture is presented us than encapsulated in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Jesus tells us what our heavenly Father is like, for we see him in the complete goodness, the total love, the tender care and the sublime forgiveness of a devoted father in the narrative. In this concise description we are also taught what man is like and this is especially important for us as we stand before the doors of repentance and the Great Fast which is quickly approaching.

After coming to a realization of the ready availability of forgiveness to a repentant child of God with appropriate disposition last Sunday, today we inspired to overcome our self-imposed limitations and return to the source of spiritual security from which we have strayed. Today we are taught that in repentance we are sorry for our sins, we must leave them behind and we must come in faith to the embracing and eager arms of our heavenly Father.

The reality and truth we hear today is often described as the most poignant, compelling, beautiful, meaningful, even overwhelming of all stories related to us by the Lord. It is a story meant to dramatically illustrate the nature and character of our God, a story to teach, certainly not at all to entertain or simply take up our time.

A man had two sons of which the younger was unhappy about life at home. Thinking he would be more fulfilled away from the presence of his father, along with the rules and regulations of the household, away from the familiar friends he knew all his life, away from the security he always knew, that if he wandered away to "live it up", he could become a fulfilled man separated from his limiting existence and "find" himself, as so many silly, superficial, simple people think today. So, initially we see the parable is timely and appropriate.

One day the young man appears before his father so he can taste the world and is perceived joys. He asks for his inheritance. He reasons why wait until the father dies; better now than later, better while the father can also can enjoy giving his hard-earned money away, better now

the father see how much joy he provides his son before passing into eternity. The Son has it all figured out. And the generous and loving and devoted father gives of himself and his wealth to the undeserving son. It seriously ached the heart of the father to see his son pack his bags and disappear on the horizon as he seeks after pleasures unheard of and never before attained or achieved.

As always the fool entertains while wise men feast. All the wealth shared with the fool is quickly dissipated and spent, wasted and squandered in riotous living, in an attempt to taste all the pleasure physical beings are able to experience. So; it is not joy and glory discovered by the young man, but pain and disgrace. He has no friends except those he can buy with favors. He tastes of the sweets of the world and finds them extremely bitter. When his wealth is gone, so is the company eager to share them. He has no one left to party with because he has no funds to provide a party. Wealth gone, fair-weather friends gone as well. When he had funds, everyone was interested in his company. Now he is broke and in abject poverty and no one wishes to hear the sad story.

To exacerbate the circumstances a famine comes to the land. He literally begins to seriously hunger and having no connections with people of influence, he must take the lowest job on the social ladder – feeding swine in a field. He has to swallow his pride as a Jew who can have absolutely nothing to do with pigs. Further still he is so desperate he must eat the swills that were meant for the animals. On his own, he realizes he is not too successful, even compared to the frail standards of the world.

Finally, finally he realizes his destiny is not with broken dreams or impossible always changing and always diminishing standards of the world. He at last, comes to his senses. He sits down and examines himself. How grievously wrong he has been! He learns the hard way that created by God for God, he cannot live without God. He has forsaken himself and abandoned his father. He has denied his own identity and nature and now realizes how important it is.

He will do what must be done, the only thing that can be done, the last realistic alternative. He gets up from his self-pity and achieves reality. Servants in his father's home have more security and dignity than he. "I will go to my father and will say to him, "Father I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no more worthy to be called your son. Receive me as a hired servant."

To open the doors of repentance we need the key of humility, which is seeing ourselves as we really are. We need a sense of sin because we will never repent if we feel we have nothing to repent or be sorry for. Today we are taught this truth. Because if we feel ourselves as sheep gone astray, we will experience the need to return to the security of our God. No matter how far or how long we have been away, we need not despair because our Father is patiently and anxiously waiting for us with love and forgiveness.

## Hearers of the Word

*Your decrees are my inheritances forever; the joy of my heart they are*  
Psalms 119: 111.

We easily hear our heavenly Father when we hear the Scripture and open our hearts to the message of his revelation to us. The spiritual tradition of our blessed Church ought to be the most precious possessions we have received. It should never be simply left lying about or shelved among showcase books. How many people buy bibles and keep them as new as possible and attractive on their shelves for display because they never open, read nor study them. Rather, the Bible ought to be enthroned in our homes and offices as a real presence of God in our midst as we often pick it up and read from it for fulfillment and inspiration.

Each day we ought to take some time to listen to our heavenly Father speaking to us in the inspired Word. We take our Bible with great reverence, aware of God's presence. We kiss the Bible and ask the Holy Spirit who inspired the writer and who lives in us to make the Word come alive in us here and now. Then we listen – the loving God speaks through the word. Then we respond as we are moved. If God speaks powerfully to us, we simply abide in God's love and presence. At the end, we take some time and thank our Creator and Maker because it is so wonderful that we can have God speak to us whenever we want – and we take away from our encounter a thought or a word to carry with us through the entire day.

When the young son left his father's home with no concern for the thinking or love of his father, he certainly did not pay attention to nor listen to the admonition of a devoted man who cooperated with God in bringing about his life. The longer he stayed away, the more deaf he became to the teaching of a caring parent. But finally, when he no longer had any more noise of the world to compete with in his thinking soul, he realized how dumb and stupid he was in abandoning the safety and protective goodness of his parent. So all he has been exposed to in life; his rich spiritual tradition of repentance and subsequent forgiveness works successfully on his mind and soul. He returns to his proper place because he not only hears the word of God, but finally beings to live it!

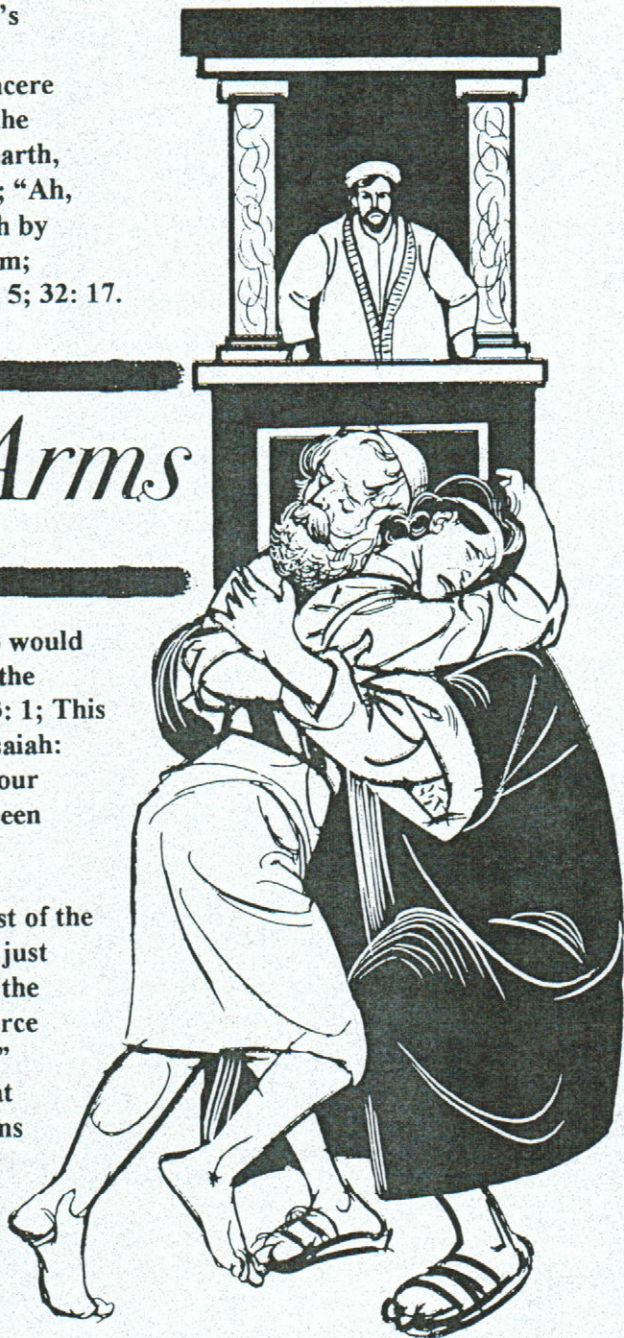
In God's revelation to us in Scripture, the open welcoming and embracing arms signify God's infinite power in creating the world and his outpouring of grace to sustain man in his sincere efforts at life on earth. "It was I who made the earth and man and beast on the face of the earth, by my great power, with outstretched arm"; "Ah, Lord, God, you have made heaven and earth by your great might, with your outstretched arm; nothing is impossible to you" Jeremiah 27: 5; 32: 17.

It manifestly signifies the overwhelming and dynamic power of God in making the gospel message of Jesus Christ

effectual to the conversion of sinners. "Who would believe what we have heard? To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Isaiah 53: 1; This was also to fulfill the word of the prophet Isaiah: "Lord, who has believed what has reached our ears? To whom has the might of the Lord been revealed?" John 12: 38.

We recall joyfully the hymnology of the feast of the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple that the just Simeon was given the dignity of embracing the Infant Saviour and lifting him up to the source of his origin in heaven, "...and blessed God" Luke 2: 28. King David points out to us that we appeal to heaven "with outstretched arms for mercy..." Psalms 136: 12. Because the Prodigal Son knew the heavenly Father has "...shown might with his arm..." Luke 1: 51, he runs home to be embraced by his loving father. Even

## *Open Arms*





Ezekiel provides inspiration and encouragement for the repentant son as he proclaims, "I will gather you with stretched out arms" Ezekiel 20: 34.

We are encouraged by the warm and impelling love of our heavenly Father to run in repentance before him, to get and exercise that grace and spiritual weapons which are appointed and bestowed by God to defend the soul. We run to the arms of God to be armed with heaven's strength and angelic power in our daily faith commitment

What comfort, what joy, what final rest we have in the warm embrace and receptive arms of our God! The faithful, but older son is not drawn to experience the love of the father because he has not known want and alienation. He does not grasp nor can he understand the words of the Saviour, "People in good health do not need a physician; sick people do" Matthew 9: 12. The sinner in the arms of God brings joy to heaven; the angels sing and our God is exalted because in another instance the power of the devil is defeated.

How marvelous the lost son is found and returned to the safety of his father's house. How blessed, how fortunate the younger, the separated, the once dead son, to live again in the sustaining arms of protection and encouragement and affirmation. His family and his father's servants rejoice and celebrate as the Lord predicted, "I tell you there will likewise be more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need to repent" Luke 15: 7.



*"I have sinned against God and against you;  
I no longer deserve to be called your son"*

**Luke 15: 18.**



## Our Compass

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, on your intelligence rely not; in all your ways be mindful of him and he will make straight your path*

Proverbs 3: 5, 6.

A man fond of hunting relates for us an interesting story which occurred in years past as he hunted on the north slope of a large nearby mountain. At that time he did not have a compass and saw no need to spend money for one. He was convinced he could never get lost. Then finally, the inevitable occurred. He became disoriented and despite carefully considering which way led out, he found himself walking aimlessly in circles. After several hours of wandering, he came to a place where he could see out over a large valley with many farms. When he finally realized where he was, he became aware it was on the south slope of the mountain about three miles from where he wanted to be. The next year he had a compass, but became quickly convinced it was inaccurate. Again he got a lot of exercise before finally relying on its accuracy. The instrument proved true and led him on a straight course to where he wanted to go.

How often we all witness people out in the mountains of life who think they have no need of God's Word, God's Church as their compass. Feeling they know far more about their individual needs of heart and soul, they rely on their own intuition, interpretation and opinion, most times arrived at in sad error and deviation from the truth surrounding them. Pride further inspires them to remain faithful to their own errors.

They are fully convinced they can find their own way. Even sadder is to see those whom we know have a compass, were reared in Christian homes and were taught the way of righteousness, yet refuse to believe their compass and go their own stubborn profligate way. Some make a grand mistake in judgment and refuse to admit their error. They do not know how to correct their mistake, so they persist in the mud, remaining on the outside of salvation, morosely looking in.

What joy there is in the heart of right-thinking people when we witness an individual come to his senses and recognize he is lost! He returns to the use of his compass, places his full trust in the teaching of Christ in his Body, the Church, and starts once again in the direction that finally leads home.

True freedom and independence is not in choosing your own way, but in yielding to God's way!

# Did You Know That ...

...too many therapists attempt to help us correct our faults by confessing our parents' shortcomings?

...it is the quality of our work and lifestyle that pleases God, not its quantity?

...there is hardly anything in the world that some man cannot make a little worse and sell a little cheaper?

...a prudent question solves the problem of half the wisdom?

...no man really becomes a fool until he stops asking serious questions?

...in sharing His wisdom with us, God does not impoverish himself?

...reading is a basic tool in the living of a good life?

...the good and quiet lead quiet lives?

...the wisdom of the wise and the experience of the ages are perpetuated by quotations?

...our God present us with what is always an acceptable gift when He brings me news of a great thought from His revelation to us?

...we should be as careful of the books we read as of the company we keep?

...reading not only furnishes our mind with materials of knowledge; it causes us to think and makes what we read ours?

...real life for some men is a perpetual compromise between the ideal and the possible?

...man is easiest judged by the questions he asks?

...at the heart of racism is the religious assertion that God made a creative mistake when He brought some people into being?

...he who will not reason is a bigot; he that cannot reason is a fool; and he that dares not reason is a slave?

## THE NEED TO BE APPROACHABLE

**H**ave you ever noticed how approachable Christ was when He walked the earth? People flocked to our Lord for many different reasons. They wanted to be healed ... they wanted to be helped ... they wanted to be taught ... they wanted to be accepted ... they wanted to be forgiven. It didn't matter why someone felt compelled to see or talk to Him. Jesus had time for everyone. Remember the story of Christ hurrying to see the ill daughter of Jairus, and He is slowed down by the woman who only wanted to touch His garment so that she could be cured of her affliction? Do you recall another incident where the Apostles tried to keep women from bringing their children to see Jesus, and our Lord rebuked them with these words: "Let the little children come to Me..."? This was a characteristic of our Lord's ministry: if someone needed something, He was there for them, even if they were the undesirable element of society that most people would shun. When someone would open their heart to Christ, He would welcome and accept them with open arms.

As followers of Jesus, we, too, must learn from His Divine example and be approachable as well. We must guard against being so focused on our own needs that we have no time for others and their needs. It is our Christian obligation to make ourselves available to others, even if we are busy and tired. Although duties may vie for our energy, we must not pass by a hurting soul whose burden we may lighten. Never lose sight of the fact that doing so will go a long way in determining who will be welcome in the Kingdom of Heaven!

*Icon by Nataliya Zharsky  
from The Prosopon School of Iconology*

The Orthodox Weekly Bulletin . . . . . Vestal, Cliffwood, New Jersey . . . . . Litho in U.S.A.