

Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Sunday of the Prodigal Son

February 16, 2014

**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 Souls' Day will be this Saturday with Divine Liturgy and Memorial Service celebrated 9:00 AM. Please turn in the names of your departed souls immediately and be with us in prayer on Saturday.

+++ Every Monday, we have prayerful devotions before the Myrrh bearing icon at 6:00 PM. Everyone is invited to be present in praise. The Birthgiver invites us to manifest our faith in response to her first shown love, to unite our prayers with hers for the salvation of our souls. Invite your friends and neighbors to join us.

+++ We will have our luncheon prior to the beginning of the Great Fast on March 2, following the Divine Liturgy.

+++ The next Pirohi Sale will be on Saturday, March 15.

+++ Please turn in the All Souls' Day envelope with attached names. The first remembrance will take place this Saturday, February 22 at 9:00 AM.

+++ Please keep the intentions of these members of our parish intercession community in your daily prayers: Anna, Ryan, Barbara, Betty, James, Jevlogia, Father George and Michael.

+++ 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, \$100.00; Candles, \$14.00; Holyday, \$54.00; Food Coupons, \$60.00; Energy, \$20.00, for a total of \$248.00. 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! 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, Anna Zacharyczuk, Eleanor Korba, Robert 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 **\$1715.00** 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 \$5700 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.

+++ Please pray the Lord our God grants us an enrichment of our spiritual lives for his glory.

+++ May all glory, adoration and worship be accorded our God in the Holy Trinity by all the faithful of our parish with one mind, one soul and one heart each day of the week!

FORGIVENESS VESPERS

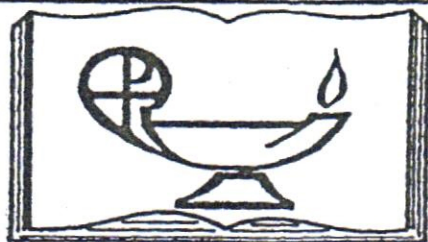
**Come and
take part in
this powerful
and moving
celebration of
forgiveness and
renewal.**



Sunday, March 2

Following Covered Dish Luncheon

LORD



TEACH
US

Envy

Do you suppose it is to no purpose that Scripture says, 'The spirit he has implanted in us tends toward envy?' James 4: 5.

Joseph was envied by his brothers because his father loved him Exodus 37: 11.

When Rachel saw that she failed to bear children to Jacob, she became envious of her sister Genesis 30: 1.

Because I was envious of the arrogant when I saw them prosper though they were wicked. For they are in no pain; their bodies are sound and sleek They are free from the burdens of mortals, and are not afflicted like the rest of men. So pride adorns them as a necklace; as a robe violence enwraps them. Out of their crassness comes iniquity; their fancies overflow their hearts; they scoff and speak evil; outrage from on high they threaten. They set their mouthing in place of heaven, and their pronouncements roam the earth Psalms 73: 3 - 9.

When the Jews saw the crowds, they became envious and countered whatever Paul said with violent abuse Acts of the Apostles 13: 45.

Impatience kills the fool and envy slays the simpleton! Job 5: 2.

A tranquil mind gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones Proverbs 14: 30.

Then I saw that all toil and skillful work is the envy of one man for another Ecclesiastes 4: 4.

Sunday Of The Prodigal Son

Most of us have rather vivid recollections of the gospel lesson prescribed for this Sunday. In fact everyone seems to know it as the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, when perhaps in reality it should more realistically and better be called that of the "Loving, Benevolent and Merciful Father."

It seems that in thunderous tones the evangelist speaks of all the sins of the younger son, his drinking, profanity, card-playing, gambling and all the sins of the flesh. He alludes to the terrible hell such sinners are destined for, and some would say he even seems to use high pressure methods to get sinners to rethink their position and repent. Occasionally some sinners are converted by this methodology. But usually such an approach leaves Christ, the Church and the rest of us somewhat worse off.

It is true there are people who commit these sins. But they are not the only sinners. In fact they are often not the worst sinners. And such preaching approach not only fails to save those who need saving the most, it made them more complacent and self-satisfied. The hardest people to reach with the love of God are not bad people. They already know they are bad. They have no defense. The hardest ones to win for God are self-righteous people.

Some people criticized Jesus for associating with sinners. So He told them a story about a father who had two sons. One of these sons became a regular prodigal. He went to a "far-country" to put as much space as he could between himself and his father's upright lifestyle. He wasted both hard earned money and his brief life. He did not seem to be able to do anything right or praiseworthy, even just good. He actually sank to the level of a pig or a hog! Christ is making quite a statement here. The other of these sons lived a decent, respectable life. As far as we know he was never guilty of any immorality, at least not a notable publicly scandalous life. To his father he was able to honestly, even truthfully say, "I have never challenged or transgressed or disobeyed any of your expectations."

Not only did he outwardly maintain his moral standards, he was really a hard worker, perhaps even obsessed with work, even lost in it and its accomplishments and rewards. In fact, Jesus introduces him by saying. "Now his elder son was in the field..." Luke 15: 25. Certainly work is good and is pleasing to God. One of the world's greatest paintings is *The Angelus* by the renown Millet. The word *angelus* refers to a particular prayer at noon, the angelic salutation to the Birthgiver of God because by tradition that

is the time of day St. Gabriel the Archangel approached her with his startling announcement from heaven.

That particular painting is of two people praying in the field, supposedly repeating the biblical prayer and greeting. On the horizon is a church steeple and we presume the bell is ringing a call to prayer. To understand the true significance of the painting, however, you must study where the rays of the afternoon sun fall. They are not on the bowed heads of the man and woman, neither are they focused on the church steeple. They fall on the wheelbarrow and the ordinary common tools of work. It is the artist's tribute to the dignity and blessing of work which gives expression, even identity to the noble vocation of man. The use of man's unique giftedness and talents to glorify God and improve the condition of the world in which he lives is praiseworthy and lofty in ideals.

There were the two boys, the two sons, obviously totally different in personality and giftedness and temperament. One who committed all the sins which seem so wrong, the other, who worked hard and lived an apparently decent life. Jesus' story ends with a great banquet and welcome home party in the father's mansion. One of the boys is seated at table in a prominent place. He wears a new robe which his father bestowed on him from the love of his heart. He wears on his finger a ring signifying restored membership once again in his family of origin. There is great joy in the father's heart and it is evident in his home. The other boy is out in the darkness, unhappy and bitter, resentful and separated from his father and his banquet table. He has no inclination to celebrate and sees no reason for it. He judges the celebration taking place to be contrived.

Now which boy is there in the outer darkness, looking at the event from a self-imposed distance, from the periphery because he was afraid to be included in the company of his prodigal brother, lest he also be tainted with such wanderlust and depravity. It was the "good" boy who was out in the dark by his own choosing at the end. Certainly Jesus is not telling us nor is He counseling we commit the sins of the flesh and indulge ourselves without limitation. But He is pointing out that one can shut God out of his heart by "good works," even openly and generously good works. It is so easy to feel self-righteous and feel no need of the Father. That is the most dangerous sin, separating ourselves from God's grace and gloating about the goodness of life all by ourselves, without the warm and endearing help needed from the heart and mind and guidance of our God. Secularism does have an appeal to the secularist. Living without God in an emptiness in which man is filled with himself is sublime foolhardy nonsense.

Self-Satisfied People

The people who gave Jesus the most trouble were not so-called “sinners.” They came to hear him preach and from his lips they received not one word of condemnation. Jesus would take even a harlot and set her soul to singing. The tax-collectors He witnessed skipping and hopping in their ordinary gait. Surely, there was a thrill in his voice as He describes how the father saw his prodigal son returning, “...had compassion and ran and threw his arms around him and kissed him” Luke 15: 20. Jesus was often accused of being “a friend of publicans and sinners” Matthew 11: 19. That, He did not of course, deny. His ministry of service was on their behalf. He said, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” Mark 2: 17.

Those self satisfied people in Christ's day and in ours as well, are the most hopeless. The elder brother of the prodigal son never sank into the gutter because he felt upright and morally superior. Instead, he stayed at home and worked very hard and lived an enviable life. As a result he began to build up within himself a sense of moral superiority. He began to pat himself on the back and feel he was better than and superior to his weak brother. The worse his brother became, the more self-righteous it made him feel. He felt good about himself because of the deprivation of his sibling.

It did not worry the elder son that his brother left the father's house and headed in the wrong direction. He never spent a sleepless night over the wrong of another. He never spent an hour in prayer for his brother's salvation. He was not concerned about the isolation of the younger brother. The father's heart was grieved and broken because of his boy, and daily he kept watching and eagerly hoping for his return. When the prodigal did return, the father welcomed him with a banquet. But the elder brother “was angry and would not go in” Luke 15: 28.

Here we see one of the greatest of human sins, which is envy. Sometimes we get envy and jealousy confused with each other. Jealousy is not bad. In fact, it is normal and right. God's revelation to us in Scripture teaches us God is jealous. “For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God” Exodus 20: 5. Jealousy comes and has its source from love and when love is cheated, it has a right to be jealous. Any person is jealous for that which he loves and if one has a right to love, he or she also has the right to be jealous.

But envy is a result of selfishness. St. Paul tells us, “Love does not envy” 1 Corinthians 13: 4. The envious person is always unhappy over the good fortune of another. It was envy that caused the first murder on earth. “Cain was envious of this and was

crestfallen” Genesis 4: 5. It was envy which nailed our Christ to the cross. Even the pagan ruler observes, “For he knew, of course, that it was out of envy that they had handed him over” Matthew 27: 18.

Because the elder boy would not come into the house, his father went out and entreated and pleaded with him. Notice the young man’s reply, “All these many years I served you and never transgressed any of your commands and yet you never gave me a calf that I might celebrate with my friends” Luke 15: 29. There he reveals his true motive. Why did he stay at home and work? Because he loved his father and respected him? Because he enjoyed his job and its responsibilities? Because noble instinct inspired him? Not at all. He remained at home because of what he could get out of his father, because of the inheritance he would now solely derive, because it was the easiest way to assure his worldly future. No values beyond himself urged his apparent respectful demeanor.

We do not have to serve God to receive and gain his material blessings. He gifts us with these anyway. It rains on the just and the unjust. The sun shines for the sinner and the saint. God allows all of us the benefits of his good earth. But there is something to be gained from the eternal Father far more wonderful. It is his fellowship, his blessed company, the inspiration and assurance of his presence.

Don’t Miss the Company

An engineer tells a story of when his father used to write to him faithfully every week while in college. Years later the young man could not very well remember what he wrote. In fact, he did not read the letters at all carefully. Inside each letter would always be a dollar, sometimes two, even three and that was what the young man was primarily interested in at that time. But years later, and since the father died, the young man recalls with a particular sadness distinctive to his experience that he no longer hears from his father and thinks about him often and misses him more with each passing year. Now it is not the dollars he wants; it is the personality, the being, his inspiring example, his father in body and soul whom he misses so desperately, particularly since he undeniably ignored him years before when he could have enjoyed his presence more. Now there are so many problems he would like to talk to him about. Good things have happened to him and he wishes he could discuss them and share them with his father. Alas, his regrets cannot be satisfied.

This young man, as he thinks about his own father, also recalls our heavenly Father and realizes that sometimes He, too, is taken for granted. The young man gladly receives and accepts the ordinary material worldly, fleeting blessings that God always sends our way, and he so often becomes absorbed and preoccupied with what God sends that he forgets about Who He is and what He says. Once he became profoundly frightened when he imagined communication between our heavenly Father and him was cut off. Suppose, he could never feel His presence again? Suppose he had no one to pray to? What kind of life would it be?

Why does a man marry? Is it to get someone to cook his meals, make the beds and sweep the floor? No, not at all. A man marries because he wants and needs a wife to complete and fulfill him. Otherwise, he could hire a housekeeper. Does a woman marry just to get someone to support her? No, she wants and needs the love of a husband.

Once the saddest stories come out of the life of a successful banker. He was being given a testimonial by important fellow bankers who had come to pay him honor. Finally, he rose to his feet to say a few words. He said, "Gentlemen, I appreciate what you have done for me tonight. But it does not mean much to me now. My wife died last year and I have no one to tell it to or share it with." Someone to tell it to. Someone to share it with. That means everything, to our God and to the faithful believer.

Two friends got together after not seeing each other for a long period of time. Their lives had become separated by life's demands and responsibilities. They did not especially have that much to talk about. Neither expected to get anything from the other. They just wanted to be together for old times' sake. If one needed it, the other would give him whatever money he had. But that is the least, the very least thing in friendship. Being with one you love and who loves you means so much more; it has a value beyond earthly calculation.

No doubt that is one of the reasons Jesus told the story about these two brothers. One of these boys started out saying, "Give me..." Luke 15: 12. He did a lot of things which were bad and became a prodigal. But happily he "came to himself" Luke 15: 17, and realized there is something far better than material things, there is something more satisfying than selfish pleasures because his physical body was not only starved, but his soul was emaciated by deprivation. "I will rise and go to my father," Luke 15: 18, he finally concluded.

But the elder brother never thought beyond himself. The father says to him "This is your brother," Luke 15: 31, but the envious one will not accept this truth. He disparagingly says to the father, "...this son of yours..." Luke 15: 30, and misses knowing what it means to really love and be loved without condition. He complains to the father, "I have served you, but I never received anything for it." Gently, the father reminds him, "You are with me always" Luke 15: 31, but the elder boy can see none of the blessings the company of his father has brought him.

The elder boy who lived and worked according his father's admonitions and expectations only because he thought it would reap financial dividends, ended by ceasing to be a son and becoming merely a drudge and a slave to passing and illusory values, almost a working chattel, a diminished property. How sad the tragedy of one who lets love dry up within his heart to become a devastated and lost person!



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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.

A PRAYER FOR YOU AT THIS TIME

...

O God of love and mercy,
open my ear
to hear your Word,
soften my heart
to be transformed by it
and strengthen my hands
to do your will.

AMEN



What is wrong with telling a *little* lie if telling the actual truth might hurt someone?

First of all, there is no such thing as a “little” lie. Second, all lies are grounded in deception, regardless of the situation. Let us not compromise and sugarcoat the issue. Whenever you tell a lie you are attempting to deceive, it is that very simple!

Perhaps you may think there is nothing wrong with telling “white” lies” if the situation calls for it. After all, according to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, a white lie is “...an often trivial, diplomatic or well-intentioned untruth.” The definition settles the issue if you believe in situational ethics; however, as a child of God, you should not.

The world says that good intentions justify lying. The truth of the matter is that regardless of your intention, telling falsehoods does more damage than good. Notice that when you lie you have to tell more lies to cover up the first one you told. You are now attempting to protect yourself or extricate yourself from a sticky situation. In addition, you can never remember what you told to whom! Thus you develop a reputation of being a liar like some of our national politicians and you lose your self-respect in the process, whether you are aware of it or not.

As a follower of Christ, as a communicant of his Body and Bride, you should never lie. God’s revelation to us is our guide and inspiration as well as a compelling reason to be above board. It speaks strongly against lying regardless of the situation.

The evil man gives heed to wicked lips and listens to falsehood from a mischievous tongue Proverbs 17: 4.

A sword upon soothsayers that they may become fools Jeremiah 50: 36.

The father you spring from is the devil and willingly you carry out his wishes. He brought death to man from the beginning and has never based himself on truth; the truth is not in him. Lying speech is his native tongue; he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I deal in truth you do give me no credence John 8: 44, 45.

We know that the law is good, provided one uses it in the way the law is supposed to be used, that is, with the understanding that it is aimed, not at good men, but at the lawless and unruly, the irreligious and sinful, the wicked and the godless men, who kill their fathers or mothers, murderers, fornicators, sexual perverts, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and those who in other ways flout the sound teaching that appertains to the glorious gospel of God – blessed be he – with which I have been entrusted I Timothy 1: 8 – 10.

The man who claims, “I have known him,” without keeping his commandments, is a liar; in such a one there is no truth...I John 2: 4.

My reason for having written you is not that you do not know the truth, but that you do, and that no lie has anything in common with the truth. Who is the liar? He who denies that Jesus is the Christ. He is the antichrist, denying the Father and the Son...I John 2: 21.

There are many irresponsible teachers, especially from among the Jewish converts – men who are empty talkers and deceivers. These must be silenced. They are upsetting whole families by teaching things that they have no right to teach – and all for sordid gain! A man of Crete, one of their own prophets, has testified, “Cretans have ever been liars, beasts and lazy gluttons,” and that is the simple truth! Titus 1:10 – 13.

If one of you is wise and understanding, let him show this in practice through a humility filled with good sense. Should you instead nurse bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, at least refrain from arrogant and lying claims against the truth. Wisdom like this does not come from above. It is earthbound; a kind of animal, even devilish cunning...James 3: 14.

So it is easy to conclude and see lying contradicts the very truth of God among us. It distorts reality and makes it subject to individual misperceived perception. It makes acceptable the devil's contentions and misrepresentation. It raises to the same dignity and level the perversion of evil with that of eternal good. Lying is distortion and denial of truth which is embodied in Christ himself and his legacy among us. Lying violates such a fundamental mandate of the Lord that when we lie, it is an offense to our Creator himself, *Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart so as to make you lie to the Holy Spirit...you have lied not to men, but to God! Acts of the Apostles 5: 3, 4. I am the...truth John 14: 6.*



Author—After Peter had helped to establish the church in Antioch, he preached to Jews and converts to Judaism throughout northern Asia Minor (1:1). Later, in Rome, hearing the churches of Asia Minor were being persecuted, he wrote them this letter of encouragement.

Date—First Peter was composed at Rome (5:13) sometime in AD 50–67. The exact date Peter arrived in Rome is unclear; tradition says he was martyred there later in Nero's reign, c. AD 67.

Major Theme—*Rejoice in sharing the sufferings of Christ.* The First Epistle of Peter is an exhortation for Christians suffering persecution to remember and live in their baptism. As baptism is a death and a resurrection, so Christians must enter into unjust suffering with a spirit of death and resurrection. Our goal is the fulfillment of baptism—heaven. This requires unwavering commitment now to (a) holiness (1:3—2:10), (b) submission in the roles we have in life (2:11—3:12), (c) patient suffering in this age as we prepare for the age to come (3:13—4:19), and (d) disciplined unity in the Church (5:1–11).

Background—The dispersion of which Peter speaks (1:1) is unknown. After the martyrdom of Stephen (c. AD 33), many Christians fled from persecution in Jerusalem. Or Peter may be speaking more generally, of Christians at large, who were often ill-treated and forced into exile because of their faith. We are told these Christians live in five provinces of Asia Minor (1:1), located in the central and northern segments of the peninsula.

Outline

- I. Greetings (1:1, 2)
- II. Practical Meaning of Baptism (1:3—3:12)
 - A. A life of faith and hope (1:3–12)
 - B. A life of holiness (1:13—2:10)
 - C. A life of honor (2:11—3:12)

- III. Persecution and Suffering (3:13—5:11)
 - A. Persecution for being righteous (3:13–22)
 - B. The persecution of mockery (4:1–19)
 - C. Suffering and the church (5:1–11)
- IV. Conclusion (5:12–14)

A LOST SON AND A LOVING FATHER

If a teacher in one of our Church School classes would ask the students to draw a picture of God, what do you think they would do? Probably draw a picture of Jesus, God the Son. But with God the Father there is more difficulty. One of the problems is with the Nature of God. He is Spirit. The Scriptures mention that God is Love. How do you draw love? The Bible says God is Life and Light. These are abstractions and cannot be drawn.

Well, Jesus DID paint a marvelous portrait of the Heavenly Father for us. Although He didn't physically draw it, He did tell a wonderful story. Notice what a clear picture we get of God the Father as we learn about the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

There was a father who had two sons. The younger one asked for his share of the property and left home. In a country faraway, he squandered his wealth on "loose living" and found himself in dire poverty. But he looked at himself, came to his senses, repented of his sins, and resolved to return home. The father received him with joy and made a family feast in celebration.

Notice, the father permitted the son to leave - he didn't interfere with his free will. The father was generous with what he gave the son. The father never forgot the son after he left. The father worried about him, and hoped daily for his return. The father rejoiced when the son came back. The father forgave the son completely at his repentance. The father received him back as son, in full fellowship, and made a feast of joy for him. This moving parable presents us with a portrait of our Heavenly Father!

Wayward Brothers

*It is right that we should celebrate and be glad, for your brother was dead
and is alive again*

Luke 15: 32.

Today we hear once again the heart-tugging story of the Prodigal Son which is actually the story of two wayward brothers and their magnanimously and generously loving father. We are the two sons and the devoted parent is our heavenly Father. This is a universal story representing every member of the human race.

While the form and type of riotous living the younger son indulged in may be foreign to many, the older brother's self-righteous attitude surely resonates with everyone's spiritual struggle. His sin may not have been as dramatic and conspicuous as that of the runaway man, but perhaps it was more serious than an out-in-the-open immoral lifestyle. That is because it was kept hidden, but rather easy to recognize only when it surfaced.

Here are its characteristics: He chose anger instead of ready acceptance and forgiveness. "The son grew angry at this and would not go in..." Luke 15: 28. Thus he willingly separated himself from his own flesh and bone and blood on two levels. He abruptly said to his father< "...this son of yours..." Luke 15: 30, instead of calling him my "...brother" Luke 15: 32. Clearly he had not experienced the astounding wonder of healing grace. He was not able to recognize and experience the heart-warming and soul-flourishing sentiment their common father and progenitor plainly made manifest. How true it is as St. James affirms for us, "...let the brother of low degree rejoice" James 3: 9. The father is overwhelmed. His daily prayer of intercession has been fully answered by a benevolent Creator, "with joy unspeakable and full of glory..." 1 Peter 1: 8. Affirmed for us is th witness of our heavenly patron, St. Paul the Apostle, "... finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord..." Philippians 3: 1, as he advises his listeners to forget what happened in the past and begin anew.

In the Parable of Divine Mercy, we learn from the Lord, "Rejoice with me! I have found the silver piece I lost. I tell you, there will be the same kind of joy before the angels of God over one repentant sinner" Luke 15: 9, 10. The father understood, but the brother did not. Membership in the same family of faith, of persevering devotion made no difference. The older brother did not invest his exclusive time with the father

to recognize the loss he suffered and the hurt he experienced because of the recalcitrance of his junior brother. He did not use the concentrated time to think about what Isaiah the prophet wrote, "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might he increases strength. Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up on with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" Isaiah 40: 28, 29, 31.

It is the same common loving and concerned father who inspired the younger son to return to the security of the family and who causes the father to embrace the older loyal son, loyal, unfortunately for the wrong reason because he is the inheritor all the family remaining treasure since the younger son has already lost his share. In his repentance, the separated son returns to the security and comfort of faith practice once again. It is as if he heard St. Paul preaching to the Philippians, "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" Philippians 3: 13, 14. Most assuredly the grace of God in the wisdom of Solomon convincingly reached him in his distance place, "Whoever covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" Proverbs 28: 13. Obviously and prophetically the thought of David the repentant Old Testament King inspired his prayer, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I kept your word. You are good and do good, teach me your statutes" Psalms 119: 67, 68.

Yet it is so obvious the father loves both sons unconditionally. With the prodigal, he ran out and welcomed him. And with the older son, he "...came out and began to plead with him" Luke 15: 28. There was no harsh scolding, just simple unabated joy for the younger son and a longing heart for the older young man. With a spirit of heavenly reconciliation for both, the father devotedly embraces them together. What a gloriously inspiring picture of love unabated of how graciously our heavenly Father relates to us and pursues us!

Which son do you represent? Have you responded to our heavenly Father's immeasurable love? Nothing have we received except that which the eternal Father offers us in the richness and durability of his grace. Once we recognize we are but sinners saved by grace, our outlook and our destiny will radically change and we will realistically recognize we, too, need the mercy of the worst sinner.