

HOLY GOD, HOLY MIGHTY, HOLY IMMORTAL, HAVE MERCY UPON US.



OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR
JESUS CHRIST

Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Sunday of the Pharisee & Publican

February 9, 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

+++ **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 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 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, \$533.00; Candles, \$36.00; Holyday, \$52.00; Parish Dues, \$45.00; Food Coupons, \$220.00; Kitchen, \$42.00; Bulletin, \$25.00; Diocesan Dues, \$390.00, for a total of \$1243.00. 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!



By Faith

By faith, Sarah received power to conceive though she was past the age; for she thought that the One who had made the promise was worthy of trust Hebrews 11: 11.

By faith Abraham was put to the test, offered up Isaac; he who had received the promises was ready to sacrifice his only son Hebrews 11: 17.

By faith, Joseph at the end of his life, spoke of the Exodus and of the Israelites and gave instructions about his burial Hebrews 11: 22.

By faith, Moses' parents hid him for three months after his birth, thereby disregarding the king's edict, because they saw that he was a beautiful child Hebrews 11: 23.

By faith, Moses when he had grown up, refused to be known as a child of Pharaoh Hebrews 11: 24.

By faith, the Israelites crossed the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted the same thing, they were drowned Hebrews 11: 29.

Because of Israel's faith, the walls of Jericho fell after being encircled for seven days Hebrews 11: 30.

By faith, Rahab the harlot escaped from being destroyed with the unbelievers, for she had peacefully received the spies Hebrews 11: 31.

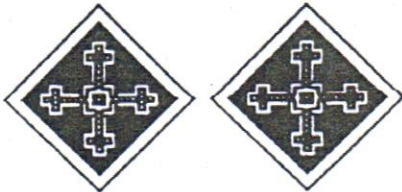
So you see then how by good works a man is justified and not by faith alone James 2: 24.

He who lives
well preaches
well...



Proverbs 4:8-10

If you exalt wisdom, she will exalt you. Hold her fast and she will lead you to great honor; she will place a beautiful crown upon your head.



JESUS IS THE HOLY
EUCCHARIST. AS MANY
TIMES YOU PARTAKE
OF HIM HE IS IN
YOU AND YOU ARE
IN HIM.

Not to decide
is to decide

Spirituality For Dummies

As a monastic, Nicetas, was disobedient to his superior, left the monastery, and closed himself in a cell. Because of his disobedience, God permitted great temptations to befall him. Once, when Nicetas was at prayer, the devil appeared to him under the guise of a radiant angel and said, 'Do not pray anymore, rather read books and I will pray for you.' Nicetas obeyed the and ceased praying and began to read books. He only read the Old Testament. He was unable to even open the New Testament for the power of the devil prevented him from doing so. By the prompting of the devil, Nicetas prophesied only crimes, thefts, arson and other evil deeds which are known to the devil and in which he participates. Finally, the holy fathers of the Caves Monastery realized that Nicetas had succumbed to the temptations of the evil one, and they began to pray to God for him. Nicetas returned to the monastery, realized the destruction which plagued him, and directed himself on the right path. After prolonged repentance and many tears, God forgave him and bestowed on him the gift of miracle working. He died in the year 1108 AD.

The story of St. Nicetas of the Caves Monastery is one that is very appropriate for our times. We live in a profoundly liberal culture, yet a culture that is far removed from God. The theology of this age, that is, the vision of God that we have, is one that springs not from the Tradition of the Church, but from a sense of self-reliance and independence from that spiritual Tradition. If we peruse the shelves of the book stores and libraries in the nation, we find all sorts of texts on do it yourself spirituality.

Some of these books advance various techniques of meditation drawn from far eastern non-Christian religions. In some cases some far older than Christianity and Judaism, but they are natural or pagan religions, that is they are not known to us by the self-revelation of God. Whoever it is established them did so on the basis of simple natural and human emotions divorced from God.. In short, they are broadly and objectively speaking pagan religions of different concept than the ancient Greco-Roman religious systems. Many of these meditative techniques involve actually worshipping these false deities though usually in a subtle way such as repeating the name of a god as one's meditative mantra.

Other times we see books that speak of near-death experiences and visions of angels. Angels have in themselves become a popular subject made appealing by a silly TV program that apparently has strong ratings and thus is considered credible. Secularists even give instructions and directions to get in touch with our guardian angel! They take a known truth and water it down so greatly, it no longer has any spiritual value, but can be dangerously destructive if believed and pursued by the spiritually simple.

All of these modern approaches to spirituality have a number of things in common. They profess to offer painless ways to unlock each person's inner spirituality and the concepts of sin and repentance do not exist in their vision which does away with salvation because they are simply involved with a comfy-touchy-feely emotional type of religious faith which means you make me feel good, I will scratch your back and make you feel good. Christ is simply a moral teacher and spiritual guide if He is recognized at all. They are at best indifferent to the Church or at worst openly hostile to it, viewing the Creed and other articles of faith as matters that "divide" people rather than unite them. The problem with this "do it yourself" approach to religious profession is that it is fraught with great danger when it is applied in earnest.

MODERN EMPOWERMENT EQUALS SPIRITUAL DECEPTION

This has been revealed in the struggling lives of many saints, particularly that of St. Nicetas. Like many modern seekers of spirituality, he rejected the Tradition of the Church and its rich insightfulness. Insisting on doing it himself, he refused to submit to the direction of sound and experienced teachers. He attempted to achieve, using modern terminology, "spiritual empowerment" on his own and fell into what the Church calls *prelest* in Church Slavonic which is usually rendered into English as "spiritual deception." Unfortunately, there are many people who like to indulge themselves in this way.

The concept of spiritual deception is based on a passage from St. Paul who understood it very well because he was its victim prior to entering the Church. The Apostle wrote complaining about those who were masquerading as "apostles," pretending to be that which Paul himself was. He says, "For such men are false prophets, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness" 2 Corinthians 11: 13 - 15. The only time the devil will become like God is to lead a follower of God to destruction.

REJECTION OF TRADITION

Spiritual deception occurs when one rejects the experience of the Holy Spirit as found in the Tradition of the Church and attempts on one's own to acquire spiritual knowledge or gifts. Satan is quick to deceive such people. Appearing to them as an "angel of light" he leads them to truly believe they are the spiritually illumined people they imagine themselves to be.

This is also one of the reasons why the Church rejects fortune tellers, astrologers, ouija boards and seances, speaking in tongues and other such weird practices. Guess who is only too happy to supply the "spiritual knowledge"?

The great martyr and Church Father, St. Cyprian of Carthage wrote before his death in 258 AD: "He cannot have God for his Father who does not have the Church for his mother." Whenever we decide that we have no need of the Church and its Tradition to guide us in the spiritual life, whenever we decide that we do not need teachers but are wise ourselves we run into the danger of slipping into spiritual deception like St. Nicetas. When we consciously reject the Tradition of the Church, that is, the living deposit of witness of the Holy Spirit through the centuries, and substitute our own "tradition", we directly expose ourselves to satan who comes as an angel of light to congratulate us on our wisdom! It is truly frightening to find that there are religions based on spiritual deception!

AVOIDING SPIRITUAL DECEPTION

What can we do to avoid spiritual deception? The narrative of St. Nicetas says that after he came to his senses through the prayers of the monastery fathers that he was finally able to attain forgiveness and true sanctity through prolonged repentance and many tears. The path that leads to the kingdom of heaven is the path of humility. It is not by accident that the first of the Sundays which prepare us for the Great Fast is that of the Publican and Pharisee with its permeating theme of humility. The virtue or gift of humility is to see ourselves as we really are, as God sees us, not as we vainly imagine we appear. Humility eschews anything that can become a source of pride, even "spiritual works" that can lead us to think that we are just a bit more special to God than the person next to us. Humility does not lead us to seek spiritual gifts which we are not prepared to possess, but rather to genuinely seek repentance.

St. Nicetas, as all true saints, received the gift of miracle-working at the end of a long period of humble repentance and ascetic labor, not at the beginning. He received this as a gift freely bestowed by God; he did not actively seek it. We must beware even in the Church of anyone who calls himself a miracle-worker, or claims other spiritual gifts. Those who truly possess these things do not need to advertise! God will make them known.

The devil counseled St. Nicetas to “read books” and that it was no longer necessary to pray. Just the opposite is true! We have available in English today a growing amount of Orthodox Christian literature on the spiritual life. Unfortunately, a goodly part of this literature was never intended for common consumption or general reading, but only for those who live in a monastic setting and have the privilege of spiritual guidance from an elder or spiritual father to sort out the pit falls. Without someone versed and rounded in the spiritual life to guide, reading many of these books are assumed to be “do it yourself” editions and inevitably lead us to perdition instead.

On the other hand, the one book St. Nicetas could not bear to read in his sorry state of self imposed delusion is the book that is readily available and understandable to all, the New Testament. All the Fathers of the Church insist this book is the true basis of spiritual wisdom. Some of them, like St. Seraphim of Sarov, read it through completely each week and refreshed themselves in its wisdom. How many Orthodox Christians have never read through it even once!

ACCEPT THE CHURCH AS MOTHER

Another practical way to avoid spiritual deception is simply to heed the words of St. Cyprian of Carthage and accept the Church as our loving and providential Mother. Observe the feast days of the Church and live the fasting days, participate in celebrating the Divine Liturgy on Sundays, confess your sins and receive the Holy Eucharist regularly. Learn more about your faith and be involved in it. Struggle each day to keep the commandments and to pray. St. Nicetas discovered that salvation is found in rejecting one’s own will and submitting to the will of the Holy Spirit that is manifested in the community life of the Church.

There is, unfortunately, no “Spirituality for Dummies” book. But there is a reminder from St. Isaac of Ninevah that does simplify and clarify the matter considerably. “The path to God is a daily cross. No one has ascended to heaven by way of ease. We know where the easy way leads.”

Keough's Commandments for Losing:

1. Quit taking risks.
2. Be content.
3. Before you make any move, always ask yourself, "What will the investors think?"
4. Avoid change.
5. Be totally inflexible – stay on the course, no matter what.
6. Rely totally on research and experts to make decisions for you.
7. Be more concerned with status than service.
8. Concentrate on your competitor instead of your customers.
9. Put yourself first in everything you do, ahead of your customers and suppliers.
10. Memorize the formula "TGE ... That's Good Enough" to set a ceiling on quality.

Then add a bonus rule:

1. Find a way to rationalize the slowing growth.

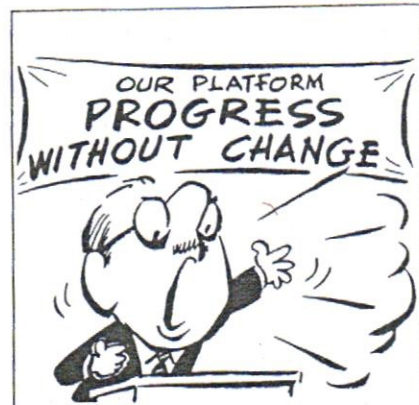
— Don Keough, CEO, Coca-Cola in
Business Week

Happiness is like a butterfly. The more you chase it, the more it will elude you. But if you turn your attention to other things, it comes softly and sits on your shoulder.



Watch Your Prayers

Don't pray for rain if you intend to complain about the mud.



Progress Without Change

Most people are in favor of progress; it's change they can't stand.

WISDOM! BE ATTENTIVE

Let us bring to the Lord the sighs of the Publican and as sinner let us approach the Lord. He desires the salvation of all mankind; He grants forgiveness to all who repent. For us He became man while remaining God, co-eternal with the Father. Kontakion, Sunday of the Pharisee and Publican.

The Pharisee, overcome with his pride, and the Publican, bent down in repentance, came before You, the only Lord: the first trusted in himself and was deprived of Your blessings; the other spoke but a few words and received Your blessings in abundance. Behold my tears and strengthen me, O Christ our God, for You are indeed the Lover of mankind. Vesper Hymn, Sunday of the Pharisee and Publican.

Open to me the doors of repentance, O Giver of life. As we worship in your temple this morning, teach us how to purify the temples of our bodies, and in Your compassion, purify me by the goodness of Your mercies. Matins Hymn, Sunday of the Pharisee and Publican.

In parables Christ invites us to correct our life. He raises up the Publican in his humility and shows us how the Pharisee was brought down by his vanity. Seeing the dignity to which the humble are raised and the deep abyss into which the proud fall, let us imitate the virtue of the Publican and despise the sins of the Pharisee. Vain pretensions deprive us of every good deed, while humility purifies us of every evil. O faithful, let us embrace the ways of humility and totally despise the ways of vainglory. Wishing to find humility in the hearts of His disciples, the King of the universe charged them to imitate the Publican and his humble sighs for pardon. I sigh as the Publican, O Lord, and my groaning does not cease. Thus do I find the path to Your heart. Have mercy on me who now seeks to live in humility. Matins Hymn, Sunday of the Pharisee and Publican.

Vainglory brings to nothing both justice and its treasures, while humility scatters a multitude of passions. O Saviour, grant that we may imitate the Publican. O Faithful, let us vie with each other in zeal, and let us seek to do good. Let us live together in humility, and may our hearts sigh with tears and prayer so that we may obtain forgiveness from God. Matins Hymn, Sunday of the Pharisee and Publican.

Raised up by his humility, the Publican who formerly lamented now was justified for having said: Lord be merciful to me a sinner. He is the one whom we imitate from the abyss into which our hearts have driven us. From the depth of our heart we say, Spare us for we are sinners, O Saviour, Who alone loves mankind. The Word has shown us the best path to exaltation, it is the way of humility. For He Himself was lowered to take the form of a servant. By following His humility, we shall be exalted. Matins Hymn, Sunday of the Pharisee and Publican

God,
*I thank You that I am
not like all other men—
robbers, evildoers, adul-
terers . . . I fast twice a
week and give a tenth of
all I get.*

(Luke 18:11-12)



God,
*Have mercy on me,
a sinner.*

(Luke 18:13)



Pharisee and Publican

*The publican, standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven,
but kept striking his breast saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner'*

Luke 18: 13.

Our Lord today issues for our benefit a character sketch drawn by his master hand. With a few words, two representative persons, quite opposite in heart and life, are made to stand before us in life-like dramatic colors. It is a double picture, drawn by him who could portray the inner and outer man as none else can, because *He needed no one to give him testimony about human nature. He was well aware of what was in man's heart* John 2: 25.

It is no wonder to us that in human history of culture, those writers who have best succeeded in delineating human nature, as for example, Shakespeare, have been serious and close students of God's revelation to us in Scripture. No other book uncovers and lays bare the secret stirrings of the human heart like this book. No other master can portray the hidden impulses and motives of humanity like He who made man. For the same reason none else could so truthfully and vividly show the outer workings and manifestations of the spirit within.

He, in whom *the fullness of God resides in bodily form* Colossians 2: 9, has with a few master strokes, drawn for us the accurate descriptive pictures of the Pharisee and the Publican. These pictures are set before us for our instruction and spiritual profit. We are to contemplate them seriously. We are to be warned by the one and we are to be instructed and drawn to imitation by the example of the other. Initially, let us consider the conversion of the Publican.

We must consider the greatest hindrance to conversion which is *self-righteousness* Luke 18: 9. We see this delineated and manifested in the Pharisee, We therefore, study him as contrasted with the Publican. The Pharisee is self-righteousness personified. We see it standing before us. We see how it lives and moves and exalts itself toward heaven. We see what it is and from where it springs.

It is a complacent satisfaction with self. It is an unctuous self-flattery. It is a deluded magnifying of one's supposed virtues. It is a willful blindness to one's own faults and limitations. It is greatest in negative virtues. Its passive virtues are trifles overly magnified

and mistakenly exalted. Let us look at and listen to the Pharisee. He goes up to the temple; he considers himself a religious man; he professes *to pray* Luke 18: 10, but what a travesty of prayer is heard! There is no word of confession, except a confession of other people's sins. There is not a breath of petition. He stands forth boldly and prominently. He begins with thanksgiving, but he does not thank God for mercy, for grace, for the blessings received from heaven; he is so full of self and self-sufficiency, that he can only thank for what he is and what he does, in contrast with others. He delights to compare himself with the common herd. He first tells the Lord what he does not do. He is not an extortioner. He is in no sense unjust. He is too pure to even be capable of committing adultery. He can best sum up his goodness by thanking the Lord he is not *like this publican* Luke 18: 11. Such is self-righteousness, a fearful disease of fallen humanity; one of the greatest hindrances to man's restoration.

It is well that we understand this disease of the mind and soul. There are few places in the Word of God that so clearly describe it, as does this parable. It will be profitable for us to look into it somewhat more deeply.

What are the roots of *self righteousness* Luke 18: 9? There appear to be two main roots or sources. One is a shallow view of God and his revelation to us. The other is superficial understanding of sin and self.

This was the problematic trouble with the Pharisee and indeed with all the Pharisees of Christ's day and our day as well. He did not realize the august, sublime and holy nature of the Being whom he so bluntly and boldly addressed. Had he had even a faint conception of the glory of God *whose voice strikes fiery flames; the voice of the Lord shakes the desert* Psalms 29: 7, 8. *A voice, the Son of God, whose eyes blaze like fire, whose feet gleam like polished brass has said today: I know your deeds* Revelation 2: 18, but he was in fact, like so many of us today, part and parcel of *a generation pure in their own eyes* Proverbs 30: 12. Then and there alone would he have understood, perhaps even remotely, how the very nature of our Creator God shrinks from and abhors sin, that He is so inexpressedly pure that He even asks, *Can a man be righteous against God?"; Lo, he puts no trust in his servants, and with his angels he can find fault, How much more with those that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed more easily than the moth!* Job 4: 18, 19.

Had this Pharisee even known approximately that the whole past history of Israel, the whole service of the temple in which he stood was intended to teach God's holiness and his uniqueness, then, he, in short, would have understood the nature of our Creator God and would not have done as he did.

Because he did not understand the nature of our God, He did not understand his expectations, his ordinances for our behavior. He could not comprehend God's love for us. In boasting of his own good deeds, which he doubtless regarded as a fulfillment of the so-called law, there is not a word about fearing God, loving God, trusting in God. Indeed the whole first tablet of the Commandments is glossed over, passed over. He flatters himself he has kept the law because he has abstained from gross acts of extortion, adultery and injustice. He mentions two positive virtues. He boasts of these as marks of supererogation, as doing even more than the law expected or demanded of him. Had he heard and understood the Sermon on the Mount, he could not have imagined that he kept the law.

It was the spirit of the law that he never understood so he could not come to a grasp of what sin is. To him sin consisted in the outward acts of the hand, the tongue, the stomach, or other bodily physical organs. He did not realize that sin is really a matter of the heart and soul. He had not learned that lust or desire is sin. Had he known what sin is, in its essence and nature, he would not have dared to so stand before our Creator with such words literally falling from his lips. Knowing not what sin is, he had no conception of his sinfulness and desperate wickedness of his own heart. He did not know himself of and thus is revealed the truth all the Fathers of the Church have continually enunciated so seriously. It is most difficult to recognize sin in one's life without the assistance of a spiritual father. Thus his ignorance of God and his plainly announced ordinances and his own ignorance of self and sin, made him self-righteous. He was good, even superior by outward comparison with others in his imagined world.

Self-righteousness was one of the greatest obstacles our Lord had to contend with. It was characteristic of the Scribes and Pharisees. He could reach and gather in Publicans and other sinners, but He reached very few Pharisees. To them He said, *publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you* Matthew 21: 31.

Self-righteousness is the greatest obstacle to the progress of the Church today. Our age is sadly afflicted with this malady. Everybody thinks they are okay; that they are not as bad as others; literally that they are great. It has crept into many popular churches, into our Church as well. The holiness of God and the sinfulness and separation of sin are too little understood; not realized because we do not preach their danger among us. Consequently, Christ is too little appreciated. Repentance and faith are not preached as they should be. If we are not sick, or think we are not sick, then we do not need a physician. Those who need a doctor should secure his services is the attitude too many have in our society today. Superficial expedients

are tried to gather in sinners. Self-righteousness is not exposed or dislodged. True conversions are comparatively rare.

The Church can stoop down and pick up the fallen out of the filth and mire of sin, when such are brought to realize their sin. But the Church cannot reach, Christ cannot save, as long as they trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise others.

The only remedy for this dire malady is God's revelation to us in Scripture and the life of his Body, our blessed Church. That *sword of the Spirit* Ephesians 6: 17, must cut in and lay bare the corruption and soreness of the *deceitful and desperately wicked* Jeremiah 17: 9 heart. It must *penetrate and divide the soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the reflections and thoughts of the heart* Hebrews 4: 12. *The law does nothing but point out what is sinful* Romans 3: 20. By his revelation in Scripture and in the life of the Body and Bride of Christ, the Holy Spirit *convince the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment* John 16: 8.

The living Word of God enunciated and made known by the vehicle of salvation, carries the life of the Holy Spirit. It certainly did its preparatory work in the heart and soul of the Publican, We believe we see in him a product, a result of the work of God's inspiration. The teaching from heaven prepared his heart; although our parable does not definitely mention this, we reason from the effect to the cause. It was now transforming his heart. We see in that heart the workings first of penitence and then of faith and penitence is manifested in his actions.

He kept his distance Luke 18: 13. He feels himself unfit and unworthy to approach too near the Holy Place – like some outcast, coming into a church and standing by the door, as if too base to enter farther into the house of God and closer to the altar table. How opposite of the Pharisee, who stood forth conspicuously, doubtless as near the holiest place as possible so he could be seen and observed, even admired!

He not even daring to raise his eyes to heaven Luke 18: 13. Unworthy and ashamed to look up, he casts his eyes upon the ground. Ashamed because of his sin, bowed down with a sense of guilt, his very attitude is a confession of sin and sorrow.

Blessed shame! It is a hopeful symptom. The blush of shame because of sin has well been called the morning dawn of a new way of life. Ezra said *I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to you* Ezra 9: 6. Job said, *I am vile* Job 40: 4. Jeremiah complained of the impenitent

Jews: *They were not at all ashamed, neither would they blush* Jeremiah 6: 15. And again: *You have the forehead of a whore; you refuse to be ashamed* Jeremiah 3: 3.

The Publican *beat his breast* Luke 18: 13, as if to indicate, "Here is the sore spot; here is the weak spot; here is the seat of sin." To him sin did not consist in a few outward acts. To him it was, first of all a diseased and defiled condition of his very essential being. It was not so much the sin of the hand, or the tongue that worried him, but the sinful heart from which all sin springs. He *beat his breast* Luke 18: 13.

By this he further indicates that he deserves being beaten. As a transgressor, he felt guilty. As ridden with guilt, he felt worthy and deserving of being punished, of receiving stripes. As just subject to punishment, he *beat his breast* Luke 18: 13. His action bespeaks penitence and sorrow for sin. So do his words, his self expression. He designates himself rightly *a sinner* Luke 18: 13. He sees himself as though he is a sinner above all others, as if he is the only one. He accuses and attributes causes to no one else, for it is he alone who cooperated with a sinful inclination. Here is a strong confession of individual and personal guilt. It is more than a general confession of general sinfulness. It enumerates and assumes responsibility. It was self-condemnation. It expressed in words what had been shown in acts.

This singling out of himself as the chief of sinners is the very essence of a thorough repentance. When the sinner sees himself as standing apart from a sinful race, as justly condemned for personal guilt, then has he been enlightened from on high, *convinced of sin* John 16: 8, by the Holy Spirit.

It is this sense of personal guilt and condemnation to which all must come. There is no true conversion to salvation in Christ without it. A general confession is easily made. It is not so hard to believe that all are sinners. But it is quite another matter to realize and feel "I am" *a sinner* Luke 18: 13 and to enumerate the realistic reasons why we make this confession. Sin in the abstract then becomes concrete in me. Such was the Publican's confession. He was truly penitent.

Most important, his penitence confirmed and grew into enriched faith. True penitence is the root of faith, and true faith is the fruit of penitence. However abysmally he failed in sinfulness, he still wanted to be a success in the eyes of his Creator. So he admits, he confesses and is penitent for his shortcomings. The guilt he bears for being separated from God's grace is not worth the agony of soul.

We readily identify his faith in his plea for mercy. Like the penitent prodigal, when he thinks of his father, he remembers and ponders the one trait of mercy that is impelling and compelling. The Publican, with eyes cast down, his broken heart over separation and alienation in sin, cries upward. He calls to mind that God is merciful. His heart yearns for a taste of that mercy. While his mind contemplates mercy, his heart reaches out to embrace it.

God's mercy is not merited. It cannot in deed be earned. What is earned or paid for cannot be treasured mercy. It cannot be bought. It can only be received freely as a gift. Faith is turning towards and laying hold of mercy. Self-righteousness asks for its privileges and rights. It demands wages. It wants justice. Faith claims nothing as a right. It asks not for wages. It seeks no justice. Faith knows that to ask for justice is to seek after possible rejection; to claim wages earned is to claim possible condemnation.

In the days of Napoleon the grand emperor of France, a timid little girl once pressed her way through the courtiers and stood before him. Looking down into her silently pleading face, the emperor says, "Well, child, what is it?" Tremblingly she tells him that she comes to beg for the life of her father, who was under sentence of death. Growing somewhat stern, the emperor replies, "Child, your petition is useless; twice before your father deserved death, and was pardoned, and now justice will be served! Justice to our country and justice to myself, demands that he suffer the penalty he earned by his infractions. "Sir," the little girl continued to plead, now with a louder and bolder convincing voice, "I come not to ask for justice, but to beg for mercy."

And so did the Publican come. And so must every believer and penitent come. So does true faith express itself and ever come. It sees proffered mercy and it seeks obtainable forgiveness in mercy. It realizes that it is unmerited and free. It is our heavenly Father's gift to grant. We reach out towards that mercy if we are genuine believers. Because it belongs to us if we match heavenly grace with heartfelt sorrow for our sins. Then we grasp it; we cling to it as it casts itself upon our undeserving heart and it rests there. This is faith. This is the consequence of the Publican's approach in penitence to his Creator and Maker. It is restoration to the original condition of Adam and Eve in paradise.

Sinners everywhere; there is mercy for you. You cannot earn it. It already has been earned by the obedient life, the atoning death and triumphant and victorious Resurrection and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. You cannot buy it. It has already been bought and paid for by him. You cannot prepare yourself for it except by receiving necessary grace to repentance for sin. You need only to let him prepare you by coming into the presence of forgiveness in the

sacramental Mystery of Reconciliation and obliterate the separation by repentance and sincere sorrow for sin with the final request of forgiveness. You will be reminded of your helplessness and the abounding power of God's freely offered mercy. It will enable you to lay hold of and rejoice in the merciful joy of our Creator God.

The Publican returned to his home *justified* Luke 18: 14. He was justified, not because he made himself worthy, but because he genuinely believed. *Nevertheless, knowing that a man is not justified by legal observance but by faith in Jesus Christ, we too have believed in Christ not by observance of the law; for by works of the law no one will be justified...I have been crucified with Christ and the life I now live is not my own; Christ is living in me* Galatians 2: 16, 19.

For the Publican it was truly a blessed, even glorious church-going event. Each time any believer participates in the worship of the Church or simply goes to be in the actual presence of our God to pray and glorify the Holy Name, it should be, it must be with the same results. Oh, how the Holy Spirit anticipates an entire congregation of worshippers with hearts bowed down with a genuine sense of sin, emptied of all self-sufficiency, yearning without end for richer measures of heavenly grace, and believing that Jesus does furnish sufficient blessing and grace. Pray the Lord of the harvest that we furnish that acceptable congregation, glorious worshipping and praising his Holy Name!

May our church attendance as a parish family be always so blessed to us, that each time we are in the presence of our God and Creator, our awareness may ever more deepen not only penitence, increase in faith, but boldly make us recognize we are in the company of the angels, glorified saints and most importantly, the Maker and Saviour of the World!



THE ONLY JOURNEY THAT REALLY MATTERS

Have you ever heard someone say they wanted to visit some exotic locations before they die? They'll say they want to cross it off their "Bucket List." What is a Bucket List, you ask? It's a wish list of things that the person wants to do before they die. And it becomes important for them to cross off as many things as they can before they "pack their bags" for the final time.

Life is a short journey that doesn't end on our terms, but rather on those set by our Heavenly Father. The Church constantly places this message before us. While it may sound exciting and noble to romanticize about "living life to the fullest," this pleasure packed philosophy is not exactly the acceptable Christian approach to life. In fact, we can bluntly say that for all of us, there is only ONE THING - not ONE HUNDRED - that we must do before we die: BE IN COMPLETE COMMUNION WITH OUR LORD, JESUS CHRIST.

Because of our life's potential brevity, it is essential to live it properly each and every day. What constitutes "living our days like we should?" Every day must be one of service to Christ, His Church and our fellow man. Every day must be viewed as an opportunity to practice the Gospel and share it with others. And yes, every day must be lived as if it were our last.

When all is said and done, I hardly think the Lord will ask us on Judgment Day if we ever went to the Grand Canyon or if we visited the Taj Mahal. However, He will want to know if our "Top 100" included ministering to the poor, the needy, the sick and the imprisoned. If we are most concerned about following Christ and living according to His teachings, our ultimate journey will lead us to the Kingdom of Heaven - which should be first on anyone's list of things to do and places to see!

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