



St. Elias Melkite Church

Serving San Jose & South Bay Area, CA

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Divine Liturgy

Sundays: 11am

Feastdays: See website Calendar

Confession Times

Wednesdays: 5-6 pm

Sundays: 10-11 am

Bible Study

Wednesdays: 6-7pm

Sunday School: After liturgy

Contact the Pastor

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Qurban and Socials

- This Sunday, 2/12
Qurban: Higareda
Social: Higareda
- Next Sunday, 2/19
Qurban: Gamouney
Social: Farah

Pray for Servants of God

The priest Paul Leonarczyk

Higareda Family

Judy Sramcik

William Connelly

Ibtissam Ishaq

Hania, George and Sandra Dabit

Holly Handal

Pierre

Ann Bowden

Jacob Hurlbert

Paula Carnazzo

Hayden and Mariah Shea

Fay Marcuzzo

Kamal and Eugenie Neimat

Laure Kelly

Nadja Haddad and Family

Richard Hanna

Areej Zakher

Christians in the Middle-East

Asleep in the Lord

Michael Srour

Takla Haber

Adel Saba

Sunday, February 12, 2017: The Prodigal Son

HYMNS

Troparion of the Resurrection (6th tone) The angelic powers were around Your tomb, * and the guards became as dead; * and Mary stood at the tomb, * seeking Your spotless body; * Then You despoiled Hades without being tried by it, * and You met the Virgin O Bestower of life. * O Lord, who rose from the dead, * glory to You!

Kondakion of the Prodigal Son: In my foolish wretchedness I ran away from your glory and I squandered wickedly the riches you had given me. And so now, like the prodigal son, I cry out to you, "I have sinned in your sight merciful father. Receive me now that I repent and make me as one of your hired servants."

READINGS

1 Cor 6:12-20 Brethren,.... the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. For God has raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Flee immorality. Every sin a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your members are the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God and that you are not your own?....Glorify God therefore in your body and in your soul which both are God's.

Luke 15: 11-32 The Lord told this parable: "A man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that falls to me.' And he divided his possessions between them. And not many days later, the younger son gathered up all his wealth and traveled to a far country; and there he squandered his fortune in loose living. And after he had spent all, there came a severe famine over that country, and he began to suffer from it. And he went and joined one of the local landowners, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. And he longed to fill himself with the pods the pigs were eating, but no one offered to give them to him. But when he had come to his senses, he said, 'How many hired men in my father's house have bread in abundance, while I am perishing with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'" And he got up and went to his father. But while he was yet a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion and ran and fell upon his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the Father said to his servants, 'Fetch quickly the best robe and put it on him, and give him a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet; and bring out the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; because this my son was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to make merry. Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came close to the house, he heard music and dancing. And calling one of the servants he asked what this meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has got him back safe.' But he was angered and would not go in. His father, therefore, came out and began to beg him. But he answered and said to his father, 'Look, these many years I have been serving you, and have never disobeyed any of your orders; and yet, you have never given me a kid that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours comes, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes; you have killed for him the fattened calf!' But he said to him, 'Son you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours; but we were bound to make merry and rejoice, for this your brother was dead, and has come to life; he was lost and is found.'"

COMMEMORATIONS

Meletios, Archbishop of Antioch: He participated in the Council of Constantinople II in 381.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Icon Workshop: Feb. 17-19 and 22-24. Register by 2/12. Ted Chan (tchan.sbg@gmail.com).

Berkeley Outreach: Saturday, Feb. 18th at 5pm. Please come support this great endeavor!

Bishop's Visit: March 11th-12th. Mark your calendar and plan to attend the Liturgy and Social.

FROM THE EPARCHY

EVERY YEAR ON THIS SECOND SUNDAY of the Triodion we hear the Lord's story which we call the Parable of the Prodigal Son. In fact there are three important characters in this parable: the Prodigal, the loving Father and the older brother. Some commentators feel that the older brother is the most important figure in the story because of the occasion on which the Lord told this parable. To find this context we must look at the first verses of the chapter which precede it: "*Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Him. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'*" So He told them this parable..." (Lk 15:1-3). The Lord then tells not one but three parables about the joy over a repentant sinner: the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin and the story of the Prodigal. The Lord's aim in each of them is to confront the self-righteousness of the Pharisees and scribes who saw themselves as properly observant Jews in contrast to those who collaborated with the Roman occupiers (the tax collectors) or those who ignored the precepts of the Law (the sinners). Thus each of the characters in the parable represents one of figures in the above three verses. We have the Rebel son, who represents the sinners, the Conformist son, who embodies the respect for the Law and tradition which characterizes the scribes and Pharisees, and the welcoming Father who is Christ Himself. The Rebel is truly a prodigal, disrespecting his father by demanding what would come to him at his father's death – in effect, saying "I wish you were dead." As we know, he goes off and eventually loses everything. Finally he decides to return to his father, who receives him with love.

The Second Brother: The focus now turns to the Conformist brother who has done everything by the book but is every bit as lost as his brother ever was. As Fr Henri Nouwen tells us in his reflection, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, (1992, p. 71): "Outwardly the elder son was faultless. But when he confronted his father's joy at the return of his younger brother, a dark power erupts in him and boils to the surface. Suddenly there becomes glaringly visible a resentful, proud, unkind selfish person, one that had remained deeply hidden." Without realizing it, the older brother has gone off to a "strange land" just like the Rebel. He was no longer the faithful son of his father everyone thought he was. As his father's eldest son, his place would be at the center of the festive gathering, seeing that everyone was welcomed and cared for. Hospitality was – and remains to this day – one of the most important activities in a Middle Eastern household. Refusing to take part made the Conformist the exact opposite of what he appeared to be: the faithful image of his father. He had no cause to look down on his brother; he too had fallen victim to "the tyranny of the passions" (St. Maximos the Confessor) and publicly insulted his father by his actions. He not only refused to stand at his father's side before the guests; he even caused his father to leave them in order to deal with his son's feelings. Like the Pharisee in last week's Gospel parable, the Conformist brother represents the scribes and Pharisees who are outwardly faultless. They observe all the precepts of the Law but look down on those who do not. The Lord Jesus does not tell them to ignore the Law, but to complete it with mercy and compassion. Elsewhere we find Him berating the Pharisees for this very reason: "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others*" (Mt 23:23).

Are We Scribes and Pharisees? The brothers in this parable represent two types found in our society today. There are independent individualists who are determined to "fulfill themselves," to make their own way according to their own lights. There are also people who conform to the expectations of their family or society, seeking to earn the approval of their peers or the powers-that-be. In the Church there are always people who equate being a good Christian with doing all the "right" things. Consciously or unconsciously, they use their acts of external righteousness to mask their unrighteous hearts. In the words of Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol, Cyprus: "...we went to the shrines, we venerated, we took out our money and placed it in a box, we left our candles, our oil, our prayers, our names, our prosphoron, everything... But our hearts did not change at all. Having completed our duties, we are the same as we were before. We are ready to attack one another, ready to testify against each other, ready to be sour just as we were before. Our hearts do not change... I confess to you from my own experience that I have not seen worse enemies of the Church than 'religious' people" (from *Therapy for the Sickness of Pharasaism*). As the Lord said, "*these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.*"

What Happens Next? The parable ends without an ending. We are not told how the older brother responded to his father because the goal of the parable is that we examine what we would do. St John Chrysostom said, "Almost any noble person can weep with those who weep but very few of us can rejoice with those who rejoice." Very few of us can really rejoice in the salvation of another... But how happy is the man who can rejoice in the salvation of his brother, who rejoices over his brother's repentance more than his own well-being." The approaching Great Fast gives us an opportunity to care for the salvation of others.

"What is the object of this parable? Let us examine the occasion which led to it; in this way we shall learn the truth. The blessed Luke said a little before concerning Christ, the Savior of us all, "*Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Him. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'*" Since the Pharisees and scribes were making an outcry on account of His gentleness and love for mankind, wickedly and impiously blaming Him for receiving and teaching people whose lives were impure, Christ set before them this present parable to show them clearly that the God of all requires even the person who is thoroughly steadfast and firm, who knows how to live in a holy manner, and has attained the highest praise for his sober conduct to be earnest in following His will, that when any are called to repentance – even if they are the most blameworthy – he must rejoice and not give way to a loveless irritation on their account" (Cyril of Alexandria, *Com. Luke*, Sermon 107).