



# Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

12 February 2017

## Returning Home

Today, as we proceed in our preparation for Great Lent, we hear Jesus' well-known parable of the Prodigal Son. In telling us this parable, Jesus Christ shows us what repentance involves. To repent is not simply to seek to do better, or to change ourselves by our own efforts. Rather, it is to repair our relationship with a loving Father, a relationship that had become broken when we turned our backs on Him.

This parable shows us how this son, who had squandered his inheritance in riotous living, "came to himself." Having realised that even his father's servants were better off than he was, he determined to return home, even if only as a servant. But his father was overjoyed and welcomed him as his long-lost son, ordering a great feast, and showing how over-joyed he was to see his son again. The intention of the parable is to show how the Father longs for us to repent and turn to Him again, and welcomes us with great love when we do so. As Saint Peter Chrysologus writes:



*'He fell on his neck and kissed him.'* This is how the father judges and corrects his wayward son and gives him not beatings but kisses. The power of love overlooked the transgressions. The father redeemed the sins of his son by his kiss, and covered them by his embrace, in order not to expose the crimes or humiliate the son. The father so healed the son's wounds as not to leave a scar or blemish upon him. *'Blessed are they,'* says Scripture *'whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.'*

The phrase "came to himself" is significant here, for the son realised that his entire identity was being destroyed. The Fathers teach us that by turning away from God, we have become subject to corruption and are being gradually destroyed. It is only by turning back to our Loving Father who reaches out to us, and re-establishing a relationship with Him, that this corruption can be turned around, enabling us to truly come home, not only to our Father, but also to our true selves.

Christ chooses those who stand. Rise and run to the Church. Here is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He who hears you pondering in the secret places of the mind runs to you. When you are still far away, he sees you and runs to you. He sees in your heart.

Saint Ambrose of Milan



**12 February is the  
Sunday of the Prodigal Son**

**Matins Gospel:** Matthew 28:16-20

**Epistle:** 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

**Gospel:** Luke 15:11-32

**Resurrectional Apolytikion:**

When the stone had been sealed by the Jews and the soldiers were guarding Thine immaculate Body, Thou didst arise on the third day, O Saviour, granting life unto the world. Wherefore, the powers of the Heavens cried out to Thee, O Lifegiver: Glory to Thy Resurrection, O Christ. Glory to Thy Kingdom. Glory to Thy dispensation, O only Friend of man.

**Seasonal Kontakion:**

O Father, foolishly I ran away from Your glory, and in sin, squandered the riches You gave me. Wherefore, I cry out to You with the voice of the Prodigal, "I have sinned before You Compassionate Father. Receive me in repentance and take me as one of Your hired servants."

Jacob led out his sheep  
And brought them to his father's home;  
A symbol for those with discernment,  
A parable for those with perception  
Is to be found in this homecoming:  
Let us too return to our Father's house,  
My brothers, and do not become  
captivated with desire  
For this transient earth  
– for your true city is in Eden.  
Blessed indeed is that person  
Who has seen his dear ones in its midst.  
  
Saint Ephrem the Syrian

### Readings and saints for this week:

**Monday, 13 February:** 1 John 2:18-29; 3:1-8; Mark 11:1-11  
Martinian of Palestine; Apostles Aquila & Pricilla

**Tuesday, 14 February:** 1 John 3:9-22; Mark 14:10-42  
Auxentios of the Mountain; Cyril, Apostle to the Slavs

**Wednesday, 15 February:** Philemon 1:1-25; Mark 14:43-72; 15:1  
Onesimus of the 70; Righteous Anthimus

**Thursday, 16 February:** 1 John 4:20-21; 5:1-21; Mark 15:1-15  
Martyr Pamphilus & Companions; Flavian, Pat. of Constantinople

**Friday, 17 February:** 2 Timothy 2:1-10; Luke 20:46-47; 21:1-4  
Great Martyr Theodore the Tyro; Mariamne

**Saturday, 18 February:** 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; Luke 21:8-9, 25-27, 33-36  
Saturday of Souls; Leo the Great; Agapetus the Confessor

# Death, Dying, and Eternal Life

*A Series on the Orthodox Understanding of the Life of the Age to Come*

We saw last week that, while death is not part of God's original intention for creation, it has entered our world as a result of the fall. Death is a reality that we may try to hide ourselves from – and which our culture often encourages us to ignore, or to treat superficially – but which we ultimately cannot escape. However, death is not the end and our faith teaches us that Jesus Christ came to save us from the reality of death.

## Jesus Christ has Conquered Death

In the Paschal apolytikion we sing: *“Christ has risen from the dead, by death He has trampled on death, and to those in the graves He has given life.”* This is the heart of the Church's faith, namely, that by taking on death, and by dying as a human being, Jesus Christ has robbed death of its power over us. The Fathers and the liturgical texts of the Church express this this great victory in various ways, often portraying it as a dramatic conquest. For example, on Holy and Great Friday we pray:



*When You, the Immortal Life, descended to Death, You struck Hades dead with the lightning of the Godhead; and when You raised up the dead from the abyss, all the powers of Heaven cried aloud; ‘O Life Giver Christ, our God, glory to You!’*

Similarly, at the midnight celebration of Paschal Matins we will pray:

*This is the day of Resurrection, all People, let us be enlightened by it. The Passover is the Lord's Passover, since Christ, our God, has brought from death to life and from earth to heaven...*

*I was buried yesterday with You, O Christ; but today I rise, resurrected with You. Yesterday I crucified myself with You, O Savior. Now glorify me with You in Your kingdom.*

## We Die with Christ in Baptism

This is the heart of our faith – that, by conquering death, Jesus Christ has also changed things definitively for us. Death's power has been broken and we too are invited to enter into this victory over death. As Saint Paul writes:

*For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. (1 Corinthians 15: 22)*

We enter into Christ's victory over death through baptism. In baptism, we die and rise with Jesus Christ, for, as we sing in the baptismal service, “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.” This does not mean that we no longer die, but, by conquering death, Jesus Christ has changed the nature of death, enabling us to conquer it too.



## *A New Daily Version of Evangelion*

*Evangelion* has recently expanded into a daily version that provides a short reflection on the Gospel of the day (similar to that found on the front page) and is sent out electronically. Find out more at:

[www.evangelion-daily.org](http://www.evangelion-daily.org) or [www.facebook.com/EvangelionDaily](https://www.facebook.com/EvangelionDaily)

# The Saturday of the Departed

This coming Saturday, on the eve of the Sunday of the Last Judgement, the Church encourages us to pray for all who have “fallen asleep in the hope of resurrection and life eternal.” This is the Church's great day of prayer for its deceased members.

We are not saved as isolated individuals but as members of the Church. We are all members of Christ's Body and we need and depend on one another. The love of Christ has gathered us together and holds us in being and we are called to love one another and to bear the burdens of our brothers and sisters.



It is this mutual love that is at the foundation of the Church's prayer for the departed. If we love Christ, we also love those who are in Him and it is His love that holds us all alive.

*Thou hast willed to fashion me as a living creature from natures visible and invisible: Thou hast made my body from the earth, and given me a soul by Thy divine and quickening breath. Therefore, O Saviour, grant rest to Thy servants in the land of the living, in the tabernacles of the righteous.*

*(From Vespers of the Saturday of the Dead)*

## **To Repent is to Return from Exile**

We know that we are called to repent, but we may be inclined to think of sin and repentance mainly in legal terms. While God does call us to keep His commandments (because He knows what is best for us), sin is about much more than simply breaking rules. Sin is far more than any individual sin, but is more fundamentally a state of alienation of God. Like the Prodigal Son, and like Adam who was cast out of Paradise, we have become alienated from God. We have lost the joy that comes from a life of communion with God. We have lost the sense of life as it was meant to be. We have lost the spiritual beauty and the innocence of our first creation.

To repent means to return from exile as the prodigal son did. And in order to return from exile we first have to realise that we are indeed in a state of exile, a state of alienation from God. Yet too often we have anaesthetised ourselves to the pain of our exile: We fill our lives with entertainment and activities that may not be bad in themselves, but that can dull us to the pain of what we really feel. If we are to repent, we need to allow ourselves to realise our alienation from God. We need to allow ourselves to feel the pain of our human brokenness, and to acknowledge the depth of our longing for God.

Today, on the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, the Church sings the sad and nostalgic Psalm 136 (137) at Matins, which recalls the exile of the Jews in Babylonian captivity: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, and we wept when we remembered Sion...” This has become the song of all who recognise their exile from God and, in recognising it, turn towards the God for whom they long.