

The Confessor's Tongue for February 20, A. D. 2011

Sunday of the Prodigal Son

In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

Sunday of the Prodigal Son

On this day we commemorate the parable of the Prodigal Son, which occurs in the Holy Gospel according to Luke.

The theme of the Sunday of the Prodigal Son is that of squandering great riches and returning in repentance.

Each of us is to see himself in the Prodigal, as wasters of the Father's riches in a land far from the Father. How is this so?

First, man in falling was deprived of Paradise. Created in God's image, he had the potential to achieve the likeness of God, but he rejected this in order to try to become god in his own right and fulfill himself apart from his Creator. Each of us must repent of our own efforts to follow Adam in this rebellion. Man was made to attain to the likeness of God, to be conformed to the image of Christ, who is the very image of the Father. But when we live in sin, we do what is unworthy of our creation in God's image, and we squander the great benefit and potential that being made in God's image confers on us to live instead far from the Father as pigs in a pigpen!

Second, we who are baptized have been given a great deposit of grace from God, but to the degree that we sin, we squander that treasure. Our sin separates us from God and takes us to a "far land". Only the second Baptism of tears (repentance) allows us to recover that Baptismal grace and to renew it.

Great Lent helps us pursue both ends.

Hymns for the Prodigal Son

The Church's teaching for everything important is found in the hymns of Her services. Ponder these hymns for the Sunday of the Prodigal Son as you prepare for the Fast.

For Vespers, Lord, I Have Cried, tone 1

I was entrusted with a sinless and living land,
but I sowed the ground with sin
and reaped with a sickle the ears of slothfulness;
in thick sheaves I garnered my actions,
but winnowed them not on the floor of repentance.
But I beg Thee, my God, the pre-eternal
husbandman,
with the wind of Thy loving-kindness winnow the
chaff of my works,
and grant to my soul the corn of forgiveness;
shut me in Thy heavenly storehouse and save me. 2x

Brethren, let us learn the meaning of this mystery.
For when the Prodigal Son ran back from sin to his
Father's house,
his loving Father came out to meet him and kissed
him.

He restored to the Prodigal the tokens of his proper
glory,
and mystically He made glad on high,
sacrificing the fatted calf.
Let our lives, then, be worthy of the loving father
who hath offered sacrifice,
and of the glorious Victim who is the Savior of our
souls. (twice)

Glory...tone 2

Of what great blessings in my wretchedness have I
deprived myself!
From what a kingdom in my misery have I fallen!
I have wasted the riches that were given me,
I have transgressed the commandment.
Alas, unhappy soul!
Thou art henceforth condemned to the eternal fire.
Therefore before the end cry out to Christ our God:
receive me as the Prodigal Son, O God, and have
mercy on me.

Litija, Glory...tone 4 [Usually omitted]

As the Prodigal Son I come to Thee, O merciful
Lord.
I have wasted my whole life in a foreign land;
I have scattered the wealth which Thou gavest me, O
Father.
Receive me in repentance, O God, and have mercy
on me.

Aposticha, Glory...tone 6

I have wasted the wealth which the Father gave to
me,
and in my wretchedness I have fed with the dumb
beasts.
Yearning after their food, I remained hungry and
could not eat my fill.
But now I return to the compassionate Father and
cry out with tears:
"I fall down before Thy lovingkindness,
receive me as a hired servant and save me."

Matins, Sessional Hymn, tone 1

Make haste to open unto me Thy Fatherly embrace,
for as the Prodigal I have wasted my life.
In the unfailing wealth of Thy mercy, O Savior,
reject not my heart in its poverty.
For with compunction I cry to Thee, O Lord:
Father I have sinned against heaven and before Thee.

Kontakion, tone 3

Foolishly have I run away from Thy glory, O Father,
wasting in sin the wealth that Thou gavest me.
Therefore with the words of the Prodigal I cry unto
Thee:
I have sinned before Thee, compassionate Father.
Accept me in repentance and make me as one of Thy
hired servants.

Ikos

Our Savior teacheth us every day with His own voice: let us, therefore, hearken to the Scriptures concerning the Prodigal who became wise once more, and with faith let us follow the good example of his repentance. With humbleness of heart let us cry out to Him who knoweth all secrets: We have sinned against Thee, merciful Father, and are not worthy ever again to be called Thy children as before. But since Thou art by nature full of love for man, accept me and make me as one of Thy hired servants.

Exapostilarion, tone 6

In my wretchedness I have wasted sinfully the wealth of grace that Thou hast given me; all to no purpose I have left my true home, and as the Prodigal I have scattered my riches deceitfully among the demons.
But now on my return accept me as the Prodigal, merciful Father, and save me.

The Praises, tone 2

I come before Thee, Lord, with cry of the Prodigal: I have sinned in Thy sight, gracious Master; I have wasted the riches of Thy gifts of grace. But receive me in repentance, Savior, and save me.

Arise, O Lord my God...Tone 4

As the Prodigal Son I come to Thee, merciful Lord. I have wasted my whole life in a foreign land; I have scattered the wealth which thou gavest me, O Father.
Receive me in repentance, O God, and have mercy on me.

I will praise Thee, O Lord...Tone 8

As the Prodigal I have wasted the riches which the Father gave me;
I have spent them all and now am destitute, dwelling in the land of evil citizens.
No longer can I bear to live among them, but turning back I cry to Thee, merciful Father: I have sinned against heaven and before Thee, and I am not worthy to be called Thy son: make me as one of the hired servants, O God, and have mercy on me.

Glory...Tone 6

O loving Father, I have departed far from Thee, but forsake me not, neither reject me from Thy Kingdom.
The evil enemy hath stripped me and taken all my wealth;
I have wasted like the Prodigal the grace given to my soul.
But now I have arisen and returned, and to Thee I cry aloud:
Make me as one of Thy hired servants.
For my sake on the Cross Thou hast stretched out Thy sinless hands,
to snatch me from the evil beast

and to clothe me once again in my first raiment, for Thou alone art full of mercy.

By the Waters of Babylon Psalm 136 (137)

At Matins for the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, and then also for the Sundays of Meatfare and Cheesefare, after singing the Polieley of the Psalms: "Praise the name of the Lord" and "O give thanks unto the Lord", we sing also Psalm 136: "By the rivers of Babylon", "with the beautiful alleluia", i.e. in the known chant with special tenderness, with sweet singing. This psalm arouses in the sinners to understand their unfortunate condition in their captivity in sin and by the devil, similarly to the Jews in captivity in Babylon, who understood their bitter situation and repented, and represents the sorrowful soul nostalgic for the heavenly fatherland. The last verse of this psalm: "Blessed shall he be who shall seize and dash thine infants against the rock", in translation means: the one is blessed who has the courage and power to break on the rock of faith sin in its infancy—those things which give birth to evil thoughts, the depraved stirrings of the heart, and the shameful impulses of the will—before they take possession of one's soul. *Bulgakov Handbook*

Open To Me the Door of Repentance

Beginning Last Sunday and ending with the Fifth Sunday of Lent, we sing during Matins the following hymn, which we all would do well to make our prayer throughout the season of the Fast.

Open to me, the door of repentance, O Lifegiver, for my spirit riseth early to pray towards Thy holy Temple, bearing the temple of my body all defiled. But in Thy compassion, purify me by the lovingkindness of Thy mercy.

Lead me on the paths of salvation, O Mother of God, for I have profaned by soul with shameful sins and have wasted my life in laziness; but by thine intercessions, deliver me from all impurity.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy, and, according to the multitude of Thy compassions, blot out my transgressions.

When I think of the many evil things I have done, wretch that I am, I tremble at the fearful day of judgment, but trusting in Thy lovingkindness, like David I cry to Thee: have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy.

Upcoming Events 2011

- 25 February, Friday, 9:00 p.m. Hesychastic Vigil
- 6 March: Sunday, 6:00 p.m. Forgiveness Vespers (everyone needs to plan on attending this service!)
- 24 April: Holy Pascha: The Feast of Feasts!
- 30 May: Memorial Day Picnic
- 28-31 July: Ten-Year Anniversary Celebration

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!