
THE LADDER ^{of} Divine *Ascent*

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The Newsletter of St. John of the Ladder Orthodox Church

February 2009

Great Lent Draws Near

Lenten Triodion Begins with the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee Feb 8th

"And he said, 'There was a man who had two sons' ..."

This is how Christ begins what is perhaps the greatest of his parables, the one we know as the Parable of the Prodigal Son, but which could easily be titled the Parable of the Two Sons or the Parable of the Compassionate Father. With this parable, we are invited to enter the "school of repentance" and sit at the feet of the Master, so that we can hear the words of eternal life and "keep them."

After receiving his portion of the inheritance, even before his father had died, the younger of the two sons "gathered all that he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living." (LK. 15:13) This one sober understatement does not demand a great deal of imagination to yield its meaning. We know that loose living refers to a web of wrong choices, bad company, unrestrained satisfaction of "the passions," and forgetfulness of God. This spiritually suicidal combination leads to bankruptcy on a further series of interrelated levels: the material, moral/ethical, and spiritual. In no time, the prodigal son is forced to feed "on the pods that the swine ate." (v. 16)

Before succumbing to the temptation of trying my hand at an updated melodramatic script that would luridly describe the sins of the wayward young man of the parable - replete with money, sex and drugs - together with all of the didactic apparatus meant to strengthen our resolve to protect our children (since I am now too old for all of that); I would rather more modestly pause at the words about a journey "into a far country." The far country of the parable is geographical, for the young man of the parable ventured far from his home.

Yet, a "far country" can also refer to a hidden place in our interior landscape; a "place" in which we can distance ourselves from God and right living to a frightening degree, even if slowly and unintentionally. At first, that interior far country can prove to be appealing. It can appease our vanity, protect our pride and/or feed "the passions" that we can nurture even if (and maybe especially when!) hidden from the view and censure of others. This is initially stimulating and seems to promise endless delight - perhaps like the endless freedom that an unsupervised dorm may offer to an innocent college student away from the sheltering, but seemingly restrictive, atmosphere of home.

When the emptiness of such a landscape becomes evident, we too can desperately desire to "feed on the pods that the swine ate." The self-serving (or "self-help!") philosophies that we squandered our "inheritance" from God on, will no longer satisfy us, but in a restless and hungry search for something else to replace these, we can even fall to the level of "swinish delights" --- anything to relieve our boredom or frustrations. Without moving anywhere, and without changing the patterns of our lifestyle, we can still withdraw to a "far country" in that interior landscape that can prove to be as treacherous as any unknown environment of the exterior world. It is said of the prodigal son of the parable, that when at "rock bottom," he "came to himself." (v. 17) This is certainly one of the key expressions found in this endlessly rich parable. The young man found his right mind, his sanity was restored, and basically he "got a grip on reality" --- an undramatic, but perfect way, to describe "conversion," or the process of turning back toward God and the warm embrace of our heavenly Father.

A certain clarity of thought is needed to find our way home when we drift off toward a far country. Every year, through the lectionary of the Church, especially in the pre-lenten season of preparation, we are powerfully reminded of just how far away from "home" we may actually be in mind and heart. If we have been equally prodigal with the gifts bestowed upon us by God, then we can equally "come to ourselves" and return home to the embrace of our compassionate Father.

Inside This Issue	
Great Lent Draws Near	page 1
Forgiveness Vespers March 1 st	page 2
2008 Year End Statistics	page 2
Feb Calendar/Schedule of Services	page 3
Announcements	page 4

Forgiveness Vespers with the Rite of Mutual Forgiveness will be celebrated at approx 12:30 pm on March 1st.

One of the verses I like the most in our season of preparation for the Great Fast is the following one from the Vespers of Forgiveness Sunday:

O Paradise, garden of delight and beauty, dwelling place made perfect by God, unending gladness and eternal joy, the hope of the prophets and the home of the saints, by the music of your rustling leaves beseech the Creator of all to open to me the gates which my sins have closed, that I may partake of the Tree of Life and Grace which was given to me in the beginning.

It seems to me that we highlight forgiveness as we are about to begin the lenten struggle because we need to understand that without mutual forgiveness there can be no spiritual change or growth. In fact, without striving to forgive and asking for forgiveness from God and one another there can be no salvation. The Lord says that divine mercy will be shown *only to the merciful and forgiveness only to the forgiving.*

Most of us have experienced the sweetness of being forgiven, and of forgiving, and it is a kind of paradise isn't it? It is a brief taste of heaven to stand within the mercy of forgiveness - a paradise to be in a right relationship with God and one another, to shed all that is calculating and defensive and guilty and to savor a moment of relief, of honesty and openness, to have a clear conscience, to regain - even if briefly - an almost child-like innocence and purity.

It is no mistake that in addition to the theme of forgiveness, this Sunday also commemorates the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise. The primordial fall from grace of our first parents is the source of our own sense of exile and alienation, of the division and separation we experience in our relationships with God and one another. We have only at times a passing glimpse, a brief taste, of the paradise for which we were created and which is our true spiritual home.

Mutual forgiveness is one of these critical moments. Our lenten journey will be marked, God-willing, by several such moments when the veil is lifted and the distance that separates us from paradise is diminished, moments of recognition and sweetness that point towards the true homeland our heart's desire.

So dear fathers, brothers and sisters in Christ, as we approach the fast, let us indeed approach and begin it with the joy; the joy that in Christ we are reconciled with God and with one another. Let us also outwardly express our inward desire for this reconciliation by participating in the service of mutual forgiveness which will mark the beginning of Great Lent.

2008 Year End and Current Statistical Data

Members: 76

Ave Attendance	adults	children
Sunday	82	24
Saturday Eve	22	6
Wednesday	15	2

**2008 Baptisms: 3; Chrismations: 4; Marriages: 1
Funerals: 0; Catechumens: 2; Inquirers: 10**

2008	Income	Expenses
Budgeted	\$146,777.69	\$148,569.85
Restricted	\$86,789.40	\$86,526.22

Of the restricted income, \$26,391.71 was earmarked for the charity fund and \$21,311.75 was earmarked for mortgage reduction. The mortgage on our building was retired as of September 2008. Glory be to God!

Consignment News

Hi Everyone!

We want to thank all of you for your continued support of the **Consignment Project!** As you may know, your donations are taken to the **Kids N' More** store in Mauldin and each month we receive **CASH** that is donated to the project. This money is used for Charity (in house, mostly) to help those in need.

We are asking for **HOUSEHOLD** items!! The store has allowed us to make extra drop offs. So if you have household items that you'd like to donate, please do so, as temporarily, we can make 2 drop offs per week! There are some things they do **NOT** take and we will list them below.

Also, please continue to donate your "gently used" clothing items. Make sure they are **CLEAN**, and have no permanent stains, holes or missing buttons (They are very picky!).

Thanks again, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact Georgia Pelinsky or Margie Wamboldt!!!

Items Consignment will NOT TAKE:

picture frames, AUDIO electronics, vases, any item that you would guess will not have a \$2.95 value

They LOVE all other "stuff" - examples:

knick knacks, wall pictures, small kitchen appliances (must be CLEAN!!), bedding (ditto!), flower arrangements

You get the idea...thanks!

Georgia and Margie

St John of the Ladder Orthodox Church

~~~ Schedule of Services ~~~

February 2009

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
01 33 rd Sunday after Pentecost Prefeast of the Meeting Zacchaeus House Blessings Divine Liturgy 9:30 am Great Vespers	02 Divine Liturgy 7:00 am Meeting of the Lord in the Temple Building Cmte 4:30 pm OCF @ Furman	03 Righteous Godbearer Symeon and Anna the Prophetess	04 <i>fast</i> Inquirers' Class 'Scripture and Tradition' 7:00 pm Vespers 6:00 pm	05 OCF @ Clemson University 7:00 pm	06 <i>fast</i>	07 Confessions Great Vespers 6:00 pm
08 34 th Sunday after Pentecost Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee House Blessings Divine Liturgy 9:30 am	09 OCF @ Furman University 7:00 pm	10	11 <i>fast-free</i> Inquirers' Class 'Church History' Vespers 6:00 pm	12 OCF @ Clemson University 7:00 pm	13 <i>fast-free</i>	14 Choir Rehearsal 5:00 pm Confessions Great Vespers 6:00 pm
<i>Fr Marcus (2/9) and Fr Nikolay (2/10) leave for Diocese of the South Diocesan Council, Deans' Meeting, and Clergy Conference, Feb 9th --- 12th</i>						
15 37 th Sunday after Pentecost Prodigal Son House Blessings Divine Liturgy 9:30 am Slavonic Molioben 12:30 pm	16 OCF @ Furman University 7:00 pm	17	18 <i>fast</i> Inquirers' Class 'The Mystery of Christ' 7:00 pm Vespers 6:00 pm	19 Blessing of United Ministries 2:00 pm OCF @ Clemson University 7:00 pm	20 <i>fast</i>	21 Baptism of Eleutherios 'Woody' Helvey 4:00 pm Great Vespers 6:00 pm
22 38 th Sunday after Pentecost Sunday of the Last Judgment Divine Liturgy 9:30 am	23 <i>meat fast</i> OCF @ Furman University 7:00 pm	24 <i>meat fast</i>	25 <i>meat fast</i> Lenten Matins 7:00 am Inquirers' Class 'Creation and Fall' 7:00 pm Lenten Vespers 6:00 pm	26 <i>meat fast</i> OCF @ Clemson University 7:00 pm	27 <i>meat fast</i>	28 <i>meat fast</i> Choir Rehearsal 5:00 pm Great Vespers 6:00 pm
01 March Sunday of Forgiveness Cheese-fare Brunch Divine Liturgy 9:30 am Forgiveness Vespers 12:30 pm	02 Beginning of Great Lent No OCF at Furman University Canon of St Andrew of Crete 6:00 pm	03 Canon of St Andrew of Crete 6:00 pm	04 Lenten Matins 7:00 am Confessions 4:30 - 6:00 pm Choir Rehearsal 5:15 - 6:00 pm Presanctified Liturgy 6:00 pm	05 No OCF at Clemson University Canon of St Andrew of Crete 6:00 pm	06	07 Inquirers' Class 'Creation and Fall' 4:30 pm Confessions Great Vespers 6:00 pm

Fellowship and Coffee Hour: Sundays immediately following Divine Liturgy

Church School: Sundays at 9:00 am before Divine Liturgy

Inquirers' Classes: Wednesdays following vespers, Saturdays during Lent --- as scheduled

Choir Rehearsal: Saturdays as scheduled, see times and dates above

Confessions: Saturdays after Great vespers and Wednesdays before, as scheduled

Fr Marcus is available Sunday afternoons for House Blessings and by appointment until March 1st!

We magnify Thee, O Christ, the Giver of life, and we honor Thy most pure mother,
By whom according to the Law Thou art now brought into the Temple of the Lord.

