

SOBORNOST

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE

SERVICES

**Wednesday: Moleben to the
Theotokos 6 AM**

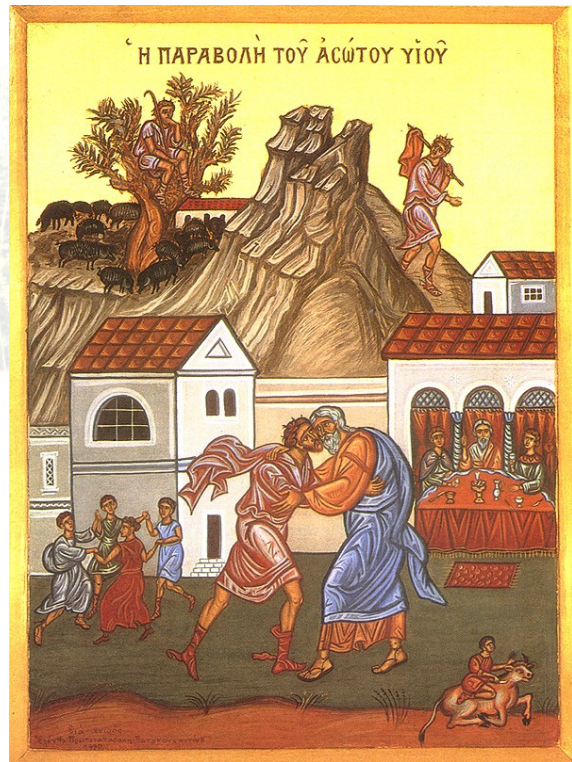
Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6 AM

Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM

Great Vespers 5:00 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM



February 20, 2022 – Sunday of the Prodigal Son

“Sin itself leads us to God,” says St. John of Karpathos, the great consoler of monks and all those who despair, but he quickly adds, “if we repent.” This is a bold saying, but everyone who has fed themselves on the swine-food of filthy passions, arrogant sins and wretched thoughts, knows this to be true. But only when they feel suffocated and starved, betrayed and deceived by the false shimmering beauty and quickly-passing pleasure of sin, and from such a wretched state cast their eyes to heaven and call upon God in utter humility, confessing their sinful apostasy from Him, their blatant and ungrateful rejection of His infinite gifts and their demonic delusion which sought to live and enjoy itself apart from Life Himself.

We are very well aware of what the famine is which the prodigal son in today’s Gospel experienced. We are very well aware of the starvation he experienced and the swine food which he wanted to eat. But let us also be aware of what the “coming to himself” is. And let us realize that at any moment, we can do this. Sometimes it takes a long time to wake up from the delusion and dream world of sin. And many times we go about in a forgetful, inattentive state of mind and soul, and we watch as we unwillingly give ourselves over to distraction, a thousand

different thoughts, confusion, idleness and spiritual poverty. Many times we watch ourselves in such a state, and we desire to snap out of it, but we can't right away. We must come to ourselves. We must leave an external manner of life. We must cut off the many distractions of mind, the flights of fancy, the unreal imaginations, the wandering thoughts.

How? Fall down in mind and soul, and if alone, in body too. Fall down as a prisoner—for this is what we are in such a state. We are, as St. Paul says, desiring God in our inward man, in our mind delighting in the spiritual law and life of God, but we yet engage in sin, doing those things we do not want to do, doing those things which we despise and hate. St. Paul says this state is one where it is not us, but sin which dwells within us. However, this does not excuse us from blaming ourselves. This does not justify continuance in such a state. God forbid! For the same Apostle explains that whatsoever we serve—whatever we offer the members of body and soul, and all the powers and energies of our livelihood—whether to the doing of sin, or to the doing of repentance and righteousness—whichever we serve, we are a slave thereto, a prisoner. This same Apostle was—using his own words—“addicted to the ministry of the saints” and always refers to himself as a slave and prisoner of God and His Christ, one wholly chained, fixated and attached in his whole man to the Godhead, to His worship, His service, His life.

We are all slaves, whether we know it or not. Every man in the world is a slave and prisoner. But to what? To whom? Many in the world say along with the Jews, understanding Christ's words and the words of the Gospel in a carnal manner, “we are free men, we are slaves to no one.” To such we might reply, “Fools and blind—wake up you self-deluded ones! You are the worst slave!” “But I am free,” they protest, “I serve no one!” “No,” we respond, “you are a deluded and deluding liar, you are a complete slave to your own will, to the devil, a coward and a weak man bereft of spiritual strength and the firm directing of yourself by grace-illuminated reason.”

Let such a worldly state be far from us! Let none of us delude ourselves. If we are prisoners and slaves to our passions, then let us at least not hide it—for whatever is exposed to the Physician can be diagnosed and healed. But whatever is hidden through self-deceit and false shame will devour one worse than cancer in the innermost depths of the soul.

Are we slaves and prisoners to swinish thoughts, raging feelings, inattention and distraction? Then let us at least cry out with whatever part of our spiritual mouth is not overfilled with swine food, with whatever part of our mind and desire that is left and has a small inclination to God; with this small part of our mind and heart; no matter how small these two mites are, let us use them. The humble, honest,

sincere and fervent prayer of such a one as this is the prayer of the publican: “Lord Jesus, my God, have mercy on me a sinner!” This is the prayer of the prodigal: “Father, forgive me, for I have sinned against heaven, against all that is holy, against You, and I am unworthy to be called Your son!” This humble prayer cries out: “I believe, O Lord, help my unbelief! I have a small tiny mustard seed of faith and love for You, lay hold of this within me and make it to become a giant and fruitful tree of spiritual fruit and respite, a living paradise wherein You can dwell. Whether I want it, whether I desire it, whether I will it, or not, O Lord, save me!”

This is how the Church teaches us who are weak to pray for deliverance. When we notice the great abyss of our spiritual poverty and the depths of our delusion, sin and madness and separation from God, then we turn, if only a little, to Him, and as it says in the Gospel, straightway God the Father sees us who are afar off. Then what? It says that He runs to us. Runs! Not only this, the Father falls upon the neck of our soul, embraces us with His tender love which is not wounded as the self-seeking and proud love of fallen men, and He kisses our soul. He breathes within us the sweet fragrance of life, of forgiveness, of purity, light, holiness, renewal. This is who the Father is. For the Only Son of this Father has told us. There is no other perfect image of the mercy and love of the Father than this, aside from the great revelation of such love which has been revealed to us in His perfect Image, Christ our Lord, Who, while crucified, forsaken and bleeding upon the Cross, cried out: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!”

O Lord, cover our ignorance; free us from our delusion. We have a tiny portion which has not been given over to passion, lust, hatred, worldliness, vainglory and sin, enter this part and expand it, make it to grow.

He alone can do this. Our small part is to incline ourselves as much as we can to Him. Our conscience, that living light and voice of God within us, reveals our poor state, our famine, starvation and swine-like state.

This grace is given to all men, Christian or not, Orthodox or non-Orthodox, righteous and sinner, Jew and pagan. But how do each and everyone of us respond to this realization of our spiritual poverty and beckoning call to heaven? Our part is very small in the great plan of our salvation, but we nonetheless have our part. We may not have much freedom, but we have a speck. And this is enough, as long as we offer it to God as best as we can and as best as we know how. A responsive heart—this is all that is needed. The wise man says, in the person of God, “My son, give me your heart.” St. Benedict, and every spiritual father who loves us with the love of Christ, says, “Listen carefully, my son, to the master’s instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart. This is advice from a father who loves you; welcome it, and faithfully put it into practice.” If these are the words of man, how much more loving can the heart be of God Who speaks these things?

St. Catherine the great-martyr, when she was suffering her martyric torments, had God appear to her. She asked Him, "Lord, where were you during these trials?" He responded, "I was here all along, in your heart." Humble Catherine responds, "Lord, how could you have been here in my heart, when it is so unclean and full of pride?" He states, "True it is, but even though it is unclean and proud, yet you nonetheless left a small little space in it for Me." What a word of consolation for those of us who are consumed by the weight of our sins. What a miracle-working and grace-giving revelation this is for us who see and feel nothing within ourselves that is good. "My son, give Me your heart," says the Lord. Why do you run away from Me? Why do you enjoy a lawless existence? Why don't you realize that I dwell within you since your Baptism, and My Spirit is enthroned within you since your Chrismation? I feed you with My Very Self, My most holy Body and precious Blood countless times, again and again. Why do you seek consolation outside your heart? I am here, I always am. You are a temple of the Holy Spirit. My Son, My Christ, has been planted within you, that you might through My grace become a son of God by grace. Why do you love vanity and distraction, idleness and laziness, lust and anger, pride and position? Why do you not commune with Me? For I always dwell within your heart, no matter how impure it might be! What is better? What is greater than this?"

These are the words of the One and Only Father Who truly loves us all. Let us hear them! Let us beg to always hear and feel such words. To never lose the consciousness of our separation from God, our imperfection, yet the unconquerable ability He has to deliver us and to embrace us, and to take us into a new life in Him.

On the other hand, some of us might not be the prodigal son of today's Gospel. We may rather be the self-righteous, envious, and ungrateful son. God forbid. But if we are, let us not envy the progress of sinners who have been smitten with heavenly love and have become great lovers of God. For many of the saints were also such ones.

For us who dwell in the Church, our Father and all things of His are always with us and always ours. We have the Church's many services, the lives of the Saints, the beautiful God-inspired hymns, the guidance of the Holy Fathers, repentance, confession, Holy Communion. Let us not be insensible to this, and let us try to rouse our hearts to an ever-increasing awareness and responsive love to such love and grace as this. Let us call to mind at all times the great gift of God calling us into existence, endowing us with a conscious mind, a free-will, the ability to enjoy life in Him which has no end, but rather ever-ascends into incomprehensible joyous rapture. Let us call to mind the gifts of being a member of the Church, the Body of Christ, the Body of God. Let us call to mind the loftiness and great grace

and soul-profitting vocation of the monastic state. Let us call to mind the many times we sinned against others, and they forgave us. Let us call to mind the many times we have been oppressed by darkness, trial, confusion and pain, and God has brought us out into a most-spacious place of heart. Let us call to mind the many universal and personal gifts of God: both this world and the next, both visible creation and invisible, both temporal joys and consolations and ones which are incorruptible. Let us actively call these to mind at the beginning of all our prayers, even as the Church teaches us to set glorification and thanksgiving at the head of all our prayers.

When we do this, and when we meditate on these great and beautiful things in the stillness of our prayer-corners—as we bow down in body, mind and soul to God—then the awareness of all these good things will arouse us to a disgust and hatred of our sinful ways, and to a mighty love and desire and thankfulness to God; and this responsive love will move us to a feeling and strong recognition of our complete unworthiness of being God’s sons, of being sons of the Church. Then true compunction is born, then true prayer flows forth, then true heartfelt thanksgiving will burst forth from our hearts with the sincerity of the little children of God the Father. For we must see our sins in the light of God’s mercy and long-suffering, lest we despair, or cut ourselves apart by self-hatred and impersonal analyzation. We must see our sins in the face of God Who never changes from His grace of love. He does not change because we sin against Him. But we must change in the face of such unconditional love.

However, He will arrange our lives in the best manner for our salvation. He will allow us to feel the dryness and emptiness of sin and the world. He will leave us in a famished state of soul. He will not quickly come to us until we realize our need for Him. But other times, as Isaiah says, “He is found by them who seek Him not.” This is how we can come to ourselves as the prodigal. This is how we can always make a beginning. This is how we can start crawling to God as spiritual cripples, or little babes, and call upon Him with simplicity, humility, stuttering words for help. This is our part. God’s part is the loving fatherhood, the compassionate and irrepressible running to us, the embracing, the kissing, the renewing, the saving, the healing, the re-instating to sonship and the re-gifting of all His gifts of grace, the partaking of His spotless, holy, most pure and beautiful and incomprehensibly-joyful, sweet life.

May we make a beginning towards this incorruptible life, both here and now; and may we, by the prayers of our most humble and sweet Mother, all the angels and saints, be counted amidst their company as they worship, rejoice in, praise and love God for all the ages—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen. (*from holycross.org*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 6:12-20

Brethren, all things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body *is* not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make *them* members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body *with her*? For “the two,” He says, “shall become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 15:11-32

The Lord said this parable, "A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to *his* father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls *to me*.' So he divided to them *his* livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him *anything*. But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.' And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put *it* on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on *his* feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill *it*, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry. Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the

fatted calf.’ But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to *his* father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’”

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Is what has happened to us true? Is what strikes us reality? Are we not in the grip of an illusion? Are these hallucinations of the night and of dreams, or the clear sight of day, and are we all awake at this hour? Who can persuade himself that in broad daylight, when men have all their intelligence and all their activity, a poor child, without any merit, is vested with such power and such an honor? That this might happen in a dream is not a wonder: awkward people, men so poor they do not have even necessary food, they sometimes dream that they take on strength and beauty, that they are seated at a royal table, but this alas! is just an effect of sleep, a trick of the imagination; we know that dream is a skilled craftsman of errors and wonders; it likes to trick us, it delights in a world of strange phantoms. Daytime is another matter, and nothing similar takes place in the world of realities. It is impossible, nevertheless, to doubt it: this is all too certain, everything is done, done, done before your eyes; the wonders of the dream are overwhelmed by the simple truth, and I see here now this great city, so many people, this astonishing multitude, who direct their eager eyes to my littleness, as if something remarkable and beautiful must come out of my mouth.

Well! even if my words could flow with the fullness and majesty of the great rivers, and I had in me the waves of eloquence, the sight of the crowd gathered to listen would stop them suddenly in their course and make them flow back to their source. And when we are so far from such an abundance, where our words can not even compare with the slightest rain, how could they not be withered by fear to some degree? How is it that the same phenomenon does not happen in the soul as in the body? What can I say? Does it not often happen that we seem to be afraid of the things that we have before us and that we have a firm grasp of, as if our nerves were paralyzed and our powers destroyed. This is what I fear at the moment: the thoughts that I have gathered with much trouble, although they are basically irrelevant and worthless, I tremble to see them escape my memory, fade and vanish, leaving my soul in a vacuum. I beseech you all, you who command, and

you whom I must obey, the agony in which you have thrown me by your willingness to come and hear me: change it, by your fervent prayers, into a holy boldness; inspire me with the strength by your representations to He who fills intrepid pioneers of truth with his word (*Psalms*, 67:12), to put His discourses on my lips. *Ephes.*, vi, 19. This will not be difficult for you, numerous as you are, and having so many merits to present to God, to strengthen a soul which is lacking experience and frozen with fear. In fact you will satisfy a duty of justice by fulfilling our wishes: for you and your charity, we will face up to the chances of a most violent and most tyrannical game, in addressing, despite our inability, the Ministry of the word, in coming to tread the burning arena of intellect, we who have never attempted this noble exercise, and always kept silent in the ranks of listeners.

...Let us turn to prayer. Let us ask God that our common mother remains unshaken and unsullied, and that we shall long have this father, this pastor, this master, this pilot. I dare not speak to you about myself. I can hardly count myself among the priests, an abortion should not be counted among the children on whom nature has lavished all his gifts. But if you deign to remember me, as we remembers a miserable and wretched being, pray that a superabundant power comes on me from on high. I needed protection while I was living for myself, free from all other cares, and now I am obliged to appear in the church — is it by the favor of man, is it by the will of God? I have not said it to him, I should not discuss this matter before you, lest I be accused of hiding my thoughts — now that I belong to the people, and I submit, never more to shake off this heavy yoke, the more I need you all to extend a helping hand to me, that all pray for me so that I may restore intact to the Divine Master the deposit that he gave me. On that day each custodian will appear before the Supreme Court and give an account of his administration. Yes, pray that I do not experience the fate of those who were loaded with chains and plunged into the outer darkness, that I am counted with those to whom will be shown mercy by the grace and love of Jesus Christ Our Lord, to whom glory, empire, and adoration belongs, for the ages of ages. Amen.

– St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 1 (delivered at his ordination to the priesthood)*



[Editor's note: Fr. Joseph was ordained to the holy priesthood by +Metropolitan Nicholas of blessed memory on the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, 2003. May God grant him many more blessed years with us!]



Also Commemorated Today: St. Leo, Bishop of Catania

Saint Leo was bishop of the city of Catania, in Sicily. He was famed for his benevolence and charity, and his Christian love for the poor and the vagrant. The Lord granted him the gifts of healing various illnesses, and working miracles.

When Saint Leo was Bishop of Catania, there was a certain sorcerer named Heliodorus, who impressed people with his fake miracles. This fellow was originally a Christian, but then he rejected Christ and became a servant of the devil.

Saint Leo often urged Heliodorus to repent of his wicked deeds and return to God, but in vain. Once, Heliodorus impudently entered the church where the bishop was serving, and tried to create a disturbance, sowing confusion and temptation by his sorcery.

Seeing the people beset by devils under the sorcer's spell, Saint Leo realized that the time for gentle persuasion had passed. He calmly emerged from the altar and, tying his omophorion around the magician's neck, he led him out of the church into the city square. There he forced Heliodorus to admit to all his wicked deeds. He commanded that a fire be lit, and jumped into the fire with the sorcerer. Thus they stood in the fire until Heliodorus got burnt. Saint Leo, by the power of God, remained unharmed. This miracle brought Saint Leo great renown during his lifetime.

When he died, a woman with an issue of blood received healing at his grave. The body of the saint was placed in a church of the holy Martyr Lucy (December 13), which he himself had built. Later on, his relics were transferred into the church of Saint Martin the Merciful, Bishop of Tours (November 11). (*from oca.org*)

Abba Bessarion

Our Holy and Venerable Father Bessarion was born in Egypt, and at a young age he withdrew from the world to live the solitary life. He was initiated into the angelic life by Saint Anthony the Great (Jan. 17), and was a disciple of Saint Makarios (Jan. 19), the founder of Scetis. He then lived the life of a wanderer under the open air, fortified with faith, and overcoming the passions of the flesh. His asceticism was so severe, that he is recorded to have said, "Forty nights I remained standing among thorns without sleeping."

Abba Bessarion was renowned for his humility, which is admirably shown in the following two accounts from *The Paradise of the Holy Fathers*:

On one occasion a brother committed sin in the church, and the priest drove him out therefrom, and there was there a man of discretion whose name was Bessarion,

and he also arose and went out of the church, and said, "If you have judged that this man who has committed only one offense is not fit to worship God, how very much less fit am I, who have committed many sins, to do so?"

A certain brother belonging to a habitation of brethren said to Abba Bessarion, "What shall I do?" The old man said unto him, "Keep silence, and consider yourself to be nothing."

The Paradise of the Holy Fathers also records how the disciples of Abba Bessarion used to relate the story of his life and deeds in the following words:

"The mode of life of the old man was that of the birds of the heavens, and of the things which are in the waters, and of the creeping things of the earth, and he passed the whole period of his life in peace, and in tranquility; for no anxiety as to the condition of his cell was ever present with him; and his soul was never occupied with the desire to live in certain places; and he never ministered during the whole course of his career to the satisfying of himself with food; and he never gathered together or laid up for himself possessions in clothes or books; but he was free from care about everything which concerned the body, and he rejoiced in the hope of the good things which were to come; and he was firm and immovable in the foundation of his faith; and he followed the ascetic life strenuously. He wandered hither and thither like one possessed, in the season of frost he went naked, and he was consumed with heat under the fierce rays of the sun, and at one time he lived among the rocks and at another in the desert. And if it fell out and happened that he came to districts which were settled, or to a place where a congregation of monks passed their whole lives together in the fulfillment of the rules of monasticism, he would take his seat contentedly outside the door of the monastery.

Now on one occasion, having arrived at a certain monastery, he sat down outside the door, and he wept and wailed aloud after the manner of one who had been saved from a storm at sea; and when one of the brethren had gone forth, he found him sitting there like any ordinary poor man or beggar, and having drawn nigh unto him compassionately he said unto him, 'Why do you weep, O man? If you have need of any of the necessaries of life, so far as in my power lies, I will give it unto you. Rise up, then, and get inside the monastery, and comfort yourself with the blessed companionship of the table with us.' Then the blessed Bessarion answered him, and said, 'Until I find the possessions of my house which I have lost, and the numerous goods of the house of my fathers which I have lost in sundry and diverse ways, I cannot live under a roof. For pirates fell upon me at sea, and a storm rose up against me, and I have been stripped of my riches, and from being a man of high degree I have become the object of contempt.' Now that

brother was astonished at these words, and was grieved thereat, and he went in and brought out some bread, and gave it unto him, saying, 'Father, take this, and the other things which you have mentioned, that is to say, country, and family, and riches, God shall restore unto you.' But Abba Bessarion cried out the more, and with louder cries, and lifted up his voice and said, 'I know not if I shall be able to find that which I have lost, and that which I seek, for as far as I can see they will be removed from me still farther. And I am afflicted daily, and am brought nigh unto death by reason of the violent storm of wickednesses innumerable which surround me, and I endure them and rest upon hope that, peradventure, I may be worthy of mercy in the day of judgment.'"

Elsewhere in *The Paradise of the Holy Fathers*, in what is known as the "Questions and Answers on the Ascetic Rule", the above story is explained:

"The history of the triumphs of Bessarion say that during all the days of his life he dwelt in deserted places, and in the desert and in the mountains, and among the rocks. Once having come to a certain monastery, he stood up by the door like a wandering beggar, and then sat down weeping and crying out, even as one who had been rescued from a storm. And when the brethren entreated him to go in and rest with them, he said, 'Before I find the possessions of my house which I have lost I cannot endure being under a roof; for thieves fell upon me at sea, and a storm reared itself up against me, and I have been robbed of the riches which I once possessed, and from being a man of high estate I am become of no account.' Now what were the riches which he inherited from his parents and lost? And what does this story mean? Who are the parents? What does he refer to by the words sea, and storms, and waves? Who were the thieves? Are these words spoken of himself or of other persons?"

The old man said, "These things are said of all the monks who are still striving and contending against passions and devils, and who are lacking at the present time purity of heart, and fruits of the spirit, and visions of our Lord, and they are not spoken of men who are perfect as he was. The word 'sea' he applies to the sea of the nous whereon the monk sails with works of spiritual excellence, wherefrom he enters the haven of impassibility, even as the blessed Makarios says, 'He who wishes to cleave to the sea of the nous, makes himself longsuffering.' And he calls temptations 'storms,' and the passions 'waves,' and the 'thieves' are devils, and his 'parents' are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God, in Whose image and likeness we are made, even as our Creator said, 'Come, let us make man in our image and likeness,' and also as our Lord said, 'Be like unto your Father, Who is in heaven.' And He calls the spiritual excellences, which contain likenesses of the similitude of our Father, Who is in heaven, and which make us heirs of God, and sons of the inheritance of Jesus Christ, by the name of 'riches and possessions of

his parents,' and these are faith, and hope, and the love of God and man, and joy, and rest, and peace, and graciousness, and pleasantness, and lowliness, and humility, and longsuffering, and patient endurance, and integrity, and simplicity, and purity, and mercy, and cleanness of heart, and the holy light of the nous, and pure prayer, and the divine light which riseth on the heart at the hour of prayer, and spiritual prayer, and Divine knowledge, and the visions and revelations of our Lord. These are the possessions of the soul, some of which it acquires naturally, and some by Divine Grace; now those which it acquires naturally are they which the Creator sowed in its nature at the beginning of its creation, and those which it acquires by Divine Grace are they which are bestowed upon it by the baptism in Christ. And these possessions are lost to a man through pleasures, and honors, and lusts, and benefits, but they are found and acquired, and the soul waxes rich in them, through tribulations, and revilings, and oppression, and hardships. Now although Abba Bessarion, and men who were as perfect as he was, possessed these things, other men lack them and are strangers unto them. And as regards the words: 'He once came to a certain monastery, and sat down outside the door like a wandering beggar,' they mean that he saw clearly with the secret eye of the nous that the greater number of the monks were destitute of this spiritual possession, and of the spiritual excellences and gifts which have been already mentioned. And being incited there, by the law of affection and of brotherly love, he cried out and wept on their behalf, as if it had been on his own, and he made supplication to the loving-kindness of God that He would make them worthy of the riches of His love, and of the possession of His Grace."

In *The Paradise of the Holy Fathers*, there is recorded what the disciple of Abba Bessarion, Abba Doulas (Shaol), used to say of him:

"We came once to the bank of a lake and I was athirst, and I said unto Abba Bessarion, 'I am thirsty.' And the old man prayed, and said unto me, 'Take water from the lake, and drink,' and I went, and drank, and I found the water to be sweet; and I drew therefrom and filled all the water vessels which I had with me, for I thought that peradventure I should be thirsty again when I continued my journey. Then the old man seeing me do this, said, 'Why did you fill these vessels with water?' And I said unto him, 'Forgive me, father, but I did so lest, peradventure, as we continue our journey, I may become thirsty again;' and he said to me, 'May God forgive you, for here, and there, and everywhere, God directs us.'

And on another occasion he was traveling along a road, and he came to the river Chrysoroan, and there was nothing wherewith it might be crossed, and he stretched out his hands, and prayed, and crossed over to the other side. Now I was astonished, and I offered unto him repentance, and said, 'Father, when you were passing over the river, how far up your legs did you feel the water?' And he said

unto me, 'As far as my ankles I felt the water, but all the rest of it was solid beneath my feet.'

And on another occasion we were journeying to a certain great sage, and the sun was nigh to set, and the old man prayed, and said, 'I beseech You, O Lord, to let the sun abide in his place until I come to Your servant;' and it was so.

And on another occasion I came to him in his cell that I might speak with him, and I found him standing up in prayer, with his hands stretched out to heaven, and he remained standing up in this position for four days and four nights; and afterwards he called me, and said unto me, 'Come, my son,' and we went forth and set out on the road. And being athirst I said unto him, 'My Father, I am athirst.' Then he removed himself from me about the distance of a stone's throw, and prayed and came to me, and he brought with him his garment filled with water from the air, and I drank, and we traveled on our road until we came to Lycus, to Abba John. And after each had saluted the other, he prayed, and sat down, and he discoursed concerning the vision which he had seen, and Abba Bessarion said, 'A decree of judgment has gone forth from the Lord, that all the temples of the idols be blotted out;' and this actually came to pass, for at that time they were all uprooted.

And there was in Egypt a certain man who had a son that was a paralytic, and he took him on his shoulders, and brought him to Abba Bessarion and left him by the door of his cell weeping, and he departed and went to a place some distance off. Now the old man heard the sound of the weeping of the young man, and he looked out, and seeing him, said unto him, 'Who are you that are here?' And the young man said, 'My father brought me here and then went away, and I weep.' Then the old man said unto him, 'Rise up, hasten after him, and overtake him;' and straightway the young man was made whole, and he went to his father, who took him and departed.

And on another occasion there came to the church a man who had a devil, and prayer was made on his behalf in the church, but the devil did not go forth, for he was difficult to cast out; and the clergy said, 'What shall we do about this devil, for no man can cast him out except Abba Bessarion? Let us entreat him concerning the man, and even though he comes not to the church, let us act thus. Behold, the old man comes to the church early in the morning before everyone else. Let us make the sick man to occupy the seat wherein the old man sits usually, and when he comes in, let us stand up in prayer, and say unto him, 'O father, make to rise up this man also;' and they did so. And when the old man came into the church in the morning, they rose up in prayer, and said unto him, 'Father, make to rise up that brother;' and Abba Bessarion went and struck him with his fist, and said, 'Rise up and go forth;' and straightway that devil went forth from the man, and he was made whole immediately."

Thus Abba Bessarion can be compared to the prophets of old: to Joshua the son of Nun who caused the sun to halt in its course; to Moses and Elijah who brought forth water; and to Elisha who crossed the Jordan with the mantle of Elijah. Hence, when Abba Bessarion reached deep old age, he departed in peace to the Lord, where he now rests from his labors. (synaxarion, *from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Social Team for February 27

Team 7 is up next week - Howl, Hood, Dee Jubb, Charlotte F. Thank you!

Message from Fr. Joseph

Prayer is powerful, and we need more priests in our Diocese. So, this year, Metropolitan Gregory is asking that each one of us pray daily that we have more vocations to the priesthood. He also wants us to pray by name for our clergy and seminarians--they aren't sick! The clergy that we are to pray for are: Fr. John Zyboyovski, Fr. Marc Wisnoski, and Protodeacon Gregory Benc. The seminarians are: Dylan Kelemecz, Thomas Kovalak, Nicholas Woroby, Aydin Zill, Seamus Murray, Samuel Loposky, Timothy Paproski, Nicholas Fong, and Nicolas Laliberte. We started this last June, and we already have more seminarians! I can't wait to see what happens next!

Prayer for vocations

Master of all, You promised us, "I will be with you always, even until the very end of the world," and You have taught, "I will build My Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Mindful of this pledge, we beseech Your great goodness to inspire men to the Holy Priesthood, the service of Your Holy Orthodox Church, so that she may properly be able to fulfill Your will for Your people in this age. There are children to baptize, the sick to heal, and the dying to care for. There is the Bread of Life to distribute, and the Word of God to teach. There are sins to forgive, and charity to be done in Your Name. Send Your Church in this hour and in every age "vessels of clay" to be instruments of Your presence. Hear us, O Lord, and have mercy.

Prayer for the priesthood

O Lord Jesus Christ, Good Shepherd of Your sheep, light the fire of ardent love in the hearts of all Your priests, that they may ever and in all things seek only Your glory. Remember especially, Lord, our Metropolitan Gregory, and our spiritual father Joseph, who are laboring in Your vineyard for the salvation of all those whom You have entrusted to them. Remember also, O Lord, our priests Fr. John Zyboyovski, Fr. Marc Wisnoski, and Protodeacon Gregory Benc, and seminarians Dylan Kelemecz, Thomas Kovalak, Nicholas Woroby, Aydin Zill, Seamus Murray, Samuel Loposky, Timothy Paproski, Nicholas Fong, and Nicolas

Laliberte. Make their lives as holy as the word they preach. Keep them from being discouraged. Hear their prayers for our salvation. Give them wisdom and courage to proclaim Your truth. Make them priests after Your own heart. For You are a merciful God who loves us, and to You we give glory, together with Your eternal Father and Your all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.

CAMP NAZARETH SUMMER CAMP 2022

The time for Summer Camp is Rapidly Approaching!!! The clock is ticking!!

***REGISTER ONLINE STARTING MARCH 15, 2022
@ 6PM (Eastern Time)!!!***

Dates for the Summer Camping Program

Week 1: Sunday, July 17 – Saturday, July 23, 2022 – Pittsburgh, Mid-Atlantic, Tri-State and Washington D.C. Deaneries

Week 2: Sunday, July 24 – Saturday, July 30, 2022 – New England, NY, NJ, Florida and Canada Deaneries

Week 3: Sunday, July 31 – Saturday, August 6, 2022 -- Johnstown, Pocono, Southern Tier, Youngstown and Chicago Deaneries

Science and Nature Camp: Sunday, August 7 – Saturday, August 13, 2022

**BEFORE you register, please read the
information below carefully!!!**

**Register Online Starting March 15, 2022 @ 6pm
(EDT)**

Register at – campnazareth.org

Registration for Camp will be on a **First-Come First-Serve Basis!!** Once capacity for a given week is filled, all other campers will be put on a waiting list.

\$20 Early Bird Discount Per Child!!!!

(one-time only, not per week)

Must Register & pay by May 1, 2022!!!!

Online Registration MUST be complete AND payment must be submitted by May 1 in order to qualify for the Early Bird Discount.

Registration will close on June 1, 2022 @ 12pm!

Important Information Re: 2022 Diocesan Summer Camping Program

- 1. A camper must be 8 years old BY the beginning of their camping week AND must have completed 2nd Grade in order to register for Camp!!!**
- 2. We are planning to have Camp at full capacity, which means up to 16 campers in each cabin.**
- 3. You must register by June 1, NO EXCEPTIONS!** Once registration has concluded on June 1, no one will be able to register for Camp. No exceptions!!
- 4. Registration will be done on a First-Come First-Serve basis.** Once we've reached the limit, the rest of those registering will be put on a Waiting List. If a spot opens up, those on the Waiting List will be contacted, again on a First-Come First-Serve basis.
- 5. Because of the number of Male and Female Counselors and the number of cabins Camp has, the maximum number of females or males attending any one week will be 80. Once that limit has been reached for males or females, the rest will be put on the Waiting List.**
- 6. VERY IMPORTANT: You may ONLY register for 1 Week!!!** It does not have to be your Deanery's Week, but you may only register for 1 Week! You may NOT register for multiple weeks. Exception: Any camper whose Senior Year it is, may register for multiple weeks. The Science and Nature Camp is NOT included as 1 Week. In other words, a camper may attend 1 Diocesan Camping Week AND the Science and Nature Camp as well.

Once you register, Camp will email you instructions, including the Physical Form and other necessary information.

Also, those who are of age (at least 18 by the beginning of the Summer Season and have completed High School) are encouraged to be part of the Camp's Summer Staff. This is a wonderful opportunity for you to get involved in this vital and meaningful Diocesan apostolate, form lasting friendships, and use your God-given talents for the benefit and up-building of our Church. We have worked with a number of students to design internship positions that help them earn credit in their program of study as well. Staff Applications can be found on the Camp's website campnazareth.org. **Staff applications are due by March 15.** If you have any questions, please contact Fr. Stephen Lopusky at 724-662-4840 or campnazareth@acrod.org.

On Tuesday, March 1st and Thursday, March 3rd (prior to Registration opening on March 15), Camp will be offering two informational webinars (they are the same webinar, but will be

offered twice) about the 2022 Summer Camping Weeks for all our campers, parents, clergy, volunteers and potential Staff. Both webinars will be offered at 7pm. Plan on attending one of the webinars to get the latest information on our 2022 Summer Camping Weeks including information about the Camp's facility, kitchen, medical and program plans as they relate to up-to-date information about the Coronavirus. The links to register for the Webinars are as follows (registration just requires your name and email and then you will be sent a link to the webinar):

- o Tuesday, March 1, 2022 at 7pm: [Register for March 1, 2022](#)
- o Thursday, March 3 2022 at 7pm: [Register for March 3, 2022](#)

Follow Our Diocese On-Line

Diocesan Website: <http://www.acrod.org>

Camp Nazareth: <http://www.campnazareth.org>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/acroddiocese>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/acrodnews>

You Tube: <https://youtube.com/acroddiocese>

In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri & Mt. Kenya, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Luke & Marlena Cooper, Roberta Corson, Jon Church, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Howl family, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, David & Kathryn Newman, John Reece, Mary Reed, Rose Song, Dcn. Nectarios & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)