

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

Wed: Moleben to the Theotokos 6:00 AM

Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6:00 AM

Saturday: Confession 5:00 PM

Great Vespers 5:30 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.



February 12, 2017 – Sunday of the Prodigal Son St. Meletius the Archbishop of Antioch

All of us are born into this world with a deep and unquenchable longing for Paradise. Many of us are not aware of it. Most of us bury it beneath the mire of our passions; we try to satisfy this pure and holy desire with the trinkets and trivialities of the present world. We become as ships tossed to and fro, as wanderers amid the wasteland of this life, consumed by a gnawing hunger for we know not what. Like tortured inverses of Midas, mocked by fate, every golden and glittering thing which we reach out and grasp turns to dust and refuse in our hands. This primal desire, this fundamental and quintessentially human longing, drives us unrelentingly onward throughout all of the pain and misery of our lives.

We are exiles. And precisely so: we have been banished, driven out of our ancestral home, barred by a flaming sword from the Tree of Life, condemned to a life of unending suffering and toil for the sake of mere bread, fare more paltry by far than swine's husks for one who was born to reign over all Creation, to commune with God in the eternal banquet of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Why? If the Lord God is truly the merciful, loving, and all-forgiving Father of Whom we have just heard in today's Gospel reading, how can He be so vindictive

and cruel? Why are His punishments so harsh and unrelenting, far beyond what any of us could be expected to endure?

The answer is simple: it is because our misery is the only thing that can save us. It is precisely because it is more than we can bear.

We call today the Sunday of the Prodigal Son. Yet let us remember that it is not only his story. The parable begins: “A certain man had *two* sons.” And though they at first appear to be quite different, in fact they are really very much the same. It seems that neither son truly loved their father. The younger son took his inheritance and left the Father’s House, squandering it with riotous living. But though the elder son remained, it turns out that his real desire, the love that made its nest within his heart, was not so different from that of his brother, and he was consumed with bitterness and envy because he was never given “so much as a kid” to make merry with his friends. He too desired only his inheritance and the pleasures of this life. And though he never left to give himself up to those desires, yet in the end it was he that refused to enter into the joy of his Father’s House. It was his heart that remained cold and darkened, and it was he who chose to remain ultimately alone.

This is a very real danger for all of us.... We can hide our decay and self-love under the mask of outward obedience. We can wander all throughout the world without leaving these holy walls. And we can far too easily scorn, mock and condemn those who have visibly chosen to reject the Father’s House, and yet all the time be ourselves far more deeply lost than they.

It is sometimes better to be the younger son starving in the pig pen than the elder son who, though outwardly abiding in the Father’s House, does not truly desire to love Him. It is oftentimes easier to “come to ourselves” amidst the misery and emptiness of the world than under a false veneer of piety. For it is only by realizing our wandering that we have any hope of beginning the long road home. It is only by experiencing the tortuous pain that lies beneath the pleasure we have chosen that we can find the path of escape. To taste the bitterness of the world which we ourselves have poisoned is the only medicine which can cure us.

In the words of Abba Dorotheos:

How have we come into all this affliction? How have we fallen into all this misery? Is it not because of our pride? Is it not because of our senselessness? Is it not because we took the wrong decision? Is it not because we chose to impose our bitter will? Why? Was not Man created with every luxury, in all joy, in all rest and in all glory? Was he not in paradise? God said, “Do not do that” but he did it. Do you realize the enormity of his pride? Do you see his obstinacy? Do you see his insubordination? Therefore, when He saw his impudence God said:

“He is a fool, he does not know how to be happy. If he does not have a hard time, he will be totally lost. If he does not learn what sorrow is, he will not learn what rest is.” Then He gave him that what he deserved and expelled him from paradise. Thus, Man was given up to self-love and to his own desires which would crush his bones, so as to learn not to trust himself but the commandment of God. The hardships from disobedience will teach him the calmness that comes from obedience as the Prophet says: “Your own wickedness will correct you” (Jer 2:19).

So during the Lenten season ahead—and throughout all our remaining life in this present world—when we see our sinfulness, our brokenness, when we begin to know by bitter experience the tragedy of how drastically we have lost our way, let us not despair. Let us not wonder at it. Let us not ask: “where is the Lord?” He is walking this path of exile beside us. He has been this way before, even down to the lowest depths of Hades. He did not send us here to perish, but to walk with Him the only path that exists to His Father’s House. To Him be all glory, honor and worship, together with His unoriginate Father and His all-holy and good and life-creating Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen. (*from holycross-hermitage.com*)

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

Since we have sinned after baptism and been polluted by transgressions, is there yet no hope of salvation for us? Is there no remedy of conversion? Is all hope gone? Is all vanished, the long-suffering, the love of man, the endurance, the abundant compassion? Is there no recall? Is there no return? Is there no other way of healing? Is there no other means of recovery? Insofar as it lies with our monstrous deeds, there is not. But insofar as it lies with the kindness and ineffable love of God toward man, there is. What then is it? The confession by means of sincere repentance. For it says, "I said, I will confess my iniquity to the Lord against myself; and you forgave the ungodliness of my heart." (Ps. 31:5) "Confess

your sins one to another," bids us the disciple and brother of the Lord, "and pray for one another, that we may be healed" (Jas. 5:16); and "if we confess our sins," the beloved disciple pledges himself also, "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness." (1 Jn. 1:9) How shall I confess? By imitating the prodigal in falling down and crying out to the Lord with contrite heart and humbleness of spirit, "I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; receive me, Father, in my repentance." How shall I confess? By departing from error and by abominating sin. For if you will turn, and humble yourself before the Lord, and remove unrighteousness far from your habitation, the Almighty shall be your helper.

– St. Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople, Homily 1.4

On Stewardship and the Orthodox Life – 113:

Being Contentious



“Reject a divisive man after a first and second admonition.” (Titus 3: 10 RSV)

Can a contentious person be a good steward in the church? Well, let's first look at the meaning of contentious. The Concise Oxford American Dictionary defines it as, “causing or likely to cause an argument, given to arguing or provoking an argument.” Such a person would seem therefore to have little knowledge of obedience or humility. St. Silouan the Anthonite instructs us, as related in the book, *Remember Thy First Love*, to be obedient without needless questioning. He goes on to say that obedience is an expression of love for our brothers which God has bonded us.

St. Silouan also states, “that obedience releases us from the need to trust in our own thinking, opinions, and judgment and gives us the freedom to embrace the will of God.” Obedience is the cornerstone of Christian life.

Hand-in-hand with obedience is humility. St. Silouan again comments, “If we hold fast to our self-esteem and are pleased with ourselves, with our lives, with our achievements, we cannot receive the word God wants us to hear. If you don't start listening, God will stop talking.”

Our beloved Bishop Gregory and our priest who serve Him provide direction and understanding and lead us to salvation. If we do not listen and do, being obedient, our salvation is in jeopardy. If our salvation is in jeopardy because we are contentious, non-obedient and lack humility, how can we be good stewards? Obedience and humility are two of the great virtues we are encouraged to practice.

A good steward is not contentious but obedient to God, his Bishop and priests, lovingly accepts those gifts given to him and returns them to God with joy and increase. A good steward does not argue, cause strife and reject the help of the church but accepts its healing through the Holy Spirit, our Bishop and our priest. Anything less is not acceptable.

St. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 11:16, *“If anyone is disposed to being contentious, we recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God.”* Paul talks about the Church not being a place to contend or argue, or have the last word, but rather the Church teaches obedience. He writes to the Hebrews, Chapter 13:17, *“Obey your leaders and submit to them.”* A humble and obedient attitude gives us access to all the treasures of the church. (*from acrod.org*)

ST. MELETIUS THE ARCHBISHOP OF ANTIOCH

Saint Meletius, Archbishop of Antioch, was Bishop of Sebaste in Armenia (ca. 357), and afterwards he was summoned to Antioch by the emperor Constantius to help combat the Arian heresy, and was appointed to that See.

Saint Meletius struggled zealously against the Arian error, but through the intrigues of the heretics he was thrice deposed from his cathedra. Constantius had become surrounded by the Arians and had accepted their position. In all this Saint Meletius was distinguished by an extraordinary gentleness, and he constantly led his flock by the example of his own virtue and kindly disposition, supposing that the seeds of the true teaching sprout more readily on such soil.

Saint Meletius was the one who ordained the future hierarch Saint Basil the Great as deacon. Saint Meletius also baptized and encouraged another of the greatest luminaries of Orthodoxy, Saint John Chrysostom, who later eulogized his former archpastor.

After Constantius, the throne was occupied by Julian the Apostate, and the saint again was expelled, having to hide himself in secret places for his safety. Returning under the emperor Jovian in the year 363, Saint Meletius wrote his theological treatise, *“Exposition of the Faith,”* which facilitated the conversion of many of the Arians to Orthodoxy.

In the year 381, under the emperor Theodosius the Great (379-395), the Second Ecumenical Council was convened. In the year 380 the saint had set off on his way to the Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople, and came to preside over it.

Before the start of the Council, Saint Meletius raised his hand displaying three fingers, and then withdrawing two fingers and leaving one extended he blessed the people, proclaiming: *“We understand three hypostases, and we speak about a single nature.”* With this declaration, a fire surrounded the saint like lightning.

During the Council Saint Meletius fell asleep in the Lord. Saint Gregory of Nyssa honored the memory of the deceased with a eulogy.

Saint Meletius has left treatises on the consubstantiality of the Son of God with the Father, and a letter to the emperor Jovian concerning the Holy Trinity. The relics of Saint Meletius were transferred from Constantinople to Antioch. *(from oca.org)*

2017 LENTEN DIOCESAN RETREAT



EASTERN REGION INTER-DIOCESAN LENTEN RETREAT



SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2017

9:00 AM TO 6:30 PM

AT

ST. FRANCIS CENTER FOR RENEWAL

395 BRIDLE PATH ROAD

BETHLEHEM, PA

COST TO ATTEND (INCLUDES BREAKFAST, LUNCH & DINNER):

\$30.00 ADULTS / TEENS (Until March 15) \$55.00 after March 15

\$7.00 (AGES 6 TO 12)

REGISTRATION DEADLINE:

March 15, 2017

OLEH OR NATALIE BILYNSKY

nsufler@aol.com

610-892-7315



**SPONSORED BY THE NATIONAL A.C.R.Y &
THE UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX LEAGUE OF THE USA**

New for this year, this is a joint retreat with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA (Oleh and Natalie attended our Eastern Region retreat last year as observers). If you are interested in attending, please let Fr. Joseph know by March 12 so we can get the registration form in by the deadline. Make checks payable to St. Thomas – the parish will send a group payment with the registration form. If you have any questions, please contact Oleh or Natalie (see contact info above). Please note that pictures from the Retreat may be used for publicity; let Fr. Joseph know if you do not want pictures of you and/or your child used.

<u>Age</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Presenters</u>
Adults & Adolescents	“Peace Be Unto All”: Encountering the Divine Liturgy	Fr. Anthony Perkins Fr. Bazyl Zawierucha
Ages 6-11	The Divine Liturgy: The Five Senses	Fr. William George Fr. William Bennett

CAMP NAZARETH

Glory be to Jesus Christ!

Camp Nazareth is eagerly awaiting and preparing for the arrival of the Summer Camping Season. Diocesan priests and parents have already been calling to find out the details of the 2017 Summer Camping Schedule. The 2017 Schedule is posted on the Camp’s website.

REGISTRATION FOR CAMP WILL ONLY BE ABLE TO BE DONE ONLINE THROUGH THE CAMP’S WEBSITE – CAMPNAZARETH.ORG.

The Online Registration system will be up and running starting March 1, 2017. Here is what is different from previous years in this information:

1. The Most Important Change is the Clearances now required of all Clergy, Staff, and Volunteers. This is all explained through the Camp website.
2. The Dates for the Diocesan Weeks have been updated!!
3. The Fee for Camp is: \$315/diocesan camper and \$365/non-diocesan camper.
4. Staff applications are due March 15th, 2017.
5. If anyone is interested in being on the Camp’s Medical Staff (MD or RN), please contact Fr. Stephen at the Camp (724-662- 4840 or campnazareth@acrod.org). The Nurse or Doctor on staff each week will receive a Stipend (\$400) and a campership for one of their children or for someone whom they designate.

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. There are positions available as counselor, head counselor, kitchen staff, maintenance staff, athletic director, program director (and assistant program director), technology director (and assistant technology director), Ropes Course Facilitator and Lifeguard. This is a wonderful opportunity 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. Fr. Stephen never attended Camp as a Camper or as part of the Staff, but his experience as a clergy volunteer, and now as Administrator, has made him wish he had. Staff Applications can be found on the Camp website campnazareth.org.

Please note the following deanery weeks at Camp:

Week 1, July 16-22, 2017: Johnstown, Pocono, Southern Tier, Youngstown and Chicago Deaneries

Week 2, July 23-29, 2017: Pittsburgh, Mid-Atlantic, Tri-State and **Washington D.C. Deaneries**

Week 3, July 30 - August 5, 2017: New England, NY, NJ, Florida and Canada Deaneries

Remember also the following dates:

1. March 15 -- Staff Applications due
2. May 15 -- Clergy and Volunteer Applications due
3. May 15 – Last Day for Early Bird Discount (\$20) and Camper Registrations are due

Parish News

Holy Water was consecrated on Theophany. Please contact Fr. Joseph or Pani Stacey if you would like your house blessed – this needs to be done before Lent begins, so don't delay!

ASSESSMENTS FOR 2017

We paid our Assessment to the Diocese for 2017. As in previous years, we trust that you will pay your assessments over the course of the year. The Diocesan Assessment remains \$68.00 for each adult over 18 or \$17.00 if paid quarterly. Please remember that without the Diocese and our Bishop we would not be an Orthodox Church. Thank you for being good Stewards of God's House. Kari

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

The annual Parish meeting and Potluck will be held following Liturgy next week. Information to review will be distributed in advance so you can discuss topics with the officers or clergy prior to the meeting. We will review the past year, our financial status, and look ahead at goals for 2017 and beyond. Importantly, we will also adopt a 2017 budget and elect officers. Anyone who is interested in a great volunteer/leadership opportunity, consider serving your Parish as an officer. See any current officer or Father Joseph if interested.

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 Grace Bishop GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Fr. Vincent Saverino, Presbyteria Katie Baker and family, Alicia Barosio and family, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana and Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Curtis Cooper, Luke Cooper, Tina Crull, Ron Dominiecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, Alex Holthus, John Homick, Cameron Houk, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Deanna Jarrett, Tucker Karl and family, Robert Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, and Luke Mahony, Alex & Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Westin Perry & Parents, John Reece, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore and Christina Ristas, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Subdcn. Nectaros and Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)