



The second Sunday of lent - The prodigal son
(Luke 15:11-32)

“There was a man who had two sons ...”

The urgent need for the icon of the resurrection today comes from the reality of our time and from the image we seek but cannot find in the parable of the prodigal son. We need to see God that holds the hands of both Adam and Eve. Otherwise the abyss is large between them, between the older and the younger brother, between Cain and Abel, between the rich man and Lazarus. This abyss continues in death while at the same time generating it itself. We see this abyss in the hatred of the older brother and in the absence of the older within the thoughts and heart of the younger brother. We see it in the envy of Cain and in the silence of Abel. We see it in

Adam`s blame of Eve and in Eve`s loneliness when she is tempted by the serpent.

The distance between the brothers in the parable is the icon of today`s community life at large. Their setting apart from each other reminds us of the apostolic community after Juda`s betrayal, which scattered, leaving Christ alone, like the Father in the parable who never fully tastes communion with his sons in the story. In the parable we see communion broken even before Jesus is on the cross. We see this communion broken today within us, within the church and in the world at large. During the week we heard it being reminded to us in the scripture: Cain killing Abel (Genesis 4:8 - second Monday of lent) and Efraim plotting with Syria against brother Juda (Isaiah7:5 – second Friday of lent). There is nothing more painful for any father than the disagreements between his children. Their hate for each other mirrors the faults of the parents like a painful image. What hurts the most in the hearts of Adam and Eve was maybe not that they discovered

hunger and cold outside of paradise. Maybe not even their own death, but rather the crime of Cain and the death of Abel. They cannot speak and they cannot react or intervene. Because it was their sin. We see the pain of Eve when she receives her son Seth. She can express her pain only when God brings about healing in her heart: *“For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed.”* (Genesis 4:26)

The crisis of brotherhood in humanity has deep roots. We have one Father in Christ and we all share in the same adopted sonship. However, the parable does not give us false hope. We do not see and hear the brothers coming closer. The younger one speaks only to the Father, while the older one cannot even call his name or call him brother. The hate is so intense.

The parable does not offer us hope when we behold today's reality. Where is the reconciliation? Where is the communion and solidarity in faith? Why do we leave Father alone?

Only within the resurrection can we find reason for hope, since Christ holds there the hands of both. It is the new creation, the first day of the week, which works within the life of the community and becomes a house of hospitality for the hungry. The renewal of brotherhood, the church, is the witness, the living testimony that the new creation has begun in us, before the end of times, where we hope that the brothers will forgive one another for all the hurt that we inflict on each other today. Brotherhood does not leave the Father alone and it welcomes the one that thirsts for communion, the one that is ready and longing for it. It is not the work of one soul but the gathering of many. The church, that today is broken and set apart, is the place which reminds the poor in their hearts that the Father loves them. It reminds them that there is a place to which they can return, and where they can live communal life, reconciliation and forgiveness.

As much as we see the brokenness of communal life, the main sin of our generation as well as throughout history and scripture, the brokenness of sisterhood or brotherhood is first of all a consequence of our relationship with the Father. Both brothers had difficulty being in communion with the Father, difficulty in receiving his love, or letting themselves be shaped and transformed by it. The younger brother runs away because of it, while the older brother could not become more different than his father. All the time spent close to his father made him not a reflection but rather an opposition of what his Father is:

hatred instead of love, rejection instead of forgiveness: *“and they give hatred for my love ... and vinegar for my thirst” (Ps 109:5 & 69)*

The root cause today of wars and the breaking of communion is our failure to be transformed and shaped in the image of the One who loves us. When we fail to see this love, it either makes us restless or paralyzes us in good works that desensitize the heart.

Any hope or change, before the end of time, begins with the perfect love that touches our soul. The love we do not know how to welcome because it is perfect. We cannot approach each other with the hope of peace or desire for communion if we do not come first before Christ and ask Him to judge our own betrayal, without justifications and without looking for scapegoats. Without asking and receiving forgiveness from the Father, without being defeated by the love we avoid, we cannot be part of the communion of the saints before the end of time.

And the hope for that, the parable tells us, stays with the brother who finds himself destitute, cast aside, brutally facing the consequence of his own sins; the one who finds himself naked and without defense, judged by the love of the Father with mercy. The one who is broken and falling is the one who makes the first step. It is not the Father that initiates the communion. It is, in a way, his enduring love that is always present in the hearts of the children that initiate everything that is good. But the one who moves on it is the one who lost everything, who failed miserably. The one who had to carry his shame alone, judged by the pigs.

It is precisely the one who is honestly longing for communion today, who is moved by the perfect love. The one who is naked and hungry, who is ready to love and receive forgiveness. This is the brother that brings about with him communion with the saints, a sign of new creation, the one who walks on the path of the first day of the week, looking for peace, asking for forgiveness.

It is him whom the church is asked to embrace, in order to find communion within itself. It is through him that the Father is reaching out to the older son.

As a volunteer said on Friday, the Father forgives both. But the one who generates the communion of the saints is the one who lost everything by his foolishness.

The Father does not speak without being asked. He is silent. Like Eve, when Cain was murdered. And he speaks, like Eve, when the new creation is revealed through new life - when Seth was born, and when the younger son who was dead returned and became alive again. The father does not initiate the conversation. He does not talk even when the son leaves but only when he comes back. He does not initiate the conversation with the older son either, about how he failed to nurture his love in his heart in order to become like him, mercy. He speaks only when the older brother reveals by himself his own sin by refusing to partake of the feast.

The father comes out and he answers after his son finished his confession.

And then, it is only the father who has the last word. Nothing else is said after that, because this is the end of times, where life in communion and forgiveness are not optional, where the sinful and homeless brother is not judged and ignored anymore, where forgiveness cannot be avoided anymore.

The father has the last word and that is healing for us. It is a new direction given to our life, by the gentle love of the father. And it is given to us to see every day, as it unfolds in community life. It is that life that Fr Theodore spoke about on Friday evening, before the vigil, urging us to nurture and cherish it with all our heart and all our soul, so that it may become increasingly hospitable to every weary soul and be a sign that the last words of the Father are heard and fulfilled in our very time, before the ages.

Continuing reflection on Patriarch Bartholomew letter to St. John the Compassionate Mission dated 12 January 2026:

"...We received with heartfelt appreciation the gracious letter from Dr. M. Saunderson on behalf of St Joh the Compassionate Mission of the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox diocese of North America under our Ecumenical Throne, along with the report regarding your activities and financial stewardship in 2024..."

In these opening lines to the mission, our Patriarch Bartholmew says some essential things to us:

You, St. John The compassionate Mission, belong fully to the fullness of the Orthodox church!

The patriarch says that we belong to the church on two levels.

On the local level we belong to the Diocese and secondly, to the universal church, under the Ecumenical Throne.

The mission functions as incarnated in the full reality of the Orthodox church. What it does on Broadview Ave, the letter states, matters to the Ecumenical Throne, ergo to the universal church. The mission has always, since its foundation 40 years ago, desired to live within the breath and in obedience of the canonical church.

St. John the Compassionate Mission's whole purpose is to be a door, a door that is open to everyone but especially those who may never find it, an open door to the full life of the Orthodox Church. We do this by praying and living the gospel on the margins of society with those who suffer and welcome all.

(We are also grateful to the "gracious words" of Michael...)

pRoberto

Community life:

Transmitting the Orthodox faith to young children and high school youth at St. John The Compassionate Mission

The approach of teaching the Orthodox faith at the Mission is to group children by age. This approach is simple but effective and is based on recent studies of what keeps youth involved in the church.

For children (age 12 and under), religious formation is focused on increasing children's familiarity with the Scriptures and the liturgical life of the church. This is done through active participation in the liturgical life of the Orthodox Church, supplemented by formal study times. Children are encouraged to be active members of the Church as their community that extends to their family and school life.

Teenagers (age 13 to 19), we believe, are in a transition time of their development. For this age group, greater emphasis is placed on in-depth presentation of the Orthodox faith, through dialogue and hands-on experiences. A concerted effort is made to help youth see that science and religion are not necessarily in opposition, and to look at how science and religion can work

together. Youth are exposed to the Diakonia of the church as something that is at the heart of the gospel. In this way, they are encouraged to grow in the sense that the Orthodox faith calls us to learn from and be with the poor. To support their learning about Diakonia, youth are given real-life opportunities to live the social teachings of the Orthodox Church. Questions and frank discussion are encouraged. Youth are also invited to grow in their appreciation of the importance of beauty in the life of faith.

Father Nicolaie is responsible for the content of the youth program and works with members of the community in discussing and supporting its week-by-week progression.



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