



**Orthodox Mission of the
Entrance of the Theotokos
into the Temple**

**306 W. Main Street
Emmitsburg, MD 21727**

**The V. Rev. Elias Yelovich,
Rector**

<http://EntranceMission.org>

***The Prodigality of God's Mercy*
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.'

Of all the parables that our Lord told, it is the Parable of the Prodigal Son which is perhaps the most memorable. We hear it this Sunday primarily as a reminder that we too, like the younger prodigal son in the story, have need of repentance. As we approach the Great Fast, our gaze should turn inward to our heart, the vast depth of which Dostoevsky reminded us, is the place of our encounter with God, the place where the battle between good and evil rages within us.

The younger son was called the “Prodigal Son,” because his sinful rebellion was prodigal in its manifestation. In other words, when he fell into the pit of freely chosen sin, he did so with a gusto and extravagance that was horrible and memorable. Taking his share of his own inheritance prematurely, he licked the dust of the earth with relish, spending it on loose

women and other forms of self-indulgence with abandon. Then, with his money all gone, he is forced to take the filthy and ritually unclean job of tending pigs, hungering even for the pods thrown to them. The process of coming to himself, the beginning of his transformation, is when he realizes that even the lowest paid servant in his father's house is better off than he. He resolves to go back and beg for a position there as the lowliest of servants.

The immense and unexpected surprise of this parable (Remember that every parable has one!) is the way in which his father receives him back. Not only does the father not boot him out the door, but unexpectedly rushes out to meet his son with compassion to receive him back. The father's grace and mercy and love toward his son is genuine and is greater, much greater, in prodigality than his son's sinful rebellion. Who among us can imagine ourselves doing likewise toward someone who had betrayed our trust or turned so strongly against us as did the younger son against his father?

The message of the parable is of course multifarious. We all need to repent! We all need to cease comparing ourselves against one another in prideful condemnation of others; the words of the father in the parable to his older son remind us clearly of that!

But above all, the message of this parable that is proclaimed loudly and forcefully is that our Father in Heaven is like the faither of the two sons in the parable. He, like that earthly father, waits for us to come to ourselves and to look back to Him in earnest desire to be reunited. The sufferings and anguishes of our lives surely give us cause to do so, just as the suffering of the younger son did so to him. And when we do, even just a little, even with a mere thought, look back to our own Heavenly Father for help and salvation, He, our Heavenly Father, rushes in through the Grace of the All-Holy Spirit to receive us back as well. The signet ring is put on our finger, shoes on our feet to show us that we are no longer slaves but His children, and the Feast is prepared. His reaction, the bestowal of Life and Salvation, is extravagant indeed, mercy without limit, love unfeigned, self-giving without limit. The prodigality of our salvation is astonishing, for none of us deserve the limitless bestowal of divine grace that He gives us.

Brothers and Sisters: This above all is the meaning of Great Lent. It is a time of self-examination to be sure, but perhaps even more importantly, it is a time to see and to experience the extravagant, prodigal self-giving of the Eternal Savior of our souls and bodies to each and every one of us! Let us look within so as to turn away from our sin, and let each of us turn back to Him, the Father Who waits for each of us to come home.

Fr. Elias
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306 West Main Street
Emmitsburg, MD 21727
<https://EntranceMission.org>
717-817-0084