

"THE WEEKLY FORERUNNER" *Our Parish Weekly Bulletin*

O Holy John, Prophet, Forerunner, and Baptizer of the Lord, pray to God for us!

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST ORTHODOX CHURCH

2688 California Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pa 15212 412-748-0148, *Talk or Text*
www.OrthodoxPittsburgh.com Father Dave Urban, *Pastor*

A WARM WELCOME TO OUR VISITORS!

Glory to Jesus Christ! (*responded with: Glory forever!*) Slava Isusu Christu! (*Slava na viki!*)
We are happy that you have joined us today! It is our pleasure to have you in our presence this morning and we wish God's Blessings to all who visit with us today and hope you stop again soon! Please see Fr. Dave if you have any questions in regards to our worship or Orthodoxy.

SUNDAY'S SCRIPTURE READINGS

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Glorify God in Body and Spirit

¹²"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be enslaved by anything. ¹³"Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"--and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. ¹⁵Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two shall become one flesh." ¹⁷But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. ¹⁸Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. ¹⁹Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; ²⁰you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

+++ +++ +++

Gospel: Luke 15:11-32

The Parable of the Prodigal and His Brother

¹¹And he said, "There was a man who had two sons; ¹²and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.' And he divided

his living between them. ¹³Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. ¹⁴And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. ¹⁵So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. ¹⁶And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.'" ²⁰And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²²But 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; ²³and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; ²⁴for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to make merry. ²⁵"Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. ²⁷And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.' ²⁸But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, ²⁹but he answered his father, 'Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!' ³¹And he said to him, 'Son, you are always

Normal Fast Week
FEBRUARY 20th



The Prodigal Son Returns!

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20
Gospel: Luke 15: 11-32

Schedule a Confession. Every morning say, 'Today I will be humble.'
Use up/freeze meats this week.

Meatfare
FEBRUARY 27th
FAREWELL TO MEAT TODAY



The Last Judgement

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 8: 8-9:2
Gospel: Matthew 25: 31-46

Pray facing East this week.
Christ is returning from the East and we wait for Him!
Use up/freeze dairy this week.

with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found."

UPCOMING SERVICES

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 20

34th Sunday after Pentecost

Venerable Parthenius, bishop of Lampsacus (4th c.)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26 - ALL-SOULS (1ST OF 5)

9:30am Divine Liturgy & Panachida (*Zadušna Subota*)

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 27

35th Sunday after Pentecost

St. Cyril, Equal-to-the-Apostles, teacher of the Slavs (869)

9:30 am Divine Liturgy

Tone 3; Liturgical Color: **Gold**

Pre-Lenten Breakfast

THURSDAY, MARCH 3

9:30am Moleben to the Theotokos with anointing

+++ +++ +++

BULLETIN BOARD ANNOUNCEMENTS

(Please have submissions to Fr. Dave by Wed.)

+++ +++ +++

Great Lent 2022: We are in this together - Our Journey To Pascha has begun. Last week we began the series of Sundays known as the Triodion. These weeks are meant to prepare us for Great Lent (which prepares us for Holy Week which prepares us for Pascha). Please reach out to Fr. Dave if you have questions about this important fasting period that is around the corner.

+++ +++ +++

**** On Lighting Candles in the Church** – In lighting our two candles, the first thing we should do is make an offering for them. Everything that we have is from God and the first step is to give back to Him for all of His many blessings. The next step is to venerate the icons that guard the candles and lift our prayers to

God on high. Next, we light a candle, remembering all of our loved ones who are sick (or who we just want to pray for) and then a candle for our loved ones who have passed into the next life. We beseech God to have mercy on their souls. Lastly, as we light the candles, we quietly say "Lord have mercy," repenting for our own sinfulness while at the same time "re-igniting" our own flame and recommitting our whole life to God. Thus we begin again to live as light, helping others see the Way in a world of darkness. The importance of lighting our own candles is that you are able to say a prayer for your loved ones. "We light candles for the forgiveness of sins of **both** those who light the candles and of those for whom the candles are lit." (*holy father Nicodemus of Mount Athos*) "Let light shine out of darkness, [and] Who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." (1 Cor. 4:6)

+++ +++ +++

Food Drive – For the month of February we will be collecting unexpired food and donations in order to make a delivery to **St. Cyril of White Lake Food Pantry on Pittsburgh's South Side**. Thank you in advance for your prayers and offerings this month! The list of food items they are looking for is available in the church hall or at:

stmaryorthodoxchurch.net/stcyrilfoodpantry.html

+++ +++ +++

All-Soul Saturday (*Zadušna Subota*) Liturgies with Panachidas for 2022 will be on **Feb. 26th, Mar. 19th, 26th, Apr. 2nd, and Jun. 11th**. If you are not working on a Saturday, come to church, pray with us, and light two candles for your living and departed loved ones. **Please inform Fr Dave if there are any additions to be made to your Commemoration Diptychs (*Hramoty*)**. Offering Envelopes and cards are available in the vestibule.

+++ +++ +++

*** **Camp Nazareth** The Pittsburgh camping week will be from **July 17 to 23**. Registration will begin on March 15. Staff applications are also being accepted. Visit www.campnazareth.org for more info.

+++ +++

* **Pre-Lenten Breakfast** will be on **February 27**. Please sign up in the hall so we have a rough idea of how many will stay

+++ +++

* **Presanctified Liturgies** – Our Wednesday services will be at 6:00pm at the church along with Fridays at 9:30am.

+++ +++

* **Lenten Mission** – Our deanery mission will be on the North Side on **March 27**

+++ +++

Future Services are listed on our online “Parish Calendar” which is continually updated at: www.orthodoxpittsburgh.com/parish-calendar (Please ask Fr. Dave if you want a printed copy)

+++ +++

OUR STEWARDSHIP GIFTS TO GOD	
Stewardship Offerings:	\$ 2350
Candles/Eternal Lamp Stewardship:	\$ 152
Envelope Stewardship	\$ 394
Total Collections:	\$ 2896
Capital Improvement Fund:	\$ 70
Relocation Fund:	\$ 300

Weekly Candle Intentions / Memorials were offered last week by Nelson Family; Tim Martin; Mary Jane Hudak; Melanie Shuster; Eleanor Sanger; Mirilovich Family; Patty Watson; Cindy Pavilonis

+++

The Eternal Lamp was offered last week by Matthew Peifer in memory of parents, +Jack and +Viola Peifer, and by Cindy Pavilonis in memory of +Marge Huron. May Their Memory Be Eternal!

+++

The Christ Cross Candles were offered last week anonymously for the health and safety of the parishioners of St. John’s. Many Years!

+++

The Theotokos Cross Candles were offered last week anonymously in memory of the departed loved ones of St. John’s. Memory Eternal! Vičnaya Pamyat!

+++ +++

Candles - Our minimum candle offering has been requested at \$3 for a long time (decades?). Starting **March 1, 2022**, we are going to change to the following: * a minimum \$4 donation for the weekly vigil candles and * a minimum \$1 donation for the smaller votive candles will be requested. Also, in the same manner as the free-will offering requested for the Eternal Lamp each week, * a free-will offering can now be given for the “Christ Cross Candles” and “Theotokos Cross Candles” (on the candle stands) *In Honor of (namesday, birthday, anniversary, etc.) or In Memory of someone.*

+++ +++

On-Line Giving is available from our parish website to donate to the: *General Stewardship Fund, Capital Improvement Fund, and/or Relocation Fund.* The best option is to come to church and give your offering to God in His Temple (2nd best is to mail it in to Tim Martin, 2225 McAleer Rd., Sewickley, PA 15143). If you miss coming to church for a week, online giving allows you another option to “catch up” on your weekly stewardship. You can also set up a recurring donation online. For our parish to continue it’s ministries, outreach, and general bill paying, your generosity and stewardship is needed.

+++ +++

Bulletin Sponsor – If you wish to sponsor a bulletin In Honor of (namesday, birthday, anniversary, etc.) or In Memory of someone, please do so by signing up on the sheet in the church hall or by contacting Fr. Dave (email, text, or call). An additional stewardship offering to the Church is requested.

+++ +++

Live-Broadcast – If you are unable to attend church services, please pray along with our Cathedral online: www.acrod.org/organizations/cathedral/live/

+++ +++

Additional Material can be found in “The Voice” monthly newsletter on the first Sunday of each month.

+++ +++

ORTHODOXY AROUND THE ‘BURGH AND OUR DIOCESE

*** **Diocesan Lenten Retreat** will be held on **Saturday, March 19th** from 9a to 5p at St. Nicholas (903 Ann St., Homestead, PA 15120). Please note the date change and sign up in the hall if you will be attending.

** **Pan-Orthodox Choir** - The band is getting back together again! Rehearsals will be on Saturdays from Noon to 2pm at St. Nicholas (320 Munson Ave., McKees Rocks, PA 15136)

+++ +++

***MAN OF GOD** - Exiled unjustly, convicted without trial, slandered without cause. MAN OF GOD depicts the trials and tribulations of Saint Nektarios of Aegina, as he bears the unjust hatred of his enemies while preaching the Word of God. View the trailer at: www.imdb.com/title/tt6060964/ **There will be a one-day showing of this movie in Pittsburgh Cinemark Theatres on Monday, March 21 at 7:00 pm.** Contact Fr. Dave for more information.

VISIT OUR DIOCESE ON-LINE
Diocesan Website: www.acrod.org
Camp Nazareth: www.campnazareth.org
FB: www.facebook.com/acroddioecese
Twitter: twitter.com/acrodnews
YouTube: youtube.com/acroddioecese

LIVES OF THE SAINTS

Sainted Parthenias, Bishop Of Lampsaka,
Commemorated on February 20/7

Sainted Parthenias, Bishop of Lampsaka, was a native of the city of Melitopolis (Asia Minor), where his father Christopher served as deacon. The youth was not learned at grammar, but he well assimilated the Holy Scripture by being present in church for Divine-services. He possessed a good heart, and the money he earned working as a fisherman he distributed to the poor. Filled with the grace of God, Saint Parthenias from age 18 in the Name of Christ healed the sick, cast out demons and worked other miracles. Learning about the virtuous life of the youth, the Melitopolis bishop Philip gave him an education and ordained him presbyter. In the year 325 during the reign of Constantine the Great, the Kysikhos archbishop Achilles made him bishop of the city of Lampsaka (Asia Minor). In the city were many pagans, and the saint fervently began to spread the faith in Christ, affirming it by the will of God through many miracles and healings of the sick. The people began to forsake their pagan manners of belief, and the saint then went to the emperor Constantine the Great with a petition to tear down the idolous pagan-temple and build in its place a Christian church. The

emperor received the saint with honour, gave him the edict for the destruction of the pagan-temple, and furnished him means for the building of a church. Returning to Lampsaka, Saint Parthenias gave orders to tear down the idolous pagan-temple and to erect amidst the city a beautiful church of God. Having found in one of the torn-down temples a large stone suitable to be made the holy altar-table in the church, the saint gave orders to set to work about it and move it for the construction of the church. Through the malice of the devil, which became enraged at the removal of the stone from the pagan-temple, the cart overturned and killed the driver Eutykhion. Saint Parthenias restored him to life by his prayer and shamed the devil, who wanted to frustrate the work of God. The kindly saint was so great, that he refused healing to no one of the multitude coming to him or who chanced to meet him by the wayside, whether suffering bodily illnesses or afflicted with unclean spirits. People even stopped going to physicians, since Saint Parthenias healed all the sick for free, in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. With the great power of the Name of Christ the saint banished an host of demons from people, from their homes, and from the waters of the sea. When the saint cast out a devil from a certain man, who had been afflicted by it since childhood, the unclean spirit began to implore the saint to give him another place of habitation. The saint promised to indicate such a place and, having opened his mouth, said to the demon: "Come and dwell in me". The demon, as though stung by fire, cried out: "How canst I go into the house of God?", and vanished off into places desolate and untrodden. An unclean spirit, cast out from the house where the imperial porphyry-dye was prepared, cried out for everyone to hear, that a Divine fire was pursuing him with the fire of Gehenna.

Thus, have shown people the great power of faith in Christ, the saint converted a multitude of idol-worshippers to the true God. Saint Parthenias died peacefully and was solemnly buried alongside the cathedral church of Lampsaka, in a chapel built by him.

PRAYER CORNER

For the Health of... Patricia, Lawrence, Michelle, Paul, Kathleen, John, Joanne, Barbara, Brian, Kristina, Sean, Julia, Susan, Juliana, Fredrick, Kenneth, Michael, and Roberta ...*through the prayers of St. Nectarios the Wonderworker; St. Luke, the*

Surgeon; and St. Panteleimon, the Healer.

+++ +++ +++

For the souls of the newly departed... +John Neimer (2/18), +Marge Huron (2/6), *Pani* +Mary Panchisin (2/2), *Father's great-aunt*, +Helen Shoemaker (1/17), Gloria (1/16), +Peter Papadakos (1/14) ...*May the Lord God grant them blessed repose where there is no pain sorrow or mourning. May they be Eternal in God's Memory.*

+++ +++ +++

DEVOTIONAL PRAYERS OF THE MONTH

+++ +++ +++

A Prayer When Lighting A Candle

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and forever. Amen.

Set our hearts on fire with love for You,
O Christ our God, so that in its flame we may love You with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength, and our neighbors as ourselves, so that by keeping Your commandments we may glorify You, the giver of all good gifts. Amen.

+++ +++ +++

from the Lenten Triodion

Open to me the doors of repentance, O Life-Giver; for my spirit hastens early towards Your holy temple, bearing the temple of my body all defiled; but in Your compassion purify me by Your gracious mercy. Amen.

+++ +++ +++

[“By the Waters of Babylon” is the entire Psalm 137, sung to a plaintive melody, during Matins (the morning service). It is only sung in church the three Sundays that precede Great Lent: Sunday of the Prodigal Son, The Last Judgment (Meatfare), and Forgiveness (Cheesefare).]

+++

A Prayer in Exile (Psalm 137): Longing for Zion in a Foreign Land

By the waters of Babylon,
there we sat down and wept,
when we remembered Zion.

² On the willows there
we hung up our harps.

³ For there our captors
required of us songs,
and our tormentors, mirth, saying,
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

⁴ How shall we sing the LORD's song
in a foreign land?

⁵ If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither!

⁶ Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem
above my highest joy!

⁷ Remember, O LORD, against the sons of Edom
the day of Jerusalem,
how they said, “Raze it, raze it!
Down to its foundations!”

⁸ O daughter of Babylon, you who are devastated!
Happy shall he be who requites you
with what you have done to us!

⁹ Happy shall he be who takes your little ones
and dashes them against the rock!

+++ +++ +++

The Jesus Prayer

(Inhale) O Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God,
(Exhale) have mercy on me, a sinner!
(Repeat until your heart is calm...)

+++ +++ +++

A prayer for our Neighborhoods

by Archbishop Demetrios of America

I pray to you, God, for the families of my neighborhood. Visit them. Throw their troubles out of them and bring hope. Make the daily cares that devour the heart disappear. Present solutions to life's problems. Settle the disturbed relationships among members of different families whom I know or do not know. O Lord, remind the people of our area that You exist, that You are a strong and loving Protector. Keep away, Lord, anything that causes the disappearance of peace from souls, and the escape of sleep from our eyes. Stay a little while more tonight in our neighborhood. Spread peace along with the night. Let the harshness of the day and its struggles not spread over the night. Amen.

+++ +++ +++

A Prayer for our Diocesan Clergy

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 Bishop *(name)*, and our spiritual father *(name)*, and all our diocesan clergy, who are laboring in Your vineyard for the salvation of all those whom You have entrusted to them. 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.

+++ +++ +++



+++ +++ +++

SPIRITUAL CONSIDERATIONS

Father is available to meet Monday thru Friday from 8:30am to 3:00pm or by appointment.

+++

Online Community: Please email Fr. Dave to receive the weekly bulletin via email.

Parish Phone Tree - Please call Fr. Dave to be added.

Emergency Sick Calls – Please notify Fr Dave when you or a family member are going into the hospital or having a procedure. He will pray with you and you will receive the Mystery of Holy Anointing (Unction) to be fully prepared.

Mystery of Confession – Opportunities are available after every service, most Saturdays during fasting periods from 11am to 1pm, OR by appointment.

Holy Communion/Eucharist – The reception of the Holy Eucharist is encouraged for all Orthodox Christians who have properly prepared themselves, with fasting from midnight on, regular Confession, and forgiveness for all people. Those who are not Orthodox may receive *a blessing* from the chalice.

Lapsed Members – You are always welcome home and we want you back! Generally speaking, sincere participation in the Mysteries of Confession, Communion, and regular attendance at the divine services are all that is required to begin parish life anew! See Fr. Dave for specific details.

Baptisms – Two God-parents are required, at least one of whom must be Orthodox by faith (and the other a practicing Christian). In the case of infants, the newly-baptized must have one name that is Christian in origin. Parents/grandparents/guardians

must also promise to bring the child up in an Orthodox Christian way of life. Please consult Fr. Dave for more details.

Adult Chrismation – New parishioners are always welcome! In the case of adults seeking entrance into the Church, a period of prescribed catechism will be established with Fr. Dave before administration of the Mysteries. An Orthodox Christian sponsor is also required.

Marriages – are only solemnized on Saturdays or Sundays. They are not performed during fasting periods and certain Feast Days. Please consult Fr. Dave ASAP for more details (*before* arrangements are made for the hall).

Church Funerals – are provided for practicing Orthodox Christians who are current in their spiritual responsibilities and their stewardship. Otherwise, burial is from the funeral home. The Church does not permit cremation.

+++ +++ +++

MONTHLY COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Food Drive – This month, through the efforts of our Sr. ACRY, we will be collecting unexpired food and donations in order to make a delivery to **St. Cyril of White Lake Food Pantry** (at Holy Assumption of St. Mary Orthodox Church, 105 S. 19th St., Pgh, PA 15203). Volunteers are needed on Thursdays from 5:15 to 6:45 to assist in the distribution of these goods. (If interested, please contact Fr Patrick first at 412-431-6428) Thank you in advance for your prayers and offerings this month! Here is a list of food items that they are looking for:

- ✓ Ready to eat canned fruit or vegetables
- ✓ Peanut Butter
- ✓ Jelly
- ✓ Canned Soups
- ✓ Canned Chili
- ✓ Macaroni & Cheese
- ✓ Spaghetti Sauce
- ✓ Pasta
- ✓ Noodle/Rice Mixes
- ✓ Small Package of Rice or Noodles
- ✓ Canned Stews
- ✓ Canned or Pouches of Tuna, Salmon or Chicken
- ✓ Boxed Meals ready to be prepared

- ✓ Baked Beans
- ✓ Canned and Boxed 100% Juice
- ✓ Crackers
- ✓ Tuna Helper Box
- ✓ Instant Cereal
- ✓ Boxed Cereal
- ✓ Canned Pastas (Chef Boyardee, Ravioli, etc.)
- ✓ Canned Meats

+++ +++ +++

ONLINE BONUSES

How to stay connected with the departed:

- ✕ Pray for them during the Divine Liturgy,
- ✕ Remember them in your daily prayers,
- ✕ Organize memorial services for their remembrance on their anniversary,
- ✕ Honor their memory by following their good deeds,
- ✕ Light a candle weekly for your departed loved ones,
- ✕ Give alms on their behalf, and
- ✕ Take care of their tombs [graves].

+++ +++ +++

Spiritual Vitamin:

“I wish you peace, God’s peace, which transcends all human understanding and unites man with God. To be blessed with such peace one must strive diligently to acquire a peaceful disposition of soul, to be patient with one another’s weaknesses, and to be all forgiving toward all who have offended you.”

Abbot Nikon Vorobiev

Abbot Nikon Letters to Spiritual Children p.40

+++ +++ +++

2022 Sunday Schedule for the Great Fast

March 13 - Orthodoxy Sunday Vespers at All Saints (Canonsburg) at 4:30 pm

March 19 - Lenten Retreat at St. Nicholas (Homestead) from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm (**rescheduled**)

March 20 - Lenten Mission at St Michael's Rankin **

March 27 - Lenten Mission at St John's Northside **

April 3 - Lenten Mission at St John's East Pgh. **

April 10 - Lenten Mission at St John's Ambridge **

** *Lenten Mission: Confessions starting at 3:30, Vespers at 4:00, and Fellowship Meal following*

+++ +++ +++

COMING BACK TO CHURCH

by Sister Vassa

"And he said, ‘There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.’ And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself (εἰς ἑαυτὸν δὲ ἐλθὼν) he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired servants.’ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him...” (Lk 15: 11-20)

The Parable of the Prodigal Son makes me think of the journey many of us make, of taking "our share" from the Church of our childhood, having been baptized and nourished there, at least with the basics of light and darkness; then becoming dissatisfied with the whole Church-thing for this or that reason and wandering off to what turns out to be nowhere (some nameless "far country"); and finally, when we are broken enough and "in want" enough, we come back. Because we never found anything out there quite like it. And when we come back after that kind of experience, our hearts having been broken, we are no longer dissatisfied with this or that thing that is lacking or "wrong" with the whole Church-thing. Now we come with the kind of surrender that says, I'm Yours, make me as one of Your hired servants. Now we're glad just to be there, as one of the congregation with no special position or role, as one

of the "servants" of a God Who liberates us from the bondage(s) and chaos of nowhere.

I think this is why, when I look around in church, I observe we have mostly middle-aged and older people in the crowd, along with some families with small children. The few young adults are mostly those with special roles like serving in the altar or singing in the choir. I think those many absent young adults who, some years ago, were here as small children with their families, are still out there on their journey through a "far country."

As we prepare for the liturgical "high season" of Lent, which may seem this daunting thing, with all its fasting, long church-services, etc., - especially if we've been wandering about in our "nowhere," - the Parable of the Prodigal Son invites us to consider just coming back, as we are. We don't have to be models of fasting and praying or of all sorts of virtue as was the older son in the parable quoted above; or as was the Pharisee in the Parable of the Publican and Pharisee. We see also the tax-collector who suited up and showed up at the temple, as he was. And the story of Zacchaeus, read in our churches a few weeks ago, showed us a similar case of a man who came out to see the Lord, as best he could. Let's also suit up and show up for Lent, is what I'm thinking, because there's nothing like it. God misses us, and accepts us as we are, regardless of where we've been this whole time and what we have or have not done, and regardless of what we can "do" as far as the "work" of Lent goes. God, have mercy on all of us. Let's all come home, as we are.

(For anyone interested in healthy meal-plans and reflections for every day of Lent, our "HealthyFast Lenten Guidebook," prepared with certified nutritionist Denise Canellos, is now on sale and available as a pdf-download here:

<https://www.coffeewithsistervassa.com/shop/?fbclid=IwAR23DBF2ZJjOS38msz8uKWljv55SDXleRSj3EKQw6dYk-1QGTQY7qRKy9rg>