

OUR MEANS OF RECONCILING WITH GOD

From the time Adam and Eve exercised their free will to choose to disobey God, man has had the need for forgiveness. We all have fallen short of the high expectations that the Lord has for all of His children, allowing sin to overcome us again and again. Sin separates us from our Heavenly Father, but fortunately, He has provided us with a means of reconciling with Him through the Sacrament of Holy Confession. Since Confession is such an important part of the Lenten season, let us take a closer look at this Mystery of the Church.

Confession entails much more than merely listing and expressing some degree of sorrow for our sins. Before coming to Confession, it is necessary for us to examine our conscience – we must sincerely search our souls and determine where we have strayed from the path God has

charted for us. Our confession must be an honest attempt to admit the many ways we have transgressed God's Laws. Certainly, our All-Knowing God cannot be fooled! For the Grace of God to truly enter us through the Sacrament of Confession, however, we must experience a real feeling of REPENTANCE. Repentance literally means "to change." Confession must bring about a change in our lifestyle. Confessing our sinful ways is one thing . . . casting aside and walking away from our sinful deeds is another matter entirely!

During the Great Fast, may we all avail ourselves to the wonderful opportunity the Church gives us to "make things right" with the Lord, through the Sacrament of Holy Confession. Seek out the spiritual help this Sacrament provides.

Icon by Austin Kachek - Manville, NJ

The Orthodox Weekly Bulletin Vestal, Cliffwood, New Jersey Litho in U.S.A.

ABOUT COMMUNION

We are happy that you have joined us today. Indeed, we pray for the "unity of the Faith" for the day when all of Christianity are united as ONE and can share a common Chalice. However, this is not the case as yet. Please note that Holy Communion, the actual Body & Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, is only for Members of the Orthodox Church who have prepared themselves through prayer, fasting, and confession, & arrived before the Gospel reading. However, everyone is welcome to partake of the blessed bread and receive a blessing from the pastor at the dismissal. If you are interested, you may inquire with the pastor how you can become a member.

If you are a guest or otherwise not a regular communicant, please give your baptismal name when receiving.

CONFESSION



THE SINS OF THOSE WHO
ASK FOR PARDON ARE FORGIVEN



St. Anthony The Great Antiochian Orthodox Church

4031 Aurora Rd., Melbourne, Florida
Mailing address : P.O.Box 267, Melbourne, FL 32902
Very Rev. Fr. Elia Shalhoub, Pastor & Dean of South Florida Deanery
Phone: (305) 812-4940 , E-Mail: elia_shalhoub@yahoo.com

WELCOME TO ST. ANTHONY'S

Where people from around the world come together to serve God and our community. We are glad you are worshiping with us today! This Church is one community of many in the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. The Church of Antioch belongs to two thousand years of evangelization, teaching, history, and tradition which expresses the continued commitment of its members to the Orthodox Christian faith in the Lord Jesus Christ!

St. Anthony Church is a Pan-Orthodox community, under the omophorion of His Eminence Metropolitan SABA within Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America.

If you are a first time visitor, please fill out the guest form located on the literature table.

We want you to feel at home in prayer and worship. Please submit your names to the ushers and introduce yourself to Fr. Elia at the end of the service so he may welcome you personally.

Following services, please join us for sharing of fellowship, coffee, and food.

DIVINE LITURGY VARIABLES ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2025 SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON

MARTYR PAMPHILOS, PRIEST OF CAESAREA IN PALESTINE AND HIS COMPANIONS;
VENERABLE FLAVIAN THE HERMIT

~ During the Little Entrance, chant the Resurrectional Apolytikion. The Eisodikon (Entrance Hymn) is "O come, let us worship... save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead..." After the Little Entrance, chant these hymns in the following order:

RESURRECTIONAL APOLYTIKION IN TONE ONE

While the stone was sealed by the Jews, and the soldiers were guarding Thy most pure body, Thou didst arise on the third day, O Savior, granting life to the world. For which cause the heavenly powers cried aloud unto Thee, O giver of life. Glory to Thy Resurrection, O Christ, glory to Thy kingdom, glory to Thy providence, O Thou Who alone art the lover of mankind.

~ Now sing the apolytikion of the patron saint or feast of the temple.

APOLYTIKION OF ST. ANTHONY THE GREAT

Thou didst become like the zealous Elijah in his condition, and followed John the Baptist in his upright ways. Becoming a dweller in the wilderness, and an establisher of the universe by thy prayer O Father Anthony. Wherefore intercede thou with Christ our God to save our souls.

KONTAKION FOR THE PRODIGAL SON IN TONE THREE

(**Special Melody: Today the Virgin**)

Foolishly I sprang away * from Thy great fatherly glory, * and dispersed in wicked deeds * the riches that Thou didst give me. * With the Prodigal I therefore * cry unto Thee now: * I have sinned against Thee, O compassionate Father. * But receive me in repentance; * make me as one of * Thy hired servants, O Lord.

Please support our sponsors



PERI KIROS
321-432-1993
perikiros@gmail.com

WWW.MYGREEKAGENT.COM



Address: 144 Fifth Ave Indialantic FL 32903
Phone #: 321-727-8944
Website: Skewersgrille.com



Mario J. Mandese D.C.
Address
1300 Pine Tree Dr #7
IHB, FL 32937
Phone: (321) 257-7593
Fax: (321) 420-1762

If you would like to promote your business, and support our bulletin, place your ad here. Only \$100 a year - that's less then \$2 per ad. To place your ad in our weekly bulletin call or email Yuliya: (321) 960-9564 or



FERGUSON PEST MANAGEMENT

321-258-8311

140 Tomahawk Dr. #M57
Indian Harbour Beach, FL 32937

Georges Ferguson
Certified Operator



FLAMES
Modern Mediterranean Grill
Live Entertainment Tuesday thru Saturday
Flames kitchen reignites the Mediterranean flare in today's culinary world of inventions. We honor our traditional recipes with a new take on old favorites. Our scratch kitchen adds culmination to our passion for good food.
1270 N Wickham Rd - Ste 40 - Melbourne, FL 32935
(321) 777-6677 ♦ www.flamesgrille.com



Florentine Jewelers
3RD GENERATION JEWELERS SINCE 1928
321-777-0093
1270 Highway A1A
Satellite Beach, FL 32937
f t i p e
FlorentineJewelry.com



Crochet In The Shade
Handcrafted Dragons, Aliens and other Fantastic Creatures
MESSAGE QUESTIONS TO
Chris (727) 857-9351
Nan (321) 961-6150
crochet.in.the.shade@gmail.com



EARLY BIRD PRICE

Now Until April 30, 2025

~~\$ 350~~
\$ 330

Per Person Total Value \$380

**Buy your Ticket Books Today
and Save!**

HOTEL REGISTRATION

Hyatt Regency O'Hare Chicago

\$ 189 PER NIGHT

\$10/night for parking
Complimentary shuttle to and from O'Hare

Reserve your Hotel Room!

"CONTINUING THE ANTIOCHIAN LEGACY IN CHICAGO"

Celebrating the
50TH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE UNIFICATION OF
NEW YORK AND TOLEDO
and the
120TH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE WORD MAGAZINE

- 100+ EVENTS AND MEETINGS
- CHURCH SERVICES
- ARCHDIOCESE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
- "ASK ABOUNA" ALL WEEK
- CLUB SAINT GEORGE AGES 4-12
- BIBLE BOWL
- ORATORICAL FESTIVAL
- TEEN EVENTS
- YAM EVENTS
- WORKSHOPS
- "MY KIND OF TOWN"
- ARABIAN NIGHTS DINNER AND HAFLI
- ANTIOCHIAN LEGACY BANQUET AND GRAND HAFLI

Visit
WWW.AC2025CHICAGO.ORG

"Then Mary said, 'Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her."
Luke 1:38

THE MIRACULOUS WEeping ICON

Cicero, IL



With the blessing of His Eminence Metropolitan Saba, for the first time, venerate the Miraculous Weeping Icon in the hotel Chapel all week.



SCAN ME

Contact us

Host Parish

Saint George Antiochian
Orthodox Church

1220 S. 60th Court
Cicero, IL 60804

(708) 656-2927

Info@AC2025Chicago.org

AC2025Chicago.org

THE EPISTLE

Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us. Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous.

The Reading from the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians. (6:12-20)

Brethren, 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. Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food; but 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. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. Do 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! Do 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." But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him. Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. Do 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; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

THE GOSPEL

The Reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke. (15:11-32)

The Lord spoke this parable: "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 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; treat 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. 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.' And they began to make merry. Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but 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. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"



Upcoming Events

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>This Week</p> <p>Sunday, 2/17 8:45 am: Matins Service 10:00 am: Divine Liturgy Coffee Hour: <i>After Liturgy, all are welcome</i></p> <p>Wednesday, 1/19 5:30pm: Great Vespers 6pm: Choir Practice</p> <p>Saturday, 2/22: 4:00 pm: Catechism Class 5:30 pm: Great Vespers <i>followed by Confessions</i></p> | <p>Upcoming Sunday Calendar</p> <p>Below lists the upcoming Sundays from January 26th until Holy Pascha, which falls on April 20th this year. We invite you to join us each week for Sunday Liturgy to celebrate this special commemoration of Jesus' life, death, and Resurrection. <i>Please mark these special dates on your calendar.</i></p> <p>February 16: Prodigal Son February 23: Meatfare Sunday (Last Judgement) March 2: Cheesefare Sunday (Forgiveness Sunday) March 3: Beginning of Great Lent March 9: 1st Sunday of Lent (Sunday of Orthodoxy) (Bring your icon to Church for the procession) March 16: 2nd Sunday of Lent March 23: 3rd Sunday of Lent March 30: 4th Sunday of Lent April 6: 5th Sunday of Lent April 13: PALM SUNDAY April 18: GOOD FRIDAY April 20: HOLY PASCHA April 27: THOMAS SUNDAY</p> |
| <p><u>Parish Annual Meeting Rescheduled to</u> <u>Sunday, March 9th</u></p> <p>* After the Liturgy</p> <p>*Please fill out the Proxy Form if you cannot attend.</p> | |

Announcements

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
|  | <p>February 16th February 23rd</p> | <p>Epistle Readers</p> <p>Bill Jackson Jennifer Riter</p> | <p>St. Paul to the Corinthians. (6:12-20) St. Paul to the Corinthians. (8:8-9:2)</p> |
|--|--|--|--|



THANK YOU TO OUR COFFEE HOUR SPONSORS FOR TODAY'S MEAL
PLEASE SIGN UP ON THE CALENDAR IN THE NARTHEX
TO CONTRIBUTE FOOD TO A FUTURE COFFEE HOUR



Please pray for the healing of Father Elia and Kh. Odette, Debbie Thieme, Adriana Theodoropoulos, Michealle Carey, Beverly Delida, Alix Hall, Nina and Diogo Penas, Beth Manzini, John Archambeau, Alex & Soula, Nicholas Elliott, William Snell, Vasilika Yardines, Gregory Warner

ST. ANTHONY THE GREAT
ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

2025 Annual General Meeting Proxy
February 9, 2025

KNOW ALL PERSONS BY THESE PRESENTS:

The undersigned voting member(s) of St. Anthony the Great Antiochian Orthodox Church hereby constitute and appoint _____ as PROXY with powers of substitution for and in the name and place of the undersigned, to act on my behalf to establish a quorum and vote on any issues that are presented for a vote by the membership at this Special Meeting on Sunday, February 9th, 2025 at St. Anthony the Great Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church located at 4031 Aurora Rd, Melbourne, FL 32934.

Dated: _____

Member

Dated: _____

Member

If you are unable to attend our General Meeting, please sign this form and give it to Fr. Elia prior to the event.

ST. ANTHONY ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
2025 PARISH COUNCIL NOMINATIONS

It is time for us to begin developing our Parish Council for the year 2025. Please consider nominating someone from the parish who would serve the community well. You could also consider nominating yourself.

- Remember that the qualifications for election to the Parish Council are:
- That the candidate is 18 years of age or older.
- That the candidate has been a voting, pledging member of the parish for at least the last six months of 2024.
- That the candidate has fulfilled the canonical requirements of the Orthodox Faith.
- That the candidate has completed a pledge form for the year 2025.




In addition, it is required that the nominees' 2024 pledges, as well as Archdiocesan dues, be paid and up to date. The Following Parish Council members' term is up: Alex Paul Skaff, who has already served 1 term. He is eligible for another Term. Zachary Ferrell who completed Olga Munoz term, he is eligible. He can be elected for another Term.

Being a Parish Council member means more than just attending a monthly meeting. This responsibility also requires the member to chair or be on committees when called upon, throughout the years of Parish Council membership. In addition, participation at functions and work days is also required. The nominating committee will arrange a meeting with each candidate to ensure their qualifications and willingness to serve. Please turn in or mail completed nomination forms to Susan Perers (Chairman of the Nominating Committee) or Fr. Elia. Thank you for your consideration. Nominating Committee are Susan Perers, Anonymous & Fr. Elia. St. Anthony Antiochian Orthodox Church

PARISH COUNCIL NOMINATION FORM
After filling out the form, give it to Fr. Elia or Susan Perers:

I would like to nominate _____ to serve on the Parish Council of St. Anthony Church. I understand that the nomination is subject to the qualifications for election that are stated in the Constitution of St. Anthony Church. I also understand that the person nominated must accept the nomination in order to be elected. Elections will take place on February 9, 2025 at the General Assembly Meeting of the parish.

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Feb 16– March 2 Fasting Calendar</p> <p>Abstain from: meat, dairy, eggs, fish, olive oil & wine: Wed 2/19 & Fri 2/21</p> <p>Abstain from meat: Mon 2/24 – Sun 3/2</p> <p>View calendar at https://tinyurl.com/AOCfast2025</p> | <p>February Birthdays & Anniversaries</p> <p>02: Isaac Vaughn</p> <p>04: Alyssa Stumpf (Karas)</p> <p>06: Stuart Zolton</p> <p>Samuel Brown</p> <p>Marsha Good</p> <p>10: Yuliya Warner</p> <p>11: Adrian Matos</p> <p>14: Jeffrey and Holly Dick Wedding Anniversary</p> <p>15: Susan Perers</p> <p>17: Lilly Munoz</p> <p>23: Mike and Janet Gorczynski Wed. Anniversary</p> <p>24: Clay (Richard) Gardenhire</p> <p>May God Grant You Many Years!</p> |
| <p>Blessing of Homes 2025</p> <p>Fr. Elia is doing House Blessings by request, only if you fill the Request Form. Please keep in Mind that Fr. Elia is available only on the weekend.</p> | |



WISDOM

The Virtue of Wisdom differs from knowledge in that wisdom is normally understood as the immediate insight into things, the practical understanding and grasping of what is true and right in its living expression and form. In the holy Scriptures, the Spirit of the Lord is called “the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord” (Isaiah 11.2). It is this Spirit that the Lord gives to those who believe in Him. In the Church, as the Apostle Paul says, divine wisdom is given to the spiritual person. The wise man, who possesses the Spirit of God, can show forth the “knowledge of salvation to His people . . . to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1.77–79). The opposite of divine wisdom is sinful foolishness which brings man to calamity, sorrow, ruin and death (cf. Prov 10–14). In the spiritual life of the Church, it is the wise men, the spiritual masters and saintly teachers, who have gained divine wisdom and so are made competent to direct and guide the destiny of men’s immortal souls. It is for this reason that all men should submit themselves to their instruction and rule.

- Fr. Thomas Hopko 'The Virtues'

Your servant in Christ,

Fr. Elia Shalhoub

Very Rev. Fr. Elia Shalhoub, Pastor

THANK YOU TO OUR SISTER PARISH ST. KATHERINE ORTHODOX
CHURCH FOR THEIR GIFT

"JANUARY 27, 2025 - FEAST OF THE REMOVAL OF THE RELICS OF SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM
FR. ELIA AND THE FAITHFUL OF SAINT ANTHONY,
"BEHOLD NOW, WHAT IS SO GOOD OR SO PLEASANT AS FOR BROTHERS TO DWELL IN UNITY?" PS. 132 (LXX)
CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR RECENT ANNIVERSARY! PLEASE ACCEPT THIS GIFT FROM OUR FAMILY TO
YOURS, TO HELP IN YOUR PLANNED EXPANSION.
MAY GOD CONTINUE TO BLESS US AND HAVE MERCY ON US!"

IN CHRIST,
FR. ZACHARIAS,
SAINT KATHERINE
ORTHODOX CHURCH,
MELBOURNE, FLORIDA



TODAY'S FEAST: SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON

Through the parable of today's Gospel, our Saviour has set forth three things for us: the condition of the sinner, the rule of repentance, and the greatness of God's compassion. The divine Fathers have put this reading the week after the parable of the Publican and Pharisee so that, seeing in the person of the Prodigal Son our own wretched condition -- inasmuch as we are sunken in sin, far from God and His Mysteries -- we might at last come to our senses and make haste to return to Him by repentance during these holy days of the Fast.

Furthermore, those who have wrought many great iniquities, and have persisted in them for a long time, oftentimes fall into despair, thinking that there can no longer be any forgiveness for them; and

so being without hope, they fall every day into the same and even worse iniquities. Therefore, the divine Fathers, that they might root out the passion of despair from the hearts of such people, and rouse them to the deeds of virtue, have set the present parable at the forecourts of the Fast, to show them the surpassing goodness of God's compassion, and to teach them that there is no sin -- no matter how great it may be -- that can overcome at any time His love for man.

PAMPHILIOS THE MARTYR & HIS COMPANIONS

This Martyr contested during the reign of Maximian, in the year 290, in Caesarea of Palestine, and was put to death by command of Firmilian, the Governor of Palestine. His fellow contestants' names are Valens, Paul, Seleucus, Porphyrius, Julian, Theodulus, and five others from Egypt: Elias, Jeremias, Esaias, Samuel, and Daniel. Their martyrdom is recorded in Book VIII, ch. 11 of Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*, called *The Martyrs of Palestine*.



ST. ANTHONY THE GREAT ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

4031 Aurora Rd., Melbourne, FL. 32934

www.StAnthonyOrthodoxChurch.com

Very Rev. Fr. Elia Shalhoub

Cell: **(305) 812-4940**

Elia_shalhoub@yahoo.com

Follow us on "FACEBOOK" <https://www.facebook.com/st.anthonyorthodox>

2025 HOUSE BLESSING FORM



IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO HAVE YOUR HOUSE

BLESSED,

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING FORM ASAP.

CHOOSE THREE ALTERNATE DATES AND TIMES, AND GIVE DIRECTIONS TO YOUR HOME AS WELL.

**When the priest comes to bless your home please make sure to have an Icon; a candle
ready and your list of the names (Living & Deceased) to be prayed for.**

PLEASE GIVE DIRECTIONS TO YOUR HOME AS WELL.

Thank you, V. Rev. Fr. Elia Shalhoub, Pastor

NAME: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

ADDRESS: _____

TELEPHONE: _____

(HOME)

(OFFICE)

(CELL)

DATES/TIMES REQUESTED (Please list three date/time options):

*(Please let me know if you are available or not during the day on Saturday & Sunday only from 12:00
Noon to 5:00 p.m. or if you prefer an Evening Visit.)*

Option #1: _____

Option #2: _____

Option #3: _____

DIRECTIONS & EXACT ADDRESS

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM TO FATHER ELIA AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

EPIPHANY 2025 – BLESSING OF HOMES

The central sign of our acceptance of God's sanctification of the creation is the blessing of the homes of faithful Orthodox Christians.

We bless homes:

- a. To reveal the home as what God created it to be, a way to heaven.
- b. To rid the home of every evil.
- c. To know that the family is a small church unit in Christ, to consecrate the home and all activity in it to God.
- d. To have the home and all who live in it with the fullness of God.

Only the Church reveals what life is, and she alone is the Kingdom of God on earth. The Church lives within Christ, revealing Him to us. As the Church, we sprinkle blessed water throughout the home, as we chant, ***"When you, O Lord, were baptized in the Jordan, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest. For the Fathers voice bore witness to you and called you His Beloved Son, while the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, confirmed these words. O Christ our God, who has appeared to us and has enlightened the world, Glory to you."***

The priest consecrates the home to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in this act, the Church blesses, reveals and sanctifies.

When the priest comes for the house blessing, please adhere to these guidelines:

1. Have as many family members there as possible.
2. Setup a place for prayer, in the dining room or kitchen, with an icon and a candle.
3. Print the first names of those for whom specific prayers are to be offered, including all family members on a sheet of paper, making a clear distinction between living and departed.
4. Take this time to get to know Father Elia better, asking any questions you may have.
5. If a child needs some time to talk to Father, respect his/her privacy and make the opportunity.
6. Make Father Elia aware of any special needs you may have.
7. Tell Father Elia about any family members who are in nursing homes or in need of a visit

Please remember that Father Elia will be making many visitations. A lengthy social visit may not be possible at this time. If you would prefer a visit outside the Epiphany season, please let Father know.

PREPARING FOR GREAT LENT

RETURN FROM EXILE (The Sunday of the Prodigal Son) by Fr. Alexander Schememen

On the third Sunday of preparation for Lent, we hear the parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15: 11-32). Together with the hymns of this day, the parable reveals to us the time of repentance as man's return from exile. The prodigal son, we are told, went to a far country and there spent all that he had. A far country! It is this unique definition of our human condition that we must assume and make ours as we begin our approach to God. A man who has never had that experience, be it only very briefly, who has never felt that he is exiled from God and from real life, will never understand what Christianity is about. And the one who is perfectly "at home" in this world and its life, who has never been wounded by the nostalgic desire for another Reality, will not understand what is Repentance.

Repentance is often simply identified as a cool and "objective" enumeration of sins and transgressions, as the act of "pleading guilty" to a legal indictment. Confession and absolution are seen as being of a juridical nature. But something very essential is overlooked-without which neither confession nor absolution have any real meaning or Power. This "something" is precisely the feeling of alienation from God, from the joy of communion with Him, from the real life as created and given by God. It is easy indeed to confess that I have not fasted on prescribed days, or missed my prayers, or become angry. It is quite a different thing, however, to realize suddenly that I have defiled and lost my spiritual beauty, that I am far away from my real home, my real life, and that something precious and pure and beautiful has been hopelessly broken in the very texture of my existence. Yet this, and only this, is repentance, and therefore it is also a deep desire to return, to go back, to recover that lost home. I received from God wonderful riches: first of all life and the possibility to enjoy it, to fill it with meaning, love, and knowledge; then-in Baptism-the new life of Christ Himself, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the peace and the joy of the eternal Kingdom. I received the knowledge of God, and in Him the knowledge of everything else and the power to be a son of God. And all this I have lost, all this I am losing all the time, not only in particular "sins" and "transgressions," but in the sin of all sins: the deviation of my love from God, preferring the "far country" to the beautiful home of the Father.

But the Church is here to remind me of what I have abandoned and lost. And as she reminds me, I remember: "I have wickedly strayed away from Thy fatherly glory," says the Kontakion of this day, "and wasted with sinners the riches Thou gavest me. Then do I raise the prodigal's cry unto Thee, O bountiful Father: I have sinned against Thee; take me back as a penitent, and make me as one of Thy hired servants." And, as I remember, I find in myself the desire to return and the power to return: " ... I shall return to the compassionate Father crying with tears: Receive me as one of Thy servants"

One liturgical particularity of this "Sunday of the: Prodigal Son" must be especially mentioned here. At Sunday Matins, following the solemn and joyful Psalms of the Polyeleion, we sing the sad and nostalgic Psalm 137: By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, and we wept when we remembered Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.

It is the Psalm of exile. It was sung by the Jews in their Babylonian captivity as they thought of their holy city of Jerusalem. It has become forever the song of man as he realizes his exile from God, and realizing it, becomes man again: the one who can never be fully satisfied by anything in this fallen world, for by nature and vocation he is a pilgrim of the Absolute. This Psalm will be sung twice more: on the last two Sundays before Lent. It reveals Lent itself as pilgrimage and repentance-as return.

The Parable of the Weeds, Part Two

by His Eminence Metropolitan SABA (Isper)

We have said that the presence of weeds (tares) with wheat until the last day (Matt. 13:23-30) makes Christians witnesses of their faith, thus allowing them to contribute to the work of the salvation of the world.

What is striking about Christ’s interpretation of the parable is that he considers the field a symbol of the world, not the Church. If the world will continue to contain the righteous and the corrupt, what about the Church? How do we apply this parable to her? Do we accept the existence of the wicked on an equal footing with the righteous? The Church is the leaven and salt of the world, “But if the salt has lost its taste, with what shall it be seasoned?” (Matt. 5:13). There is no place for the corrupt and the wicked in the Church, because in principle it is a community of saints; a community of people who have dedicated themselves to God. But in reality, they still sin and have not attained perfection; even though they are on the way to it. Therefore, the Church is also a community of repentant people who strive for holiness and perfection (definition from St. Ephraim the Syrian).

Repentance means continuous self-correction. The one who refuses to change himself and is stubborn in his sin has no place in the Church. The process of purification and cleansing is continuous and active in the Church. It is a permanent dialectical process that requires great spiritual awakening and vigilance, on the one hand, and support for the repentant on the other hand. That support should be equal in strength to zeal for the purity of the Church.

The Church is the living body of Christ, not a field. It is His vineyard, and believers are in existential union with Him. “And every branch of it that does not bear fruit He takes away” (John 15:2). The Lord said in another place: “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matt. 7:19). Regarding the quarrel between members of the Church (Matt. 18:15-18), the Lord instructed recourse to the Church, after exhausting the solutions of reconciliation, on the personal level and on the level of mediators. He said: “If he (the erring brother) refuses to listen to them (the mediators and witnesses), tell it to the Church. But if he refuses to listen to the Church, treat him as if he were a heathen or a tax collector.”

On these verses and others, the Church based its canon law that aims to organize its existence in the world in accordance with its heavenly essence. Saint Basil the Great says: “If those who call themselves Christians wanted to continue preserving the gospel truth, the apostolic tradition, and the simple faith, I would not have had to speak; rather, I would have remained silent.” Apologetical theology and the canons that discipline, refine, correct, and excommunicate exist because of the human face of the Church, to keep it faithful without lowering it and allowing it to distort the face of Christ and repel Him.

God sent the prophet Jeremiah to his people, and gave him a double message, saying to him: “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth, and have given you authority this day over nations and kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (Jer. 1:10). Isn’t this the message of the Church?

There is, then, a distinction in the way believers deal with those outside the Church and those within it. Those within it are not allowed to indulge in vices after exhausting all means to help them repent. If the sinner or the lost persists in his sin, the Church disciplines him. Discipline takes many forms and stages: it begins with admonition, then warning, then punishment, then temporary

excommunication, and final excommunication. This is evident in the letters of Paul the Apostle, which organized the newly emerging local churches and embodied the words of the Gospel in ecclesiastical reality.

I will give just one example concerning that brother who was cohabiting with his stepmother. The Apostle Paul says: “It would have been better for you to mourn, so that you might remove from your midst the one who has done this deed... Deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of his body, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord” (1 Cor. 5:1-5). What is meant is, cut him off from the Church because he persists in his sin, so that his sin may wear down his body, so that he may come to his senses and repent. In the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), when he was in extreme need, he remembered the glory of his father’s house, so he returned to it!

The Apostle Paul continues in his letter to the church at Corinth, saying: “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men; not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But rather I wrote to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother (i.e., a believer within the church) if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. ‘Drive out the wicked person from among you’” (1 Cor. 5:9-13).

There are cases in which dialogue, consideration and compassion stop working. These require excommunication, that is, expulsion from the Church. The Church resorts to this after exhausting all means of reform, whether moral, behavioral, faith-based or sacramental, and the sinner persists deliberately on continuing in his sin or error. At that point, he becomes a stumbling block for others, and a misleading and distorted image of Christ. He must be removed from the ecclesial family lest he destroy it and cause its destruction.

The Church is both mother and father. It educates, nurtures, and cares for, and also disciplines, punishes, and refines. Its goal is to edify mankind for whose salvation Christ died and rose.

God will judge the corrupt in this world on the last day, but the Church will hold accountable the sinners within it to encourage them to repent while preserving its purity. There is no compromise or deviation, whether in faith or behavior.

In a time of looseness and competing influences on those who are called believers, accountability does not seem as easy as discussed. Complacency is unacceptable, and healing is required. Haste is harmful, and patience is needed. In the end, discipline is not merely legalistic but pedagogical for the sinner and the brethren. It requires invoking the Holy Spirit through deep prayer.

In a time of insistence on clinging to religious formalities and fighting their essence simultaneously, the Church needs a prophetic spirit and collective action to limit corruption that runs here and there. Separating the wheat from the weeds, after they have ripened, is not a difficult matter. The difficulty lies in the time of growth, that is, before reaching maturity.

Certainly, the more the Church is filled with pure people, the less corruption it will have. In the end, we are all responsible, and we will be judged for our evasion of responsibility in one way or another.

Take care of your purity so that your Church will be better!