

REPENTANCE AND THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

**February 15, 2009
Sunday of the Prodigal Son
Revision E**

**GOSPEL: Luke 15:11-32
EPISTLE: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20**

In the West, as in the Eastern Church, today's Gospel lesson of the Prodigal Son is used in the weeks preceding Easter. Today's Epistle lesson is also used in the West in the weeks preceding Easter, but not on the same Sunday as today's Gospel. The use of today's Epistle along with today's Gospel has the effect of defining and clarifying the terms and implications of the Gospel lesson as it applies to people in general.

EPISTLE LESSON - 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 - The Temple of the Holy Spirit

The Epistle lesson serves both as a reminder of how our bodies are a Temple of the Holy Spirit in the Body of Christ and also as a reference to define what is really happening in the Gospel lesson.

Paul began the Epistle lesson by referring to something he stated on his first visit to Corinth regarding the Mosaic Law. Paul's first visit (Acts 18) on his second missionary journey, came a year or so after the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). Paul and Silas delivered a decree to all the Churches that was drafted by James and the Jerusalem Church (Acts 15:22-29, 16:4). These decrees stated that the Gentiles did not have to observe all the rituals of the Mosaic Law, but said the Gentiles will do well to stay away from three things:

idol sacrifices
blood and things containing blood
fornication (Greek: <i>porneia</i>)

As Paul wrote this letter about three years later, a libertine group had taken the decrees from Jerusalem and Paul's teaching way beyond its intent. Their catch-words were:

foods are for the belly	the belly is for foods
fornication (<i>porneia</i>) is for the body	the body is for fornication

They saw no negative connections and thought both food and sex were necessary for the body. [The Greek word *porneia* is a general term and includes both adultery, fornication and incest.]

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Paul's answer was three fold. First, he said he would not be ruled by anything (food, fornication, etc.). This is why we fast during Lent, Advent, etc., to begin to break the rule foods have on our bellies.

Second, Paul said the Lord will render both the belly and foods (v.13) completely idle. [The Greek word *katargeo* does not mean to destroy as in pillage, but to render idle. In Romans 7:2, it's translated as "released"; in 2 Timothy 1:10, "abolished".] What Paul is saying is that we won't need food to fill our belly in the New Jerusalem. We can if we want to just as Jesus did in His newly resurrected body (Luke 24:40-43). Since our resurrected bodies will be similar to His, we won't need to eat either.

John Chrysostom likened the lust for food and "high eating" as similar to one waiting on a mistress. There is an attendant slavery of greed and covetousness associated with excess consumption (Homily xvii on 1 Corinthians 6).

The third aspect of Paul's answer concerns the proper use of our bodies. Instead of the body for fornication, Paul said the body is for the Lord and the Lord for the body (v.13). Speaking of union with Christ, Paul stated that our bodies are limbs (Greek: *melos*: members or parts of a body) of Christ. Shall we take the limbs of Christ and make them limbs of a harlot (*porne*)? No way!

On the one hand, one who is joined (Greek: *kollao* "glued" or "stuck together") to a harlot is one body with her (v.16). On the other hand, one who is joined or "glued" (*kollao*) to the Lord is one spirit with Him (v.17).

Chrysostom amplified the crime of fornication by saying "that in fornication the entire body becomes defiled. For it is polluted as if it had fallen into a vessel of fifth, and been immersed in defilement. For (coming) from covetousness and extortion no one would make haste to take a bath, but as if nothing had happened returns to his house. Whereas (coming) from intercourse with a harlot, as having become altogether unclean, he goes to a bath (first). To such a degree does the conscience retain from this sin a kind of sense of unusual shame" (Homily xviii on 1 Corinthians 6).

Chrysostom continued, "By faith and knowledge the saints have embraced this true life. They receive the joy, which is in heaven; a lot, which the wicked don't care about, and are deservedly deprived of the blessedness arising from it. For, 'let the wicked be taken away, so that he shall not see the glory of the Lord' (Isaiah 26:10 LXX). For although, when they shall hear the universal proclamation of the promise, 'Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead' (Ephesians 5:14), they shall rise and shall come even to heaven. Knocking and saying, 'Open to us', nevertheless the Lord will reprove them, as those who put the knowledge of Himself far from them, saying, 'I do not know you' (Matthew 25:11-12, Luke 13:25). But the Holy Spirit cries against them, 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, even all the nations that forget God' (Psalm 9:17). Now we say that the wicked are dead, but not in an ascetic life opposed to sin; nor do they, like the saints, bear about dying in their bodies. But it is the soul, which they bury in sins and follies, drawing near to the dead, and satisfying it with dead nourishment. Like young eagles which, from high places, fly upon the carcasses of the dead, and which the Law prohibited, commanding figuratively, 'You shall not eat the eagle, nor any other bird that feeds on a dead carcass' (Leviticus 11:13ff, Deuteronomy 14:12ff). It pronounced unclean whatever eats the dead. But these kill the soul with lusts, and say nothing but, 'let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die' (Isaiah 22:13). And the kind of fruit those have who thus love pleasures, he immediately describes, adding, 'And these things are revealed in the ears of the Lord of Hosts, that this sin shall not be forgiven you until you die' (Isaiah 22:14 LXX). Even while they live they shall be ashamed, because they consider their belly their Lord; and when dead, they shall be tormented,

because they have made a boast of such a death. To this effect also Paul bears witness, saying, 'Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats; but God shall destroy both it and them' (1 Corinthians 6:13). And the divine word declared before concerning them; 'The death of sinners is evil, and those who hate the righteous commit sin' (Psalm 34:21 LXX). For bitter is the worm, and grievous the darkness, which wicked men inherit".

"But the saints, and they who truly practice virtue, 'mortify their members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, passions, evil desire' (Colossians 3:5). As the result of this, they are pure and without spot, confiding in the promise of our Savior, who said, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' (Matthew 5:8). These, having become dead to the world, and having renounced the merchandise of the world, gain an honorable death; for, 'precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints' (Psalm 116:15). They are also able to say, 'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me' (Galatians 2:20). For that is the true life, which a man lives in Christ. For although they are dead to the world, yet they dwell as it were in heaven, minding those things which are above, as he who was a lover of such a habitation said, 'While we walk on earth, our dwelling is in heaven' (Philippians 3:20). Now those who thus live, and are partakers in such virtue, are alone able to give glory to God, and this it is which essentially constitutes a feast and a holiday. For the (Paschal) Feast does not consist in pleasant intercourse at meals, nor splendor of clothing (1 Timothy 2:9), nor days of leisure, but in the acknowledgment of God, and the offering of thanksgiving and of praise to Him (1 Corinthians 6:20). Now this belongs to the saints alone, who live in Christ; for it is written, 'The dead shall not praise Thee, O Lord, neither all those who go down into silence; but we who live will bless the Lord, from henceforth even for ever' (Psalm 115:17-18). So was it with Hezekiah, who was delivered from death, and therefore praised God, saying, 'Those who are in Hades cannot praise Thee; the dead cannot bless Thee; but the living shall bless Thee, as I also do' (Isaiah 38:18 LXX). For to praise and bless God belongs to those only who live in Christ, and by means of this they go up to the Feast. For the Passover is not of the Gentiles, nor of those who are yet Jews in the flesh; but of those who acknowledge the truth in Christ, as he declares who was sent to proclaim such a Feast, (1 Corinthians 5:7) 'Our Passover, Christ, is sacrificed'" (Festal Letters VII, 2-3).

Paul finished up with a section on how our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit in us. If we are joined or glued to the Lord, this follows logically. Thus we are not our own (or of ourselves alone). We have been bought with a price (v.20); where the price was Jesus' death on the Cross, and the body is for the Lord and the Lord for the body as he said earlier.

Chrysostom pointed out that this settles us "in a state of security against sin, and against following the improper desires of the mind. For indeed we have many improper wishes, but we must repress them, for we can. And if we could not, (Paul's) exhortation would be in vain." For we are not our own; we have been bought with a price and we have a Master (Ibid.).

Regarding the Holy Spirit, Chrysostom also stated: "And is then this Spirit within us? Yes indeed, within us. For when we have driven away lying, and bitterness, and fornication and uncleanness and covetousness from our souls; when we have become kind, tender-hearted, forgiving one another; when we have rendered ourselves worthy of it; what is there to hinder the Holy Spirit from coming and lighting upon us? And not only will He come unto us, but He will fill our hearts, and when we have so great a light kindled within us, then will the way of virtue be no longer difficult to attain, but will be easy and simple" (Homily xix on Ephesians 5).

From this point of view, Paul states that all sins except *porneia* (fornication) are outside the body. *Porneia*, however, is a sin against one's own body because the Holy Spirit dwells there. Thus Paul said to glorify God in our bodies. One way he said to do this is to "present our bodies as a living, holy (Greek: *hagion* as in *Hagion Pneuma* or Holy Spirit) sacrifice, well pleasing to God, our reasonable worship" (Romans 12:1). As opposed to Jannes and Jambres, the sorcerers who opposed Moses before Pharaoh and who had corrupt minds (2 Timothy 3:8), Paul said to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we may prove what is the Will of God (Romans 12:2).

For those who are unwilling to be transformed but insist on joining (or gluing) their body to a harlot (*porne*), the Lord has no choice but to give them over in the desires or passions of their heart to uncleanness (Greek: *akatharsion*, as in unclean spirit or *akatharton pneuma*) that their bodies might be dishonored (i.e. abused and maltreated) among them (Romans 1:24). This is what we see happen to the Prodigal Son in our Gospel lesson, and this is why this Epistle lesson was chosen to go with this Gospel lesson: The Epistle lesson opens our eyes to what is happening in the Gospel lesson.

REPENTANCE

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GOSPEL LESSON - Luke 15:11-32: The Prodigal Son

The Gospel lesson began with a younger son asking his father to divide the inheritance up between himself and his older brother before the father's death. According to Hebrew laws and customs regarding inheritance, land was a permanent inheritance of one's tribe and family. It could be sold, but every 50th year (the year of Jubilee), the land reverted back to the family of its original owner. Thus, land that was sold became less valuable as Jubilee approached and the sale involved the sale of so many years' crops and not the land itself (Leviticus 25:8-17). Personal property such as livestock, precious metals, jewels, etc., were divided up by fathers and given to their sons as an inheritance. In the Gospel lesson, it was this personal property that was divided up and given to the younger son.

According to Hebrew custom, the oldest son had the "birthright" and was given a double portion. For example, in a family of five sons, the oldest got a two sixths share and the others got one sixth shares. However, the oldest was required to provide for their mother for the rest of her life and for any sisters until they got married (this included the sister's dowry!) out of his extra share (Unger, Bible Dictionary, p. 376-8). This was to be the case even if the oldest was the son of a wife who was not the father's favorite (Deuteronomy 21:15-17). Thus, in the case of the Prodigal Son, the Prodigal got one third and the older son got two thirds.

The Prodigal took his one third of the fathers' liquid assets and journeyed to a far country -- that is, a place where Hebrew law did not apply. If he had squandered all his inheritance in Israel, he might have had some recourse to starving since provision was made in the Mosaic Law to care for the poor. In addition, he could get back to his family's land during the year of the Jubilee. But in this far country -- where unclean animals like swine were raised -- he found himself envying the carob pods (v.16) that were fed to the swine. Carob pods have a large (up to 10" long), leathery exterior and the pulp from the pods is still used today as cattle feed. If it is good quality, it is roasted and ground and used as a chocolate substitute. Eaten raw, however, it is just cattle (or pig) food.

The Prodigal's lifestyle in the far country devoured the father's livelihood (or liquid assets) in wasteful living. In verse 30 the older son remarked how his brother had devoured his wealth with harlots (Greek: *porne*). Thus he joined or glued himself to harlots in that country where the Epistle lesson describes the impact of this. And when his wealth ran out he joined or glued himself (Greek: *kollao* as in the Epistle lesson, 1 Corinthians 6:16) to a keeper of swine. In a downward moving spiral, the Prodigal Son had been given over to uncleanness (as in Romans 1:24) and his body was being dishonored, maltreated and abused. It's the counter example to the Epistle lesson: If one insists in the desire or passion of one's heart to take the

limbs or members of Christ and join or glue them to a harlot, the Lord will react. By sinning against his own body, which was the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Prodigal brought his maltreatment down on his own head. And having been given over to this, he finally “came to himself” and realized what he’d done. For some people, this is the only way that they can get saved.

In his repentance, the Prodigal realized that he’d sinned against heaven and against his father (v.18). He sinned against heaven by joining the Temple of the Holy Spirit to harlots; he sinned against his father by squandering the gifts he had been given. In planning his return to his father, he made his confession to God. When he came to his father, he also made his confession to him. That his confession was genuine is indicated by his humility and sense of unworthiness (I am no longer worthy to be called your son, v.21) as opposed to his previous arrogance and independence (give me the portion of goods that falls to me, v.12).

Isaac of Nineveh said, “Baptism gives freely and demands nothing except faith; but if a man sins after baptism and then repents (like the Prodigal), God does not forgive him freely but demands works, suffering, sorrows, contrition, tears, a long time of mourning - and then forgives. The Lord forgave the thief freely, merely for his confession uttered on the cross, and promised him the Kingdom. But in the case of the woman who had sinned, He demanded also faith and tears” (Directions in Spiritual Training, Texts 135, 157). We need to understand the effects of our sins.

The Prodigal’s father responded with three things, which have symbolic meanings:

a robe for righteousness (Isaiah 61:10)

a signet ring for family identity (Haggai 2:23)

sandals for walking according to the Gospel (Ephesians 6:15)

But most of all, the Prodigal’s father responded with love. The father’s love for his younger son can be summed up as follows: “Love suffers long and is kind...bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). The father had evidently been looking for his younger son since he saw him when he was still a great way off (v.20). Yet, the father didn’t lecture him or nag him or go to the far country and try to drag him home. He had to let him go; otherwise the Prodigal may never “come to himself” and realize the consequences of his own actions. This is difficult to do, especially regarding someone you care about very much.

But what about the older brother? As the father stated (verse 31), all that the father possessed now belonged to the older brother due to the division of the liquid assets (verse 12). One can criticize the older brother for not showing love to his brother. This is valid. But there’s more to it than that. Matthew 20:1-16 is the Lord’s parable of laborers in a vineyard. Some were hired at daybreak and worked all day; others were hired in the late afternoon and worked only one hour. Yet they all received the same wage, which angered those who had worked all day. The older son may very well have felt that “It’s not fair!” for the younger son to be welcomed back as a son. As a servant, okay; but not as a son. Under Hebrew Law, the older son was now responsible for providing for his destitute younger brother until the younger brother could get back on his feet financially. The father would not re-divide the liquid assets; but Hebrew Law required those that have goods to care for those that have not (Deuteronomy 15:7-11).

The main point in Jesus' telling the story of the Prodigal Son concerned the response of the older son. In Luke 15:1, "all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Jesus to hear Him". But the Pharisees and Scribes complained that He received them and ate with them (15:2). So Jesus directed a series of parables at them beginning in Luke 15:3.

PARABLE	MESSAGE
The One Lost Sheep	More joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over 99 who need no repentance,
The Lost Coin	Joy among angels of God over one repentant sinner.
The Prodigal Son	The son was dead and is alive; was lost and is found.

Cyril of Alexandria (4th -5th Century) went on a length to de-spiritualize this parable. Some people in his day interpreted the older son as representing the holy angels, while the younger son, man. Others interpreted the older son as Israel with the younger son, the Gentiles. Cyril said not so! The theme in this parable was spoken by the prophets, "Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God; for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take words with you and return to the Lord" (Hosea 14:1). "'Therefore I will judge you, O House of Israel, each according to his conduct', declares the Lord God. 'Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions, which you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O House of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies', declares the Lord God. 'Therefore repent and live'" (Ezekiel 18:30-32).

Cyril went on to say, "As the Pharisees and Scribes made this outcry at His gentleness and love to man, ...Christ very necessarily set before them the present parable, to show them clearly this very thing: That the God of all requires even him who is thoroughly steadfast and firm, and who knows how to live in a holy manner, and who has attained to the highest praise for sobriety of conduct to be earnest in following His Will. So that when any are called to repentance, even if they should be men highly blamable, he must rejoice rather and not give way to an unloving vexation on their account" (Commentary on Luke, chapter 15). Thus the Prodigal represents the tax collectors and sinners that were coming to Jesus with repentant hearts while the older brother represents the Pharisees and Scribes who were hardening theirs.

Coming into the Kingdom of God, all receive the same wage -- the crown of life. There are other crowns or rewards such as spoken of in the Parable of the Talents. But here, the focus is on the joy in heaven when one sinner repents (Luke 15:7). As the father said, "...your brother was dead and is alive again and was lost and is found" (v.32).