

SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON



Icon of the Prodigal Son

February 5, 2012
SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON
THE HOLY MARTYR AGATHA OF PALERMO IN SICILY
Tone 1

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES FOR THE WEEK OF FEBRUARY 6 – FEBRUARY 12

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8 – *THE HOLY GREAT MARTYR THEODORE, THE GENERAL OF HERACLEA*

9:30 AM – Divine Liturgy Health and Blessings for Andrew Stoeker; Req: Maria Odezynskyj

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11 – *1ST ALL SOULS SATURDAY; THE HOLY HIEROMARTYR BLAISE, BISHOP OF SEBASTE*

9:30 AM – Divine Liturgy & Panakhida ☩ All the Faithful Departed

PLEASE NOTE: No Vespers

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 12 – *SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON; THE HOLY MARTYR AGATHA OF PALERMO IN SICILY*

9:30 AM – Divine Liturgy For All Parishioners

The discussion of “Come Follow Me” will continue today after the Divine Liturgy. We will be discussing the fourth Chapter. We will discuss chapter five next week after the Divine Liturgy.

Everyone is encouraged to participate.

UCARE

Today, a luncheon will be served after the Divine Liturgy. Cost: Free-will donation for UCARE. The Luncheon was prepared by parish youth. UCARE’s primary focus is to aid orphaned Children in Ukraine.

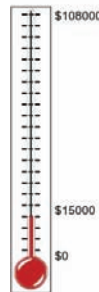
Free “Wills and Trusts Workshop”

Without a will and/or a trust, you can’t control what happens to your property if you become incapacitated or die. Learn the proper planning techniques to preserve your assets and provide for your loved ones at a February 26 workshop after the Divine Liturgy.

On the Unity of the Church

The unity of the Church follows of necessity from the unity of God; for the Church is not a multitude of persons in their separate individuality, but a unity of the grace of God, living in a multitude of rational creatures, submitting themselves to grace.

– A. Khomiakov



Stewardship Pledges

Pledges received: 6

**If you haven't returned a
pledge form, please do so.**

Sunday offering for January 29

Amount	Number
\$10.00	2
\$15.00	2
\$20.00	4
\$40.00	2
\$50.00	3
\$75.00	1
\$57.00	1 (loose)
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\$497.00	15 (1 guest)

Parishioner Total: \$477.00

Average / parish household (39): \$24.49

Weekly Stewardship Goal: \$2125.00

Shortfall: **-\$1648.00**

Cards for sale

Easter Cards, and various other greeting cards are available for sale in the church hall following each Divine Liturgy. See Mary Kitt to purchase.



Looking Ahead:

- ❖ Feb. 12th – Meatfare Sunday
- ❖ Feb. 19th – Cheesefare/ Forgiveness Sunday
- ❖ Feb. 20th – The Great Fast Begins
- ❖ March 25th – Annunciation
- ❖ April 1st – Flowery Sunday
- ❖ April 6th – Great and Holy Friday
- ❖ April 8th – The Glorious Feast of Pascha



ON THE JESUS PRAYER

adapted from Kyriacos C. Markides

The Jesus Prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me a sinner”, is the most powerful way of contacting God. It fills us with grace as we keep this prayer in our heart and mind. Ideally we should reserve a certain amount of time every day and engage in this form of prayer. Furthermore, as we engage in routine activities such as washing dishes, taking a walk, or waiting at a bus stop we can recite the prayer. Then we will reach a point when the Prayer will be an ongoing activity within our consciousness even while asleep or even while we engage in intellectually challenging activities like solving mathematical equations. This prayer becomes a form of breathing, an ongoing activity within us that sanctifies our entire being.

Forgiveness Sunday

In two weeks, on Sunday, February 19th there will be a “Cheesy Potluck” following the Divine Liturgy. This is the last opportunity to enjoy dairy products before the Great Fast begins. Please bring a meatless dish to share with others. (Please note: there are people in our community with severe and life threatening allergies so please no nuts or mushrooms.) Immediately following the potluck we will celebrate Forgiveness Vespers in the church to open the Great Fast. This is a beautiful opportunity to begin the fast with mutual forgiveness.



1st All Souls Saturday

This Saturday, February 11th is First All Souls Saturday. On that day, there will be a Divine Liturgy at 9:30 AM for all our beloved departed followed by a Panakhyda. Please write the names of all those you wish to be remembered and place in the offering basket.

Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts

During the Great Fast which begins on February 20th, the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts will be offered on Wednesday evenings at 6:30 PM and Friday Mornings at 9:30 AM. Each Wednesday following the Presanctified Liturgy there will be a Lenten Meal and a Spiritual Talk. We need volunteers to prepare the soup for the dates of 2/22, 2/29, 3/7, 3/14, 3/21 and 3/28. Please talk to Olena Bankston to volunteer.

CHRISTIANS FEAR LOSING FREEDOMS IN ARAB SPRING MOVEMENT



CAIRO – From her home in a labyrinth of stonewalled alleyways, Samia Ramsis holds a key chain bearing the face of the Virgin Mary as she sits in her yellow pajamas on the morning of Orthodox Christmas.

Sunlight pours in through a window. Outside, visitors come to look upon the spot where Egypt's Christians — most known as Copts — believe the Holy Family found refuge after fleeing Bethlehem and assassins sent by King Herod to kill the baby Jesus.

Once crowded with Christians, Cairo's Coptic quarter where Samia lives with her husband, Mounir, and two children is home to fewer than 50 Christian families. "We know many Christians have left," says Mounir Ramsis, speaking not only about this quarter but about all of Egypt. "But we love this country and will stay until death."

The Arab Spring uprisings that have toppled secular dictatorships in the Middle East and North Africa have unleashed long-suppressed freedoms that have allowed Islamic parties to gain a share of political power they have been denied for decades. Their rise is creating near-panic among ancient Christian communities that dot the Muslim world and predate Islam by centuries.

•In Tunisia, where the regime of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was ousted last year after 32 years in power, the dominant political party, Ennahda, has worried some of Tunis' 22,000 Catholics by vowing to tilt the country's yet-to-be-written constitution toward sharia, or the detailed and often harsh system of Muslim theocratic laws.

•In Libya, Christians are uneasy as the powerful head of the Tripoli Military Council, Abdul Hakim Belhaj, who once led an Islamic militia with links to al-Qaeda, has said he plans to run for office in elections scheduled for April.

•In Afghanistan, no new building permits have been issued for churches, and the last church open to the public was demolished over the summer. In Iraq, the Christian community has decreased by two-thirds since 2003 amid bombings of churches and assassinations of priests.

•And Christians in Syria, where Muslims have risen up against President Bashar Assad, have been subjected to murder, rape and kidnappings in Damascus and rebellious towns, according to Christian rights groups, including Open Doors, which helps Christians facing persecution.

Many had hoped for better in an Arab movement that proponents said was about replacing tyrannies with democracies.

"The outlook is grim," says John Eibner, CEO of the California-based human rights group Christian Solidarity International.

"If the current trajectory continues, it's reasonable to think that within a generation these (Christian) communities will not look like functioning communities," Eibner says. "They'll look more like the once-flourishing Jewish communities" across the Arab world that are all but gone.

Nowhere is the irony more profound than in Egypt, where an estimated 8 million Christians live with more than 70 million Muslims.



Christians demonstrated alongside Muslims early last year to oust Hosni Mubarak. Before Mubarak's overthrow, Christians had suffered from years of church burnings and murders at the hands of radical Muslims who want an Islamic state free of religious minorities. And after the ouster, the military regime that has been running the country has refused to make any arrests in attacks on Christians.

Mina Bouls, 25, a Copt who fled to Philadelphia, recalls cowering with his mother in 1997 as a mob stoned the family home and chanted anti-Christian slogans. But the difference then was that Mubarak ordered the military to protect Christian communities and jail extremists, Bouls says.

In October, Copts organized a protest in downtown Cairo over the authorities' failure to investigate attacks, including the bombing of a church in Alexandria on New Year's Day 2011 that killed 20 people. The military attacked the demonstrators and 17 Christians were run down and killed by military vehicles, according to Human Rights Watch.

Bouls wants to bring his family to the United States because he says he is petrified by the new society forming in Egypt. The first free elections in decades held in the past two months

handed power not to moderates but to members of the Muslim Brotherhood and radical Salafi candidates, who combined took nearly 70% of seats.

"If people try to rule the country with the Koran, with sharia law, that means they look to us as second-class people," Bouls says.

Small share of population

Christianity has existed in Egypt since the second century. The Muslim Brotherhood, a political movement that seeks a nation run according to Koranic law, has said Egypt would respect the rights of religious minorities to worship and dress as they please. Muslim Brotherhood executive member Abd Al-Rahman Al-Barr says Israel is to blame for clashes between Coptic protestors and security forces.

The Salafis, Muslim fundamentalists who want a complete application of sharia law that generally denies equal rights to women and religious minorities, also say Copts are safe in Egypt.

Abanob Magdi lives near Egypt's largest pyramid and says he is not optimistic about what lies ahead. "I saw on TV the other day a Salafi saying that if they get in power, beaches will be divided for men and women and women will have to be veiled," Magdi says as he walks through Coptic Cairo with friends.

Christians account for 4% of the people of the Middle East and North Africa. Despite being the birthplace of Christianity, the region now has the fewest number of Christians (13 million) and the smallest share of its population that is Christian of any other major geographic region, according to the Pew Center on Religion and Public Life.

The future of minorities in the emerging democracies of the Middle East “is a huge issue most vividly seen in Egypt and the Copts,” says California Rep. Howard Berman, ranking Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee. “It’s on our agenda as we figure out how to help these countries,” and their treatment of Christians and other minorities is a “red line” that will affect future aid.

President Obama has said Christians must have the right to worship freely, and he has spoken on behalf of persecuted individuals such as pastor Youcef Nadarkhani, who was sentenced to death in Iran for converting himself and others to Christianity, says Joshua Dubois, director of the White House Office for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

Some say stronger action is needed. Eibner wants Obama to urge the United Nations secretary-general to declare a genocide warning for Christians across the Middle East and a policy for preserving religious pluralism in the region.

Rep. Chris Smith of New Jersey, Republican chairman of the human rights subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, says the Obama administration “has been AWOL” on the issue. Smith says Obama should designate Egypt “a country of particular concern,” which allows the State Department to impose sanctions. He could also make \$1.3 billion in annual U.S.

aid to the Egyptian military conditional on fair treatment of minorities, Smith says.

Rep. Gary Ackerman, D-N.Y., warns that threatening to withhold U.S. aid could prompt a “backlash” in the region. “These situations are delicate but the case has to be made and the president has to make it,” he says.

Historian Habib Malik of Lebanese American University in Byblos, Lebanon, says Western

nations can improve the situation by shifting from promoting democratic rule to emphasizing “minority rights, checks and balances, freedoms and the substance side of democracy.”



Growing wave of restrictions

Some Middle Eastern countries remain relatively safe for Christians, says Carl Moeller, president of Open Doors. Jordan accepted thousands of Iraqi refugees, including Christians, who are allowed to practice their faith. Armenian Christians in Iran, while monitored by the government, can worship unhindered, though conversion is illegal, Moeller says.

But Christians in Tunisia, where the Arab Spring movement began, have faced a growing number of restrictions since the dictatorship fell, he says.

“Foreign Christians have been called into the police in Tunisia, (and) they’ve had their phones tapped,” he says. “There’s definitely growing restrictions on Christians in Tunisia.”

In Syria, where Christians have lived since the Apostle Peter established the first church in the now-Turkish city of Antioch 2,000 years ago, cities that are strongholds of the Muslim Brotherhood have risen up against Bashar Assad. Christians make up more than 2 million of the country's 22 million people, and they fear that the uprising will bring Islamists to power, rights groups say.

In Afghanistan, Western nations that are spending billions of dollars on reconstruction and maintaining security have failed to get the government to protect Christians.

One of Jesus's own apostles, St. Thomas, brought Christianity to Afghanistan in the first century, and today there are 8,000 Christians there. But the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan does not recognize Afghan citizens as being Christians, and converting to Christianity is illegal.

Not a single public church remains. The last Christian church was destroyed by its landowner in March after the Afghan courts refused to uphold the legality of the congregation's lease.

In Iraq, after the United States ousted Iraq military dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003, the Christian population has gone from 1.5 million to a half million today. The exodus came amid 60 church bombings and the deaths of 900 Christians, says William Warda, chairman of the Hammurabi Human Rights Organization in Baghdad. "We consider that genocide," he says.

Malik says Western nations must stand up for the rights of Christians, who he says may be cleansed from lands where democratic elections are used to oppress minorities rather than empower them.

Malik says it must be done "in a way that is not misperceived on the other end." However, "the West should not be cowed."

Contributing: Oren Dorell reported from McLean, Va.; Sarah Lynch reported from Cairo.

A Homily About The Most All-Discerning Jesus

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich

"Why do you harbor evil thoughts in your hearts?" (St. Matthew 9:4).

When our Lord deigned to direct a rebuke to the Pharisees and Scribes, at that time, they had not killed anyone, nor had they deceived anyone, nor had they looted anyone and, not only that, at that time, they had not even offended anyone by their words. Why then, did our Lord admonish them when they had not committed any sin neither in works nor in words? Why? Because, at that time, their thoughts were evil.

An evil thought is sin! That is the great news which Christ brought into the world. In truth, an evil thought is the sinful source of all sin because, before a man says something or does something sinful, he thinks sinfully. Thought is the causative sin. All other sins are only subsequent sins. Whoever wishes to annihilate those evil actions must uproot those evil thoughts first. Whoever desires to stem the flow of water must first dry up the source. Therefore, let no one justify himself: I am not a sinner, for I have not killed anyone nor looted from anyone nor profaned anyone nor lied to anyone! Behold, we are full of deadly looting, profaning and deceiving thoughts! If we have not committed sin by our own deeds, that is simply a matter of the mercy of God and external circumstances. But, if God had yielded and if the circumstances were favorable, we would have committed all those sins that we had thought. The serpent is not only venomous when it bites but also when it does not bite, because it carries the venom in itself. Therefore, not only is thought a sin, but also it is the source of sin: the beginning of sin and the seed and root of sin. That is why the All-seeing and All-knowing Lord rebuked those who had evil thoughts. "Why do you harbor evil thoughts in your hearts?"

O Lord, All-seeing and All-knowing, help us to cleanse our hearts and minds from evil thoughts so that our words and deeds may be pure.



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Who Art in Heaven

These words I think have a very deep meaning. They remind us of the homeland we have abandoned, of the citizenship we have lost. In the parable of the young man who left his father's house, went off the rails and was reduced to living with pigs, the Word of God shows us human wretchedness. That young man did not find his one-time happiness again until he had realized his moral degradation, had looked into his own heart and had pronounced the words of confession. These words almost agree with the Lord's Prayer, because the prodigal son says: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you." [Luke 15:21] He would not confess himself to be a sinner against heaven

if he were not convinced that the homeland he had left at the time of his going astray were not in actual fact heaven.

By this confession of his he makes himself worthy once again to stand in the presence of his father who runs towards him, embraces him, and kisses him. The conclusion is this. To return to heaven there is only one route and that is to admit one's sinfulness and seek to avoid it. To make the decision to avoid it is already to be perfecting one's likeness to God.

*St. Gregory of Nyssa
On the Lord's Prayer*