



My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we prepare to enter the second week of Triodion, This Sunday's Gospel is the Parable of the Prodigal Son: the young man who demanded his portion of his Father's inheritance and then wasted it on sinful living. When a famine came, this young Israelite was made to feed pigs—and grew so hungry, he wanted to eat their food, although pigs are considered unclean in Jewish Law. Perhaps it was at this exact moment when he realized how far he had fallen, for as Jesus says, *"But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up 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 like one of your hired hands''" (Luke 15:17-19).*

We know, of course, how the father joyfully greeted the Prodigal Son, and how the Elder Brother was angered at this treatment, for he had never disobeyed, but neither had he been rewarded in this way. We know that the message of the parable means that *"...we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found'" (Luke 15:31-32).*

However, this Sunday of the Prodigal Son, consider the words our Lord uses to describe the Prodigal Son's repentance, *"...he came to himself..."* This is indeed a beautiful way to describe what our Church calls μετάνοια, which is usually translated as repentance, but the closer meaning is "changing one's mind". The Church understands that repentance is not simply a feeling of guilt, but a choice to show new behavior. In this parable, our loving Creator and Lord describes the Prodigal Son as someone whose passions have overwhelmed him, but they have not changed who he really is; all that he needed was to return to his true self, and to remember his relationship with his father.

This Sunday, let us think: when we are most "unlike" ourselves? Do we covet material possessions, wish for greater wealth, or lust after food and other pleasures? Though the Prodigal Son "came to himself" during an extreme famine, let us use his positive example to carefully discern with our hearts where we have fallen short of Christ and His Gospel. Then, in the remaining time of this preparatory period, and during Great Lent itself, let us approach God with a changed mind and heart, so that we may be counted worthy to celebrate the coming Paschal banquet, with a renewed and joyful spirit.

+SEVASTIANOS
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