



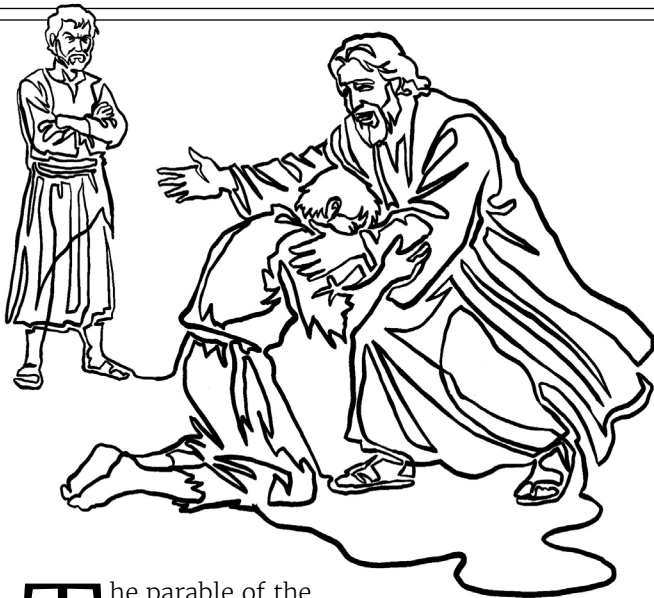
DIAKONIA

A National Ministry of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

REFLECTIONS FROM TODAY'S READING - *Luke 15:11-32*

The Parable of the Two Sons

Fr. George Parsenios



The parable of the Prodigal Son frames our thoughts as we approach Great Lent. We are called to imitate the Prodigal who turns from his sinful habits and returns to his proper home; we are also encouraged to expect the love of the Father who embraces his penitent children when we turn from our sinful habits and return to God. The loving embrace of the Father reminds us that we will not be punished for straying from God, but rather that we will be welcomed with great joy for returning to him. We must repent. We must reform our lives. But our repentance will be met not with wrath, but with joy and love. The Prodigal Son, however, is not the only son who disappoints his father. The jealous son is also disappointing because he refuses to welcome his penitent brother. The Prodigal Son abandoned his father and fell into sinful ways, thereby committing a great

offense against his family. But the jealous son refused to forgive his brother...and so he also committed a great offense against his family. The behavior of the two brothers correlates well with the two halves of the Ten Commandments. The first set of commandments focuses on our obligations to God, who expects us to be faithful and loyal to him alone. These are the commandments that the Prodigal Son transgressed as he rejected his father and wasted his wealth. The remaining commandments teach us our obligations to our neighbors. The jealous son failed to observe these because he would not love his brother. Most people are like one son or the other. Some of us strive to be faithful to God and to live pure lives, but we judge the less pious people around us and have scorn for them. Others of us can be kind and generous to our neighbors, but we do not strive to live pure and holy lives, nor do we treasure the commandments of God. Our mission during the coming days of Lent is to be faithful both to God as well as our neighbors. We must live pure and holy lives, focused on fasting and prayer, in order to draw closer to God, but always in a way that makes us more loving and forgiving to the members of our families, our fellow parishioners, coworkers, neighbors, friends, and strangers. The Father loves us all, and the only way to show our love for him is to show our love for one another.

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FROM THE ORIGINAL GREEK: Parable (Παράβολή) What is “parable?”

Fr. George Parsenios



The parables of Jesus explain the profound ways of God in the simple language of everyday life. The Greek word “parable” is drawn from the words *para*, which means “next to,” and *ballo*, which means “to put.” A parable “puts” an example from everyday life “next to” the work of God in order to clarify how the kingdom of God transforms everyday life. Jesus compares the kingdom, for instance, to a man who owns a vineyard, or to someone who invites guests to a dinner party, and to many other mundane things. Jesus teaches in

these ways so that we learn that our spiritual lives are not separate from our everyday lives; rather, God’s Kingdom comes to us in the people we meet and in the things we do every day. Thus, God transforms these everyday things. After all, when laborers are paid the same wage whether they work all day or only for an hour, then the normal rules of compensation have been transcended. Paying people for work is a normal thing. Paying them all the same for very different levels of work is not at all a normal thing. The rules of everyday life have been transcended by the coming of the Kingdom. The parables urge us to seek God’s transforming power in every circumstance we face and every person we meet.

THIS WEEK’S LOOK AT CHURCH HISTORY

Archbishop Athenagoras



In August 1930, the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate elected Metropolitan Athenagoras of Kerkyra and Paxos as Archbishop of America. Archbishop Athenagoras was enthroned in Saint Eleftherios Church in New York City in February 1931. As Archbishop, he worked tirelessly to unify and strengthen the Archdiocese.

Archbishop Athenagoras’ legacy was immense: He established the Philoptochos Society, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, St. Basil Academy, and the Clergy Pension Fund. He organized the Greek Orthodox Youth movement, relocated the Archdiocesan headquarters from Astoria to its current location in Manhattan, and supervised the reconstruction of the Holy Trinity Cathedral of New York.

Archbishop Athenagoras deepened inter-Christian and inter-Orthodox collaboration, strengthening fraternal ties with the other Christian Churches, while promoting inter-Orthodox cooperation. He founded the Federation of Orthodox Christian Churches of America in 1943 which formed the basis for the Standing Committee of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA), the successor of which is the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops.

In November 1948, Archbishop Athenagoras of America was elected Ecumenical Patriarch, and was taken to Constantinople by military airplane sent by President Harry Truman. His fruitful tenure elevated the profile of the Greek Orthodox Church in America, initiated many programs still in existence, and led the Orthodox Church worldwide with charismatic courage and vision until his repose in 1972.

PHOTO SOURCE: goarch.org

THE SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON

Preparing Our Heart for Great Lent

The second Sunday of the three-week Triodion period before Great Lent invites us to reflect on the meaning of repentance. At the center of this Sunday stands the beloved parable from the Gospel of Luke (15:11–32). Jesus tells of a son who demands his inheritance, leaves his father's house, and squanders everything through wasteful living. When the money runs out and a famine strikes, the son finds himself feeding swine, starving, and utterly alone. It is in this moment of complete emptiness that he “comes to himself.” Recognizing the depth of his fall, he resolves, “I will arise and go to my father,” seeking only the lowliest place in his father's household.

The father's response reveals the heart of the Gospel. When he sees his son approaching, he does not stand and wait—he runs to him, embraces him, clothes him with honor, and restores him to life. His joy reveals the boundless compassion of God, who waits patiently for our return, no matter how far we have wandered or how broken we feel. The elder son's struggle, meanwhile, teaches us to guard against resentment, pride, and the temptation to measure our worth before God by judging others.

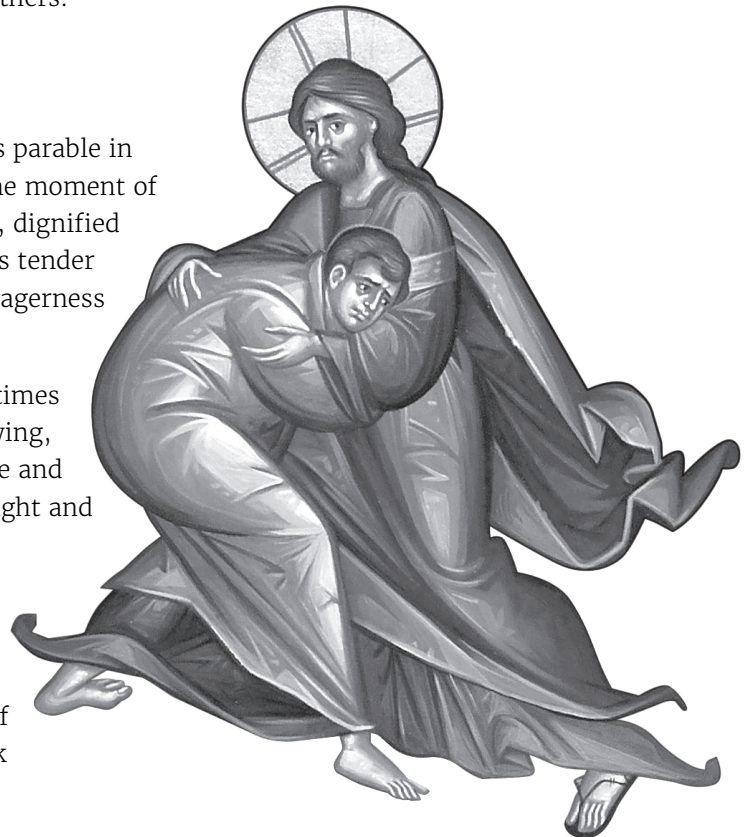
Icon of the Parable

The icon of the Prodigal Son beautifully visualizes Christ's parable in Luke 15:11–32. At the center of most traditional icons is the moment of the son's return. The father—often depicted as an elderly, dignified figure—leans forward, running or embracing his son. This tender embrace communicates God's limitless love, mercy, and eagerness to welcome us back when we repent.

The son is usually shown in torn, ragged clothing—sometimes even barefoot—and humbled. His posture—kneeling, bowing, or collapsing into his father's arms—expresses repentance and recognition of his brokenness. The father's robe, often bright and regal, symbolizes divine glory and compassion.

Many icons also include servants bringing the robe, ring, and sandals, echoing the Gospel's signs of full restoration into the father's household. The fatted calf, sometimes shown in the background, represents the joy of reconciliation, reminding us that repentance leads us back into communion with God.

Some iconographic variations depict Christ in place of the Father and include multiple scenes of the parable arranged as a single image—such as the son leaving home, feeding the swine, and returning to the father's embrace. These variations not only encapsulate the Scriptural story arc but remind us that Jesus Christ is always there to welcome us back and embrace us.



A Personal Challenge for the Week

ASK YOURSELF: *What are the habits, distractions, or attitudes that distance you from God?*

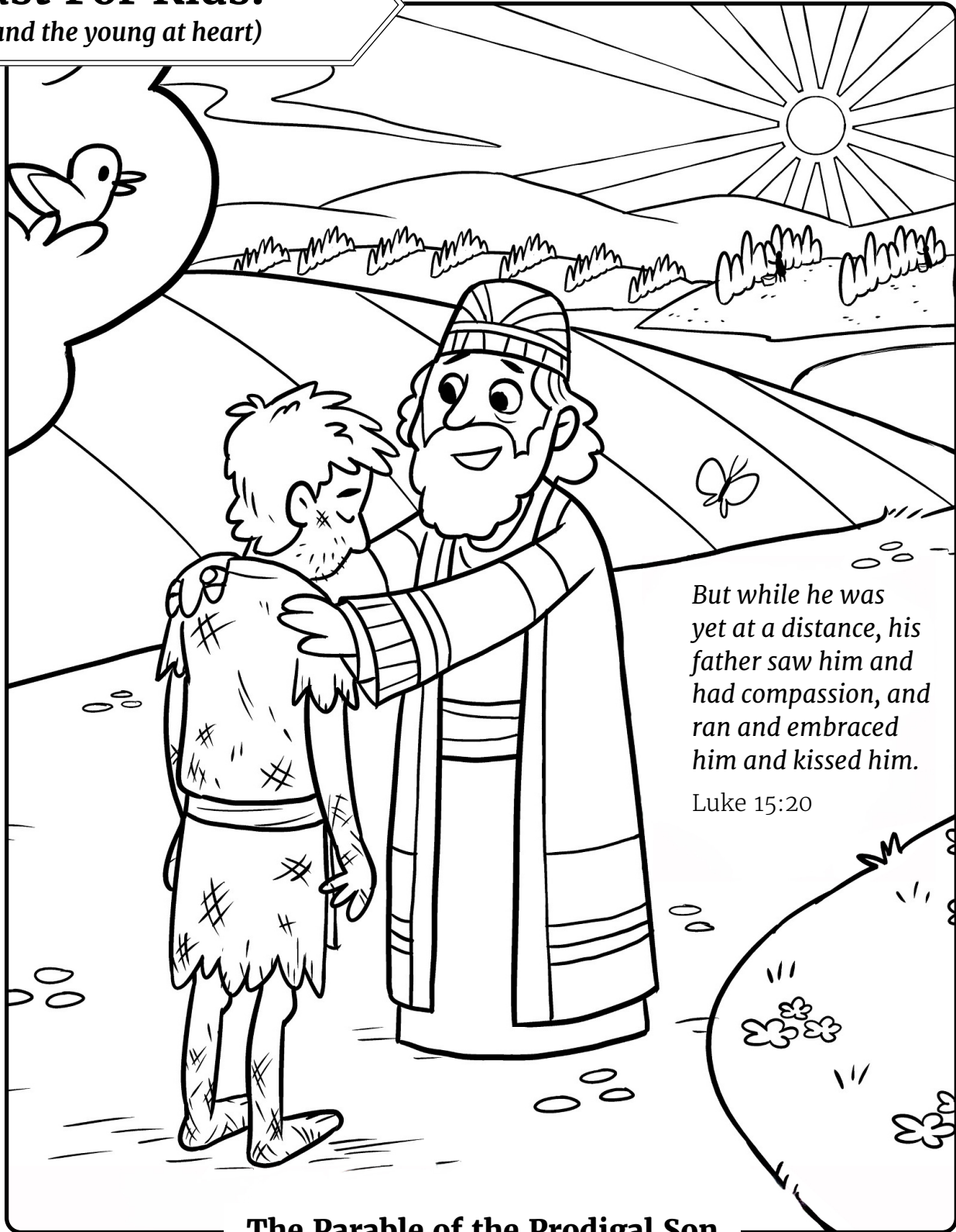
Choose **one concrete action** this week that moves you closer to Jesus: a renewed prayer, an act of kindness, attending a service, or letting go of a resentment.



Just For Kids!

(...and the young at heart)

COLOR ME!



But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

Luke 15:20

The Parable of the Prodigal Son