

Reflections for this Weekend

The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:10–14) is not simply a lesson in moral contrast; it unveils the mystery of how the human heart stands before God and how salvation truly unfolds. The Church places this Gospel at the very entrance of the Triodion because it is foundational: before fasting, before ascetic struggle, before repentance, we must first learn **how to pray and how to see ourselves truthfully before God**.

Both men ascend to the Temple, the place where heaven touches earth. Yet only one truly enters into communion with God. The Pharisee stands apart not only from the Publican, but from God Himself. His prayer is correct in form, rich in religious content, yet empty of relationship. He speaks about God, but never encounters Him. His tragedy is not that he fasts or tithes, but that he no longer believes he needs mercy. In the Eastern Christian understanding, sin is not primarily the breaking of rules but the rupture of communion.

The Pharisee’s self-confidence becomes a wall that grace cannot penetrate, because grace is never seized, it is only received.

The Publican stands at a distance, not because he doubts God’s mercy, but because he knows the truth about himself. His posture reveals the heart of Eastern spirituality: **compunction**, the gentle yet painful awakening of the heart before divine love. He does not justify, explain, or compare himself. He simply places his brokenness before God. His short prayer “God, be merciful to me, a sinner” contains no theology on his lips, yet it holds the fullness of faith in his heart. This prayer becomes the seed of the Jesus Prayer, the breath of the Church, because it expresses total dependence on God’s mercy.

Christ tells us that the Publican goes home “justified.” In the Eastern Catholic vision, justification is not a legal verdict but a healing, a restoration of right order, a return to life. Humility is not humiliation or despair; it is truth lived in the presence of love.

To see ourselves as we truly are before God is already the beginning of **theosis**, for the humble heart becomes capable of receiving divine life. Where pride closes the door, humility opens the soul.

This parable also corrects our understanding of prayer. Prayer is not performance, comparison, or proof of righteousness. It is standing before God with empty hands and a wounded heart. God is not moved by eloquence or spiritual accomplishments, but by a heart that knows it

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needs Him. The Publican does not persuade God to be merciful; rather, his humility allows him to receive the mercy that God is always offering.

In our daily lives, this Gospel challenges the subtle and dangerous forms of pharisaism that often go unnoticed: measuring our faith against others, trusting in religious activity more than repentance, confusing discipline with conversion. As we approach the ascetical journey toward Great Lent, the Church calls us not to climb higher in self-assurance, but to descend into honesty. Only those who descend in humility can be raised by grace.

The path of the Kingdom is paradoxical yet consistent: **the way up is always the way down.** In the Eastern tradition, humility is the ladder to heaven, repentance is filled with quiet joy, and mercy is the very air the Kingdom breathes. The Publican leaves the Temple changed not proud of his prayer, but healed by grace. And this is why the Church teaches us, again and again, to place upon our lips the prayer that saves: **“Lord, have mercy.”**

For in that mercy, we discover our true life. . .



Parish Announcement

Fr. Hugo will be traveling to Argentina beginning **next Thursday and returning on February 13**. The main purpose of this trip is to be with his family as they gather to **celebrate the Divine Liturgy and a memorial service marking the first anniversary of the passing into eternal life of his cousin, +Mariano**. This time of prayer and remembrance is an important moment for the family, honoring life, faith, and hope in the Resurrection.

Mariano's wife, Maria, and other family members extended an invitation to **Fr. Aníbal**, Fr. Hugo's brother, and to Fr. Hugo. Due to his busy schedule and pastoral obligations, Fr. Aníbal is unable to travel at this time, and Fr. Hugo has decided to go on behalf of the family.

During this period, Fr. Hugo also plans to travel briefly to **Brazil to receive medical treatment for his spine**. He is grateful for your prayers and support during this time.

While Fr. Hugo is away, **His Grace, Bishop Most Reverend John Pazak, CSSR**, will celebrate the **Divine Liturgies on February 1 and Sunday, February 8**.

We warmly invite everyone to **welcome Bishop John**, offer him our hospitality, and make him feel truly at home in our parish community.

Please keep Fr. Hugo, his family, and all who mourn the departed in your prayers, and may Christ grant eternal rest to His servant +Mariano and comfort to all who love him.



The courage to welcome Jesus and allow His mercy to reshape our lives.

To welcome Jesus into our lives is one of the most profound and demanding acts of courage the human heart can make. It is not the courage of great deeds or public declarations, but the quieter, more costly courage of interior surrender. Christ does not approach us as an idea or a memory, but as a living Presence who desires to dwell within us. To welcome Him is to allow that Presence to interrupt our patterns, question our certainties, and gently yet decisively reshape the inner landscape of our lives.

This courage begins with truth. Jesus never forces His way into the human heart; He waits to be received. Yet receiving Him means allowing ourselves to be fully known. We often fear this exposure, imagining that if God sees us as we truly are our wounds, our contradictions, our failures, we will be rejected. But the mystery of the Gospel reveals the opposite: Christ comes precisely because He already knows us. His mercy is not a reaction to our worthiness, but an expression of His love. The courage to welcome Jesus is the courage to stop hiding, to stand before Him without masks, trusting that His gaze heals rather than wounds.

When Jesus enters a life, He brings mercy, and mercy is never static. It is not a momentary pardon that leaves us unchanged; it is a living power that restores what has been fractured. His mercy reaches into places we have long avoided, the memories we regret, the habits that bind us, the fears we have learned to tolerate rather than confront. Allowing Christ's mercy to touch these places requires patience and trust, because healing often unfolds slowly. Yet where we permit His mercy to work, shame begins to loosen its grip, and the heart gradually learns to breathe again.

There is also courage in accepting that mercy will reorder our priorities. When Jesus is truly welcomed, He becomes the center from which everything else takes its meaning. Attachments that once defined us begin to lose their hold, and desires that once dominated us are purified. This can feel like loss, but in truth it is liberation. Christ never takes away without giving more in return. What He reshapes, He fills; what He empties, He prepares for deeper joy. His mercy does not diminish our humanity it restores it to its original beauty.

Welcoming Jesus also transforms the way we relate to others. A heart touched by mercy cannot remain hardened. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, judgment gives way to compassion, impatience yields to understanding, and resentment is softened by the memory of having been forgiven. This too requires courage, because it asks us to love beyond our natural limits. The mercy we receive from Christ becomes the measure by which we are called to live, teaching us to see others not through the lens of offense or failure, but through the hope of redemption.

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Perhaps the greatest courage lies in allowing Jesus to remain with us, not only in moments of consolation, but in times of dryness, struggle, and silence. To welcome Him daily means trusting that even when we do not feel His presence, He is at work. His mercy is faithful, patient, and enduring. It accompanies us through our weakness and does not withdraw when we stumble. Each time we choose to open the door again to pray, to repent, to hope we affirm that His mercy is greater than our fear.

In the end, the courage to welcome Jesus is the courage to believe that love is stronger than sin, that mercy is more powerful than failure, and that transformation is possible. A life that dares to make room for Christ becomes a living sanctuary, a place where grace quietly reshapes the heart and where God's Kingdom begins to take flesh. And in that sacred space, we discover that to welcome Jesus is not to lose ourselves, but to finally become who we were created to be.



Blessing of Candles – Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord (February 2)

On February 2nd, the Church celebrates the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ in the Temple. On this holy day, Christ is revealed as the ***Light to enlighten the nations*** and the glory of His people. In remembrance of this mystery, the Church preserves the ancient and beautiful tradition of the **Blessing of Candles**.

Candles symbolize Christ Himself, the true Light who enters the Temple, illuminates the darkness of the world, and enlightens our hearts. When we bring candles to be blessed, we ask God to sanctify them as signs of His presence, protection, and grace in our homes.

These blessed candles are often lit during prayer, times of illness, moments of difficulty, and at significant events in our family life, reminding us that Christ remains with us always.

We will celebrate this feast and bless candles **next Sunday after the Divine Liturgy**.

Please **bring your candles** to be blessed and take part in this meaningful tradition of the Church, carrying the light of Christ from the Temple into your homes and daily lives.

May Christ, our Light, enlighten and protect you and your families.



We are most appreciative for the generous donations to the church, and pray that the Lord grant you many, many blessings, prosperity and good health!

Ukrainian Catholic Parish

Pastor

Very Rev. Hugo Soutus

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Sunday Divine Liturgy:

8:50 a.m. The Third Hour

And

Prayer Service for Peace in Ukraine.

9:30a.m. Divine Liturgy

Religious Education

September - May

Sacraments Penance:

Sunday before Liturgies or by appointment

Baptism - Matrimony

In most instances six-month membership required

Funerals

Membership of an immediate family member required

Communion to the Homebound

If you or your family members are confined to a health center or are homebound, please contact Fr. Hugo directly so that arrangements can be made for his visitation.

Sunday, January 25

“Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee”

“Our Holy Father Gregory the Theologian, Archbishop of Constantinople”

Epistle: 2 Timothy 3:10-15. **Gospel:** Luke 18:10-14.

8:50 a.m. The Third Hour and

Prayer Service for Peace in Ukraine

9:30 a.m. Gods blessings and good health for all our parishioners and friends

In loving memory of **+Dr. Robert Nagle** from Dr. Laurel Retay-Nagle

Monday, January 26

“Our Venerable Father Xenophon and His Wife Maria”

Epistle: 2 Peter 1:20-2:9. **Gospel:** Mark 13:9-13.

Tuesday, January 27

“The Transfer of the Relics Saints John Chrysostom”

Epistle: Hebrew 7:26-8:2. **Gospel:** John 10:9-16.

6:30 p.m. Evening prayers via Zoom

Wednesday, January 28

“Our Venerable Father Ephrem the Syrian”

Epistle: 2 Peter 3:1-18. **Gospel:** Mark 13:24-31.

Thursday, January 29

“The Transfer of the Relics of the Great-Martyr Ignatius”

Epistle: 1 John 1:8-2:6. **Gospel:** Mark 13:31-14:2.

6:30 p.m. Evening prayers via Zoom

Friday, January 30

“The Three Holy Hierarchs: Basil, Gregory and John Chrysostom”

Epistle: Hebrew 13:7-16. **Gospel:** Matthew 5:14-19.

Saturday, January 31

“The Holy Wonderworkers and Unmercenaries Cyrus and John”

Epistle: 2 Timothy 3:1-9. **Gospel:** Luke 20:46-21:4.

6:30 p.m. Evening prayers via Zoom

Sunday, February 1

“Sunday of the Prodigal Son”

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. **Gospel:** Luke 15:11-32.

8:50 a.m. The Third Hour and

Prayer Service for Peace in Ukraine

9:30 a.m. Gods blessings and good health for all our parishioners and friends

Blessing of Candles