

Week 3 of Lent / the Great Lent

1. Gathering & Prayer

- Take a few moments to recall the previous session. What particularly touched you? What new insight about the human struggle, or divine grace, did you receive? Share as you wish.
- Opening Prayer, giving thanks for the insights and asking that our hearts may remain open to returning more fully to God.

Father, you have given us new life in your Son Jesus Christ and poured out your Spirit upon us. Renew us by the same Spirit and transform us into your image of Christ, that by the power of his love within us, others may come to know him as Saviour and follow him as Lord. Amen.

2. Coptic Orthodox Gospel

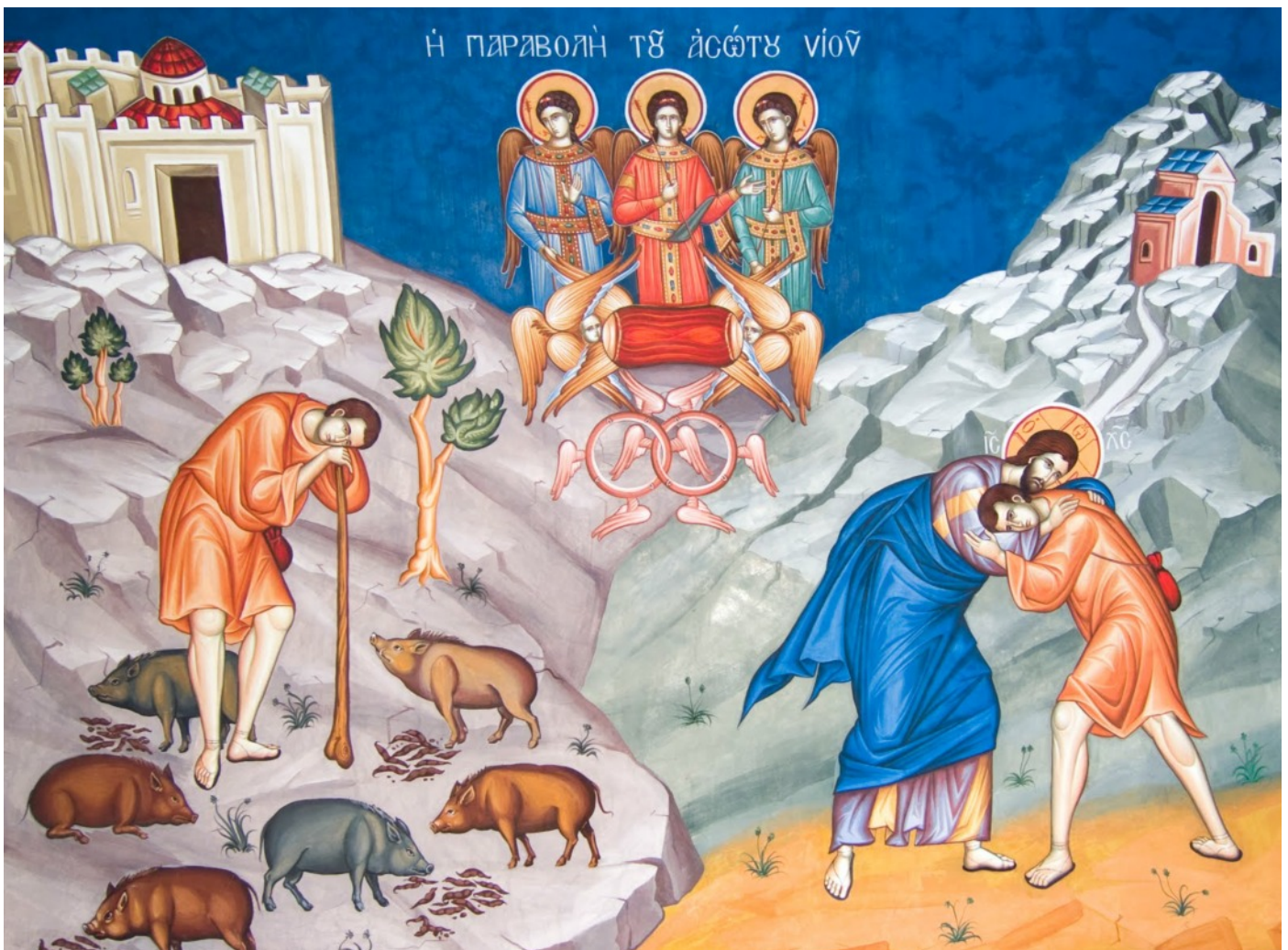
Theme: The Prodigal Son

Gospel: Luke 15:11-32

Reflection:

This is the first example the Church sets for us of repentance: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of you hired servants” (v19). God is a Father who is ready and willing to forgive His repentant son when he returns to Him in true humility.

- How do you understand the word repentance?
- How do you understand the word forgiveness?
- Are you worthy of God’s forgiveness?
- In what ways do you demonstrate the forgiveness of God in your life?



Reflections on the Coptic Orthodox Gospel from a Protestant perspective

What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah?
Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early. (Hosea 6:4)

Can't you just feel the cry of anguish in these verses as God weeps for his people who have rejected him and prostituted themselves to other gods, as Hosea's wife Gomer had left him to live as a prostitute? Can't you just feel the anguish of the father in the parable of the prodigal son, a parable that some scholars interpret as a metaphor of the rejection of God by his chosen people, as he feels the pain of separation from his son?

Having not only rejected his father, but in asking for his share of the inheritance wished that his father were dead, the son has humiliated his father. Can you imagine the father's pain? Can you also imagine the depths of despair to which the son has sunk, working with unclean animals? Can you imagine the depths of despair of the son in coming to the realisation that he is no longer worthy to be called his father's son?

But being worthy and earning the father's forgiveness is not part of Jesus' message. It certainly was an attitude of the younger brother and is the attitude of many church goers today. But Jesus' message is one that portrays the father as ever loving, eagerly awaiting to receive his people again. In fact, as the father runs to greet the returning son in a manner that was clearly undignified, even humiliating for himself to the Jewish way of thinking. Like Hosea did in redeeming Gomer, he does away with all outward appearances of respectability, and expresses his joy at the reconciliation.

What a wonderful promise that no matter how far we have distanced ourselves from God, no matter how unworthy of his love we have become, God patiently, even anxiously, awaits our return to him and responds so lavishly in his amazing grace.

3. Closing Prayer

In silence, choose one feature from the time together and pray from it. Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something that God thinks is particularly important.

This may involve a feeling—encouraging or discouraging. It may be a word or gesture that has significance for you. Or it may be something that is emerging that seemed at the time rather insignificant. Look at it. Pray about it. Allow the prayer to arise spontaneously from your heart—whether of intercession, praise, repentance, or gratitude.

Some people may choose to share a word, or an insight, or a prayer: others may prefer to remain silent.

Say Together:

God of new life, through the waters of Baptism each and every one of us is called to be a minister of the Church. Renew our call so that with passion, new vision and zeal we may together journey towards growth as your Church. May we your faithful people be:— brave enough to proclaim the Good News, enthused enough to share our story, loving enough to only see the good in others, and kind enough that our actions reflect the light and hope of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In all we are and in all we do, let us give glory to the Father, Son and Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.

You may wish to offer one other a sign of peace as this time draws to a close.