

Parish Prayer List (Living)

Metropolitan Nicholas	Sharon	Bob	Reader Mark
Andrea	Amanda	Sherry	Joretta
Fr. Michael	Barry	Sean	Kristi
James	Nicholas B.	Karin	Andrea & Kirby
Nanette	Michael	Tatiana	Rachael
Michael	Helen	Susan K	Bob Wedder
Anna	Erin and baby	Sandy	

Parish Prayer List (Fallen Asleep)

Francis Dreyer (+2/1)	Ia (Edith) Glogg (+2/17)
John Beach (+2/27)	Veronica Brickman (+3/5)

Thoughts from the Fathers

Don't Sleep, My Soul

My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death:
tarry ye here, and watch with me (Mt.26, 38)

This was a commandment, or rather a request, of the Savior to the Disciples, but the poor tired Disciples did not fulfill it. “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mt.26, 41). Even in Apostles the human flesh muffled the spirit. This call of the Savior is directed to us as well: “tarry ye here, and watch with Me”; he does not leave us; even though invisibly, but He is always with us. With this thought our whole life turns into something grand and holy.

“Tarry here” – says the Lord, and wait for my call. Wait, sometimes in sorrow and tribulation, but with the eyes always at dawn, with a firm belief, that He will visibly appear before us. We will hear His voice, calling unto us: “rise, let us be going”, - but not to the Golgotha, not to the cross, but to the resurrection, to the heavenly habitat, into the eternal joy!

“Watch with me”. We are never alone in our sorrow; “Thou art near, o Lord” (Ps.119, 151) So near, that He hears our every whisper, and sees our every sigh. Our heavenly Father feels for us and expects that moment when He finds us ready to accept His help; then He will send us relief. Our Savior Himself

desired our compassion, but due to their human weakness His Disciples could not support Him in a difficult time. Who but Him can understand our sorrow? He is always near and He can help us respond to His calling: “watch with me”. Help us, Lord, awake us from the sinful sleeping, let us be with You so close that we would not let our souls sleep when You are calling unto us and when You need even Your weakest servants! “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few” (Mt.9, 37) – You said. You went into heaven, but Your work remained on earth; let us not harm this holy work by our weaknesses!

(Translated by Tatiana Rozzell from “Every Day is a Gift from God. Diaries of an Orthodox Priest”, author unknown)

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The words by which the preparatory weeks for the fast of Great Lent are begun, speak of a paradox. 'He who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted'. As these words are proclaimed in our churches throughout the world on the first Sunday of the Triodion, commonly known as the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, we have just come from hearing another paradox proclaimed in the same Sunday's epistle: 'Yes, all those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution' ([2 Tm 3.12](#)). Humbleness brings exaltation, the pursuit of godliness brings persecution; and so we turn our eyes toward Lent.

The Publican's cry, 'God, be merciful unto me, a sinner!', is a phrase not uncommon to the Orthodox world. Indeed, it is partially in reference to this Scriptural passage that the words of the Jesus Prayer in its most common form can be attributed; and in the form of the Prayer, the words of the tax collector are thus uttered by many of the faithful hundreds, if not thousands, of times in their own lives. But what of these words that we pray?

'God, have mercy on me' is a petition of unequalled frequency in the Church's worship and prayer. Countless litanies embrace it as a refrain, prayer services and memorials beg it repeatedly, and there are portions of the Offices in which it is said in sequences of three, twelve, forty or even fifty. It is the one phrase that many of the faithful, no matter how limited their linguistic knowledge otherwise, will know in all three of the Church's great traditional tongues: *Lord, have mercy. Kyrie, eleison. Gospodi, pomilui.*

The words are simple, yet powerful. To beg God's mercy is a grave and awesome mystery in its own right, for the mercy of God is the foundation of

the universe. We are made bold to ask for nothing less than that gift which goes beyond all comprehension and understanding, that gift by which the very planets and the stars have their being and we mortal humans have our breath. There is no little content to this cry.

But the Gospel for this Sunday does not speak so much of what the words of the tax collector say, but what they do not say. His prayer is not recounted until we have heard the words of another man, the Pharisee, one of the order of great religious teachers in the late Jewish world, the righteousness of whom must nonetheless be exceeded by anyone entering the Kingdom of Heaven ([Matthew 5.20](#)). It is, interestingly, this Pharisee's prayer that abounds in words, in things said. 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other men--extortionists, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess'.

The Pharisee has made what might have seemed a reasonable prayer, if we strip away for a moment its uncharitable tone. He is not an extortionist, and gives thanks to God for this fact. He keeps justice, for which fact he again offers thanks. Nor is he an adulterer, nor a tax collector, the latter group being one known for fraud, deception and theft, especially of the poor and misfortunate. He keeps the fasts. He offers of his wealth in tithes to the temple. He seems in every way 'religious'.

But his prayer has said too much, has revealed something of him that he certainly did not intend, yet which is nonetheless true. It has made objects of the elements in his religious life, and thus shown that he does not understand their true and deeper purpose. He has judged another, even if in seeming 'justice', and thus brought judgement upon his own head. His asceticism has made him proud, and thus not only failed to serve its intended end, but counteracted it altogether. And from the very outset, the Pharisee's prayer has set him apart from his brethren. 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other men'. Prayer, which by engendering union with God thus ought in purity to make men one, has been twisted into a divisive act that rends men apart.

Still, we must not judge the Pharisee. We must not hear the words of the Gospel and inwardly cry, 'Thanks to Thee, O God, that I do not pray as he did!', for then, by another great paradox, we pray exactly as he did. The holy Gospel does not recount the Pharisee's prayer that we may see how other, poorer men pray, but that we may see with objective perspective how we pray. Though we may be more familiar with the words of the Publican, we must admit with pained heart that, of the two men, the Pharisee is far more like unto our own selves than the humbled and humble tax collector.

As with so much of the mystery that is God's gracious revelation in the Scriptures, we find that this story is our story. It is not only the Publican and the Pharisee, two long distant and removed figures, who go to the temple to pray, but we ourselves who approach God's great mercy. And it is we who stand and proclaim, whether in our moments of prayer or in the activities of our daily lives, that 'we are not like other men; we are just; we are not adulterers; we fast; we tithe; we are faithful'. And it is to us that the loving Lord Jesus proclaims: 'Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled'.

How good for our souls it is for us to cry along with St Andrew of Crete, as we shall do in a few weeks' time:

'Boastful am I, and hard of heart, all in vain and for nothing. Condemn me not with the Pharisee, but rather grant unto me the humility of the Publican, O only merciful and just Judge, and number me with him' (Great Canon, Ode 4).

It is this message that the Gospel for this Sunday means to instil in our hearts: not that we pray like the Publican, no matter how often we may recite his words; but that we pray like the Pharisee--that we are proud and haughty, and therefore must be humbled. The tax collector is not our associate but our example, the one whom we are to follow and strive to emulate. 'Grant unto me the humility of the Publican'.

The Pharisee is he who speaks of us, but the Publican he who speaks to us. 'God, have mercy upon me' *must* be the words of our prayer; but they cannot be purely our prayer whilst we still pray that 'we are not like other men', that we are 'just'. Justice is far from us who are, as the tax collector proclaimed, sinners. We have no weight with God, no claim to His grace. We have only the ability to come before Him and beg His mercy exactly as we are.

Lent is coming. In three weeks, the Vespers of Forgiveness will see in the fast proper, the actual period of 'joyful sorrow' that marks the journey into Pascha. But even now the Church begins to situate herself into that spirit which is necessary for joy, for sorrow, for repentance: the spirit of humility which can only come as our pride is brought low and in the depth of our hearts we realise that there is no other cry which mortal man can make in the presence of his King than the words of the humble collector of tax: *God, be merciful unto me, a sinner!*

--Deacon Matthew Steenberg