

****SUNDAY'S MESSAGE****

MARCH 7, 2010

SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON

Luke 15:11-32

Today's Gospel recounts the story of the son who asked for his share from his father's estate because he wanted to leave home. Even though the son knew that his request was going to hurt his father, he packed his belongings and left. On the one hand, the father felt his son's ignorance and indigence. On the other, the father knew that half the fortune for which he worked all his life is inevitably going to be squandered. But the father did not argue. He knew that if the son was ever to learn his lesson he must learn the hard way. In spite of it all, the father did grant his son's request. The son soon ran through the money; and he ended up by herding and feeding pigs, a task that was forbidden to a Jew because their law laid it down: "Cursed is he who feeds pigs."

But when this young man realized the sin he committed against his father, he came to his senses and decided to go home and plead to be taken back not as a son but in the lowest rank of slaves. Notice how the father received the indignant and sinful son. There was no blame, no recrimination, not insult or no accounts to be paid back. Because of the father's unconditional love toward his son, he did not give his estranged son a chance to be humiliated and embarrassed so as to ask to be accepted back home as one of the lowest slaves in his father's home. Instead, the father broke in before that, bear-hugged his son, welcomed him home, and finding his son alive he decided to have a celebration.

The loving and forgiving father wanted his son to know that at his father's home he is not a slave but the real and actual son. Because the son realized his wrongdoing, because he had a change of heart, and because he returned to his father seeking forgiveness, he was treated royally. Without any delay, the father ordered his servants to bestow upon the newfound son the royal paraphernalia: the ROBE, the RING, and the SHOES. The ROBE stands for dignity, power and honor, for it is the formal garment of priests, kings and judges. The RING stands for the seal of authority, for if a man gave to another his signet ring it was the same as giving him the power of attorney. The SHOES stand for a son and heir as opposed to a hired servant or a slave. Thus shoes were the sign of freedom. That was not all that the father could do to express his joy, he ordered that the fatted calf be killed and a feast was made that all might rejoice with him to celebrate the return of his once lost son.

In this parable that is entitled the prodigal son, the emphasis centers around the son who realized his wrongdoing, who came to his senses, who returned to his sanity and who sought the forgiveness of the father. The importance and the weight of this lovely parable should be credited to both father and son in an equal manner. Let us put ourselves in both situations in order to weigh the importance of each side. Which is more difficult for us to do, to admit guilt and sinfulness or to forgive those who hurt and offend us? Yes it is humiliating and difficult to admit guilt, confess sins, interrupt our sinful status quo and change to a cleaner lifestyle. Further, it is equally difficult to love unconditionally and forgive those who have done us wrong. The offense committed against the father's life long labor, his property, fortune, personality, image and pride was immeasurable. But the greater the offense, the greater the credit for the person who forgives.

In this lovely parable the loving and forgiving father is GOD. And the son is each and every one of us who at one time or another, in so many different ways, have offended Him. Yes it is true that no matter what type of sin we commit, God, the loving and forgiving Father, will accept us back, and will welcome us with a strong bear-hug ONLY IF AND WHEN WE ADMIT AND CONFESS OUR WRONGDOING FIRST. Notice that forgiveness did not happen before conversion and confession. It is a wonderful parable, which brings a haughty moral to both sides of the fence. If we are on the offender's side, learn from the prodigal son to have a contrite heart, a change of attitude, and a true confession of sins. If we are on the forgiving side, learn love and forgiveness from the father.

Dear Lord, Father of love and forgiveness, we come to you with a renewed heart, seeking a warm fatherly embrace, forgive our transgressions and treat us not according to our wrongdoing but according to your abundant mercy.

****THE DIVINE LITURGIES****

THIS WEEKEND

5:00 PM Sat. Mar. 6
10:00 AM Sun. Mar. 7
12:15 PM Sun. Mar. 7

John Zwelling
LouLou Sayed Khoury
Joseph Mansour

REQUESTED BY

Phyllis Keeton
M/M Karam Khoury
M/M Fouad Natanios

WEEKDAY LITURGIES

8:00 AM Monday
8:00 AM Tuesday
8:00 AM Wednesday
8:00 AM Thursday
7:00 PM Friday

Thomas S. Anthony
Takla Hage
Theresa Hage
Sarkis Elias
Bertha Hayek

REQUESTED BY

The Family
M/M Antoine Hayek
Amy Habib & Family
M/M Milad Mansour
Julie Harris

NEXT WEEKEND

5:00 PM Sat. Mar. 13
10:00 AM Sun. Mar. 14
12:15 PM Sun. Mar. 14

Philip & Jean Williams
Irene Shiner (1st Anniversary)
Akl Doumit & Yacoub Chbat

REQUESTED BY

The Family
Bernard Shiner & Family
M/M Yacoub Chbat

PARISH EVENTS

LEBANESE CITIZENS RIGHT TO VOTE

Lebanon will allow Lebanese citizens living abroad the right to vote in the 2013 elections, but first those interested must sign up to do so. The New York Lebanese Counsel General, Antoine Azzam, has put out a memo explaining this on the Consul's website located at www.lebconsny.org. Please take a few minutes to read this memo so if you are interested you can sign up. It will take time for the processing so it is important to do this now.

SERVICE OF THE CROSS

Every Friday during Lent the Divine Liturgy will begin at 7:00 PM followed by the Service of the Cross.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

- Mar. 7 Regular Classes,
Sunday of the Prodigal Son, ***Clocks Spring Ahead***
Mar. 14 Regular Classes, **(7-8 Grade Liturgy @ 10:00 AM)**
Sunday of the Paralytic
Mar. 17 Class for Grades 9-12 @ 7:00 PM with Father
Mar. 21 Regular Classes, Sunday of the Blind Man
Mar. 28 No Classes, Hosanna Sunday –Sha-Nee-Nee

COFFEE HOUR VOLUNTEERS: Mar. 14 Georges & May Atallah; Mar. 21 Christian & Claudia Behlok. Thank you for your service.

MERIT COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP

High School Seniors! Have you begun your application process for the St. John Maron Merit College Scholarship? All application materials must be in by April 1. See the SJM website, or contact Fr. Georges for more information. Scholarship information and application forms are available at the Church entrance.

MARONITE CHARITIES APPEAL

Thus far, donations to our Charity Appeal totals \$4560 which leaves \$25,440 to be collected by April 11th. One of the sacrifices we practice during the Lenten season is to give to those less fortunate than ourselves. We urge you to be generous to this year's charities appeal. Please fill in the form, include your donation, and place both in the addressed envelope and drop the envelope in the church collections or mail it to the church at your earliest convenience. Thank you in advance. As always, your prompt response and generosity are deeply appreciated.

PROTECTING GOD'S CHILDREN

To all teachers that still need to attend the VIRTUS workshops, here are the next set of dates: Mar. 16th 6:00 PM Nativity of Our Lord (Orchard Park); Mar. 23rd 6:30 PM SS. Columba & Brigid (Buffalo); Mar. 24th 6:00 PM Niagara Catholic HS (Niagara Falls); Mar. 25th, Apr. 22nd, May 27th and June 17th 1:00 PM all at the Catholic Center (Buffalo). Register on-line at www.buffalodiocese.org and click on "Protecting God's Children". **There are many teachers that still need to attend, please do so at your earliest convenience and also your criminal background check must also be completed.**

CARMELITE NOVENA TO SAINT JOSEPH

The annual Novena begins Thurs., March 11th and closes on Fri. March 19th. Services begin with the Rosary at 7:00 PM followed by Holy Mass.

THE SANCTUARY LAMP

This week the Sanctuary Lamp will burn In Thanksgiving for the Health of Fr. Georges Y. El-Khali, requested by Terry Abraham.

The Sanctuary Lamp is located by the altar of St. John Maron. It will burn for the entire week. Offering for the lamp is only \$10 per week. It is scheduled on a first-come-first-serve-basis to ensure an equal opportunity for everyone.

Next week it will burn for Halim Habib, requested by Amy Habib & Family.



THE SICK OF OUR PARISH

Marie Abounader, Jeanne D'Arc Abou-Antoun, Marie Hayek-Butera, Magid Mansour, Rose Manzella, Lillian Noah, Raghad Dabbikeh Schroeder, & Lily Simon
Please remember the sick of our family in your prayers

HOLY NAME SOCIETY

The Holy Name Society has a meeting scheduled for **today**, March 7th, after the 10:00 AM Liturgy. This meeting will deal with final preparations necessary for the spaghetti dinner on March 21st.

A NOTE OF GRATITUDE

The St. John Maron Lenten Retreat was held on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, March 2nd and 3rd. We were happy to welcome back as our retreat master, Msgr. Peter Popadick, Pastor of St. Aloysius Church. I wish to thank the Altar & Rosary Committee and all those who were involved in setting up, organizing, and bringing food for the retreat. Thank you for making St. John Maron a place of spirituality as well as a place of wonderful hospitality.

ST. ALOYSIUS LENTEN RETREAT

Msgr. Popadick has invited our parish to attend the Lenten Retreat at St. Aloysius, 157 Cleveland Drive, Cheektowaga on Wednesday, March 10th. A supper of soup and bread will be at 5:30 PM in the school cafeteria followed by Mass at 7:00 PM. Father Georges will be the homilist. All are welcome and we are hoping many will attend. It is truly special that our two church communities come together for this celebration.

SPAGHETTI DINNER

The annual Spaghetti Dinner, which is co-sponsored by the Altar & Rosary and Holy Names Societies, will be held on March 21st from 11:30 AM - 5:00 PM in the parish hall. It is an all-you-can-eat dinner including spaghetti, meatballs, meatless sauce, beverages and dessert. There is a charge of \$8.00 for adults and \$4.00 for children 10 and under. For take out, please call 634-0669.

CONGRATULATIONS

Our congratulations to Mr. & Mrs. Elie A. Harfouche on the Baptism & Chrismation of their daughter Gabriella Elie Harfouche. May God, who created us out of His outpouring of love, grant the newborn Gabriella, good health and long life so that she may grow in His Church to love, adore and praise Him. May he also grant Elie and Frances, the parents of Gabriella, a good healthy life to raise her according to our Maronite Catholic Tradition.