



Sermon for Sunday of the Prodigal Son / All Saints Camp Sunday

Our lives are constantly affected by new technological advances. As with all tools, of they can provide us with benefits that enrich our spiritual lives but also distractions that can lead us to focus more and more on worldly concerns. There are many sounds to alert us of our obligations, dangers and opportunities. There are welcome ones like beeps to tell us that the food is done in our microwave or our credit card has been accepted for payment: irritating buzzers to alert us that we forgot our password or that we made a wrong turn as we're driving. Others warn us that it's time to go to an appointment or complete a task to meet a deadline. In a similar way, the Holy Church appoints today's gospel lesson serves as a spiritual alert that it's time to prepare for our Lenten journey to Pascha so that we can fully receive the joy of the Resurrection.

We will begin our Lenten journey focusing on the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise. Although God had said, without qualification, that "if you eat of the tree in the garden of Eden, you will surely die". Adam and Eve turned away from God and his advice and took the 'vice' of Satan and so death was created.

In today's Gospel, the prodigal son first turns away from his worldly father by pursuing the pleasures and temptations of the world. While he did not physically die, his life as he had known it under the care of his father was over. He enjoyed temporary happiness soon followed by great want, loneliness and sorrow. It was only whenever he recognized the source of his sorrow (his focus on worldly things and his separation from his father) that he could begin to return to life.

Our children today are not only tempted by the instant gratification of social media, cultural messages in movies and popular music, but also by being bombarded through the technical advances in the world. The world of the internet can also give easy access to ideas about God that are contrary to the truth found in the Orthodox church.

Christ has blessed us with children and entrusted us with their care and development into faithful members of His kingdom. Whether we are parents, godparents, or members of the parish family, we need to provide them with spiritual support as well as physical needs. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA is blessed to have All Saints Camp in Emlenton, PA that provides a place and programs to help us and especially our children to come closer to Christ. To know His love, compassion, and strength to help us find our way out of this temporary life into the kingdom of heaven.

Although monetary support is always needed for maintenance of the camp and development of the programs offered there, we all have different talents which are important to make our camp a place for spiritual growth. There are many ways we can volunteer.

Today we celebrate Camping Day. Camp is an opportunity for our children to step away from the things of the world so that they may have a chance to return to their Father's house. Through daily prayer, church services and activities related to the Church year, they learn of the everlasting joy awaiting them in the Kingdom of heaven.

While many children are initially disturbed by the fact that they can't access the internet, they soon learn the advantage of interacting with other Orthodox Christians, their peers, teachers, clergy and counselors. They build lasting relationships that go beyond the one or two weeks they spend at the church camp. Often, those who are only intending to spend one week at camp ask to spend a second week once they learn how liberating being away from the world can be.

The church provides All Saints Camp for our children to see the joy that comes from recognizing God's creation as a foretaste to the kingdom waiting for those who follow their Father's advice.

We focus on our children's physical needs whether food, clothing, medical attention and so on. Let us also consider providing them a chance to grow spiritually at All Saints Camp.

In a world where only 1% of people are Orthodox, we and our children rarely encounter the peace and strength provided by surrounding ourselves with fellow Orthodox Christians. Let us pause today to consider how we may make a wonderful opportunity available to them to be immersed in our Orthodox faith through All Saints Camp.