

DIRECTED TOWARD GOD

Youth Reading & Craft for a Session on the Lenten Triodion

Georget Photos

The Triodion is the service book that is first used four weeks before the start of Great Lent. These four weeks are preparation for the Great Fast. Each Sunday of this period reflects on elements of Great Lent, either through parables, witness or advice. Whatever the direction is, it will focus on giving us better direction to our journey. If we do not have direction or guidelines for the great journey, how can we know whether we are on the right path? These parables are like the GPS in your car—God’s Protection System—during the journey through Great Lent. No matter how many times in our lives we take this trip, we need direction. Further examination will tell us why.

DIRECTION 1: HUMILITY

The Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee (Luke 18:10–14)

Two men went to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee (a Jewish leader who followed the temple laws closely) and the other a Publican (a tax collector). The Pharisee stood in the temple and thanked God he was not like other men, who were all extortionists, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector, as he pointed to the Publican. The Pharisee boasted of all the good he had accomplished and the tithes he had given. The Publican knelted penitently, far in the back of the temple. He did not lift his eyes to heaven, and he beat his breast asking God to be merciful to him, a sinner. The Publican went home that day justified, instead of the Pharisee, because everyone who boasts about himself will be humbled, and everyone who humbles himself will be exalted. The Pharisee did not do anything wrong. In fact, the Pharisee followed the “letter” of God’s Law. He received the rewards he wanted: adulation from those around him. The Publican, though a sinner, asked for **forgiveness**. God rewarded the Publican: **humility** is one of God’s jewels.

DIRECTION 2: REPENTANCE

The Sunday of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32)

A man had two sons. The younger of the two sons asked for his portion of his father’s inheritance. After a few days,

the younger son took his fortune, traveled to a far-off city, and wasted his wealth. Then a great famine began, and the young son could not support himself. As a result, the only job he could find was feeding pigs, and he was so hungry that he would have eaten anything, even the same food that he gave to the pigs. But no one would give him any food. The young man was only popular as long as he had wealth. It occurred to him that his father’s servants had more than enough to eat. Therefore, the young man went back to his father. His father saw him coming from a distance. He ran to the young man and embraced him. The son asked for **forgiveness**, telling his father that he had sinned against both heaven and him and was no longer worthy to be called his son. Instead of scolding or criticizing, his father called to the servants to dress the boy in fine robes, place sandals on his feet, and kill the fatted calf for a great feast for his son. His son was dead and now alive; he was lost and now found.

The older son then came home. He saw the party and asked a servant what was going on. When he found out that his younger brother had returned and there was a party to welcome him, he was outraged and argued with his father. The older son told his father that he had always obeyed, honored and worked for him, yet he had never been given anything so that he could have a party with his friends. Instead, he came home and saw a party for his younger brother, who had squandered everything. The father told his older son that he was always with him and that everything he owned was his, but his younger brother was dead and now alive, was lost and now found. He told him not to be angry, but to come and rejoice. The older brother was angry and jealous. The younger son repented to his father and to God. Genuine and sincere **repentance** will always pave the way to God’s kingdom.

DIRECTION 3: COMPASSION

Sunday of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31–46)

Christ will come again in glory as a King sitting on a throne with all His angels. He will separate the nations and have His sheep (righteous people) sit on His right, and on

the left sit the goats—the sinners who have not repented and asked for **forgiveness**. To the sheep, the King will say:

Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me. (Matthew 25:34–36)

Those to His left He will curse and send to the fiery pits prepared for the devil and his angels, because they did nothing for Him. They did not feed, give drink, clothe, give shelter, visit when sick or in prison; in every way, they ignored those in need. Therefore, the sheep will inherit eternal life, whereas the goats will go away in everlasting punishment. Compassion for our brothers and sisters—family, friends, foes, and even strangers—is important. We must help anyone in need, no matter who they are.

DIRECTION 4+: FORGIVENESS

Sunday of Forgiveness (Matthew 6:14–21)

This Sunday is the final step before the first day of Great Lent. It is our final and ultimate direction. God will forgive us our sins if we forgive those who have sinned against us. We will be judged as we judge others. When we fast, we should do it in secret and not call attention to our actions. Those who call attention to themselves receive their reward from those around them, but God will reward those who fast in secret. (Sounds like the Publican and the Pharisee?) Do not collect treasures on earth that may be stolen by thieves, rust, or be eaten by moths, but instead collect treasures in heaven where they cannot be destroyed or stolen. (Sounds like the Prodigal Son?) For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. It is not important what your friends think about your accomplishments. It is important that your treasures are jewels in God's eyes.

God's points of direction include **humility, repentance, compassion and forgiveness**. His compass points to His Resurrection and assists us in staying centered throughout this journey. When we follow His direction, we will not stray off the road one way or another, but instead arrive at our final destination.

This reading and project for youth is an excerpt from Presbyteria Georget Photos's *Let Us Live Orthodoxy, Volume 2: The Triodion to Great Lent*, which will be published in 2012 by the Department of Religious Education. The six-volume series is a hands-on approach (including projects, retreats and recipes) that leads young people to know, understand, and respect the traditions of the Church, enabling them to actively include these traditions

in their lives. For more information, visit www.goarch.org/arch-diocese/departments/religious/liveorthodoxy. Presbyteria Georget and her husband, Fr. Dean Photos, have led these exercises in their parishes with astonishing success. They presently serve the community of St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church of Polk County, FL, where Fr. Dean is Proistamenos and Presbyteria is the Sunday School Facilitator and Youth Advisor.

TREASURE IN HEAVEN

This is a very simple project, but it has a great meaning. It helps us focus on what is important in our lives—our direction—and all of the positive people, places and things that keep us moving toward God.

- 1 tablespoon gold or silver glitter
- 1 clear, sturdy, single-serving plastic or glass bottle with lid (such as a 20-ounce tea or soda bottle)
- 2 cups white or tan sand
- Funnel
- Variety of small charms that represent Church, school, home, family, pets, heroes in our lives, etc. (small enough to fit through the bottle's opening)
- OR -
- Variety of small faith-related charms (for example, cross, fish, Bible, Noah's Ark, Ten Commandments)
- 4 small cards, each with one of the following words: compassion, forgiveness, humility, repentance

1. Remove the label (and any glue it leaves behind) from a single-serving juice, tea, or soda bottle. Wash and dry the bottle and its cap.
2. Fill the container halfway with sand.
3. Select your charms. Think of everything on earth that means something to you, and select charms to represent each one (for example, a cross for Church, a red bow for your mother, and a pink bow for your sister). Place at least 10 charms in your bottle.
4. Add the cards and the glitter to the bottle.
5. Pour the rest of the sand into the bottle, leaving about 1½ inches at the top. Close the lid. (Add a bit of glue to the threads of the cap if does not seem secure.)
6. Shake container well, make sure to cover everything.

To remember where your heart is each day during the Triodion period and the Great Fast, shake your bottle to reveal your treasures. This exercise, though simple, reminds us throughout Great Lent to follow the directions Christ gave us. Each time you shake the bottle, try to bring compassion, forgiveness, humility and repentance to your heart's surface.