

God's Great Love For Us (Metropolitan Ioil (Frangkakos) of Edessa, Pella, and Almopia.)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



'He became angry and did not want to go in'

The parable of the Prodigal Son, which is read in churches today, is held by commentators to be a pearl among the parables, or the 'Gospel within the Gospel'. Some call it the parable of the Elder Son. Indeed, the attitude of the elder son when he returns and is told of the return of his younger brother is revealing. He didn't want to go in and criticized his father for- supposedly- being unfair to him. The charge was based on the fact that he worked day and night and wasn't rewarded commensurately, while the prodigal son spent his portion of the inheritance on harlots and, on his return was afforded a warm welcome. Let's look at the elder son in the parable.



Who is the elder son?

Most commentators say that the elder son represents the Pharisees, since publicans and sinners came to Christ, listened to Him and some of them repented, which didn't please the Pharisees at all. The Scribes and Pharisees complained, saying 'He receives sinners and eats with them' (Luke 15, 2). This charge against Christ was an ongoing fixture of their thinking and this is why, through such parables as the lost sheep and the lost coin, Christ attempted to change their outlook. Saint John Chrysostom says: 'All things can be borne if they're for the salvation of another'. Every soul is so precious to God that He sacrifices even His Son - the fatted calf- for our salvation.

Another interpretation of the elder son is the following. This son symbolizes the Saints of our Church. These Saints, who bore the burden and heat of the day and worked in the Lord's vineyard from the first hour, who observed God's commandments, demand that justice be applied: that God should reward the righteous and punish the impious. The Saints are astonished at the great loving-kindness of God, Who immediately forgives those who return to Him in repentance. Indeed, He gives them the same gifts as those He gives to the Sinners. It's as if the Saints are protesting (in terms of the parable, of course, not really) that God's behaviour exhibits a 'scandalous' level of mercy and loving-kindness towards

sinners. This demonstrates that human justice is different from that of God.

A misconception on the part of pious people

Very often, people who do spiritual work within the Church feel superior to sinners and can't accept that the latter can repent, can change their lives and, in the end, can be saved. They think that they have more rights before God than sinners do. They say they've done good works and never betrayed their trust in God. Then along comes the Lord and emphasizes that repentance is a more worthy task than what we think of as good works. Saint Cyril of Alexandria says that our salvation is God's gift to us and not the result of good deeds, be they many or few.

Our own criteria as people, who judge in accordance with what we see, are very different from those of God. To our mind, the robber or the harlot or the publican, and lots of other people besides, shouldn't be saved. But God, with His boundless love and His own way of measuring justice, saves them anyway. Abba Isaac says; 'God may be called just, but, even more so, He's kind and good'. He asks of us that we give ourselves. That we give Him all of our spiritual vigour and hardihood. Elder Paisios used to say that a sigh from the depths of the heart carried more weight than a vessel containing emotional tears. Let us approach God in humility, with the determination to shatter our egotism, so that we may be saved.