February: Gateway to Spring

With the leavetaking of the Meeting of the Lord on February 9, we complete the time of the “Winter Pascha.” However, on February 14, the following Sunday, with the reading of the gospel about Zaccheus, we begin our preparation for the Great and Holy season of Lent which begins this year on March 15. Each week has its own special theme which corresponds to the Gospel read on Sunday. This message on each Lord’s Day emphasizes a particular aspect of the Good News. Each week we are also challenged to examine how we have responded to that “News.”

**Feb. 21 – Publican and the Pharisee** (Gospel – Luke 18:10-14)

“Open to me the Doors of Repentance” is sung for the first time.

**Theme:** Humility

Religion cannot be reduced to external observances and must not be the source of self-admiration.

**Challenge:**
Why do I keep taking the gifts God has given me - my health, my intellectual and emotional gifts - and keep using them to impress people, receive affirmation and praise, and compete for rewards, instead of developing them for the glory of God? How would the quantity or quality of my worship and prayers and Christian stewardship (time, talents, resources) differ if my actions were seen by no one except God?

**Feb. 28 – Prodigal Son** (Gospel – Luke 15:11-32)

On this Saturday night, Psalm 137 (By the Waters of Babylon) is sung.

**Theme #1:** Return to God

I am the prodigal son every time I search for unconditional love where it cannot be found.

**Theme #2:** Exile

I remember that I have lost communion with God. I am a long way from my true home. Something priceless, pure, beautiful and eternal is missing from my life.

**Challenge:**
Where am I going in life? Do I really experience the Church as an icon of my true home? What is God calling me to change in my life? Why do I keep ignoring the place of true love and persist in looking for it elsewhere?