

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, of things visible and invisible.

(Pew book pg. 18-19)

Let us look at Saint Gregory's teaching and see how he defines Holy Trinity.

In his Teachings "On The Most Holy Trinity" (Hajakhapatum Jark, attributed to St. Grigor Lusavorich, Homily 1) St. Gregory says that for as sunshine and light and warmth are attributable to one sun and not to others, and as fountain and water and river are said to be of one nature, as also the mind, reason, and spirit are understood in man, so also to understand here the one nature and Godhead of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For the sun is not without light and warmth, and the fountain is not without water and effluence, and the mind is not without reason and spirit. Likewise, the Father is neither without the Son nor without the Holy Spirit.

Some of you may ask about the nature and character of the God the Father.

In the second homily "On the Distinctiveness of The Trinity" Saint Grigor Lusavorich says that for by nature he is the Father of His only-begotten Son, and Life of Life, Light of Light, and the Good of Goodness. And by grace He is called our Father also, and Light who enlightens us through the faith, and Life, who works life in us. He reveals himself to people through true manifestation to some through nature and to others through providential care as a father is to orphans. He thus draws us near; moreover, He enables us to resemble Him in His creative, providential care, to turn the misguided to the knowledge of God, by the grace of the benevolent Father, more so as regards benevolence, to become like Him in mercy. He teaches the sinners so that they may not be lost eternally, rather to proceed thoughtfully in the right path, guided by the divine law, to study, to come to know and to obtain wisdom and discipline, and to guide the lost with signs and wonders, to establish the disciples in the faith, to remain unmoved in the truth, to be very patient through all tribulations.

What does the badarak say about God the Father?

"God of truth and Father of mercy, we thank you, who have exalted our nature, condemned as we were, above that of the blessed patriarchs; for you were called God by them, whereas in compassion you have been pleased to be named Father by us." (Pew book pg. 40)

What does today's Gospel reading say about the Prodigal Son's Father?

Let us look at today's parable and focus on the prodigal son's father as the main character since today we are talking about God the Father. And so, after all Jesus begins the parable by referring to "a certain man had two sons". Some commentators alternately refer to this parable as the "Loving – Forgiving Father." Let's see why: First, after the younger brother asks for his share of his father's estate, the father immediately and simply gives the two sons their inheritance. The father does not endlessly lecture his son, nor does he attach any strings or demands concerning his inheritance. He does not scold his son for his greediness and impatience. As we know from the passage, the younger son squanders his share of the estate on loose living and ends up in total poverty and isolation. Once he hits rock-bottom, the younger son comes to himself and realizes how far he has estranged himself from his father and his father's values and lifestyle. He then decides to return to his father in total humility and repentance.

Secondly, as the prodigal son is returning to his homeland, it is said that "when he was a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him". Obviously, all the time the son was away, the father had been looking impatiently for him to return. The father did not forget about his son, nor did he totally occupy himself with other interests. Not only that, the father did not wait for his son to arrive at the front door of the home but ran to greet him while the son was still far away. In addition, the father did not interrogate him by asking "Where is all your money?" nor lecture him with remarks like, "I told you that you were too young to handle all this wealth". Rather, the father had compassion, knowing the pain of losing everything, the pain of loneliness and the pain of humiliation. And knowing all this, he showed his son true human love and affection by embracing him and kissing him.

Presumably, some of our own biological fathers would not have acted this way if their sons had behaved like the prodigal son did. Perhaps sometimes even we have a hard time accepting our own children, family members, or friends back into our lives if they acted like he did. But in God the Father we do not deal with a human authority figure or with a creature weakened by passions and sins as we are. Instead, we are dealing with a Divine Father who gave His only begotten Son; that all who believe in Him should not die, but have everlasting life. Like the father in the

parable, God the Father is not out to punish sinners or to collect a debt. Instead, He is eager to forgive, eternally waiting for us to return so that He can restore us to the dignity and glory for which we were created as his sons and daughters. But we have to do our part by coming to our senses, returning home, and accepting His forgiveness with humility.

Thirdly, even though the son came back and begged just to be a slave in his father's house, the father still chooses to shower him with gifts like a robe, a ring, sandals, and a great banquet. Again, the father could have forgone all these things and made the younger son a slave in order to teach him a lesson. But the robe signified baptism into a new life. The ring signified a promise of faithfulness. The sandals signified the ability to walk a different path. The banquet signified communion with the father and his family. In other words, the father's love expressed through forgiveness led to a complete and full restoration, body and soul, of his prodigal son. In the Armenian Liturgy the celebrant prays saying, "For all good gifts and all perfect bounties come down from above, from you, the Father of light, and to you is befitting glory, dominion and honor, now and always and unto the ages of ages Amen. Չի ամենայն տուրք բարիք եւ ամենայն պարգեւ կատարեալք ի վերուստ են իջեալ առ ի Բէն՝ որ ես Հայր լուսոյ եւ Թեզ վայելէ փառք իշխանութիւն եւ պատիւ, այժմ եւ միշտ եւ յաւիտեանս յաւիտենից ամեն:" (Pew book pg. 53)

Many of us may ask, why did the father give him a robe, a ring and throw a banquet for his son?

We need to remember that the maker of heaven and earth has fatherly and divine compassion, love, and forgiveness towards all His handiwork and those divine characters are not like the passing emotions that we experience. In ways that we cannot understand, they are abiding characteristics of God. Unlike human beings, we do not have to catch Him in a good mood to receive His mercy. We do not have to give Him time to cool down after getting angry at us, for He is not angry. Like the prodigal son, we bear the consequences of our actions; we suffer, not because God has decided to do us harm, but because we have chosen to harm ourselves by preferring our own will to His, by turning away from our true identity, dignity, and calling as those created in His image and likeness. What we experience as God's anger is simply the consequence of refusing to accept His love, of refusing to live as His blessed sons and daughters.

At the end of today's parable, when the older brother gets jealous and angry about how the younger is being treated despite squandering the inheritance with loose living, the father affirms the righteous path of the older son and the unbroken communion between them. The father then gently encourages his older son to "make merry and be glad". In other words, the father tells him not to focus on the sins of his brother's past but to be joyful that he has gone all the way from death to life, through repentance. The father does not lecture or scold the older son for his judgmental attitude and hard-heartedness because he is the source of all good things.

All in all, regardless of what particular sins we have committed, our Father in who we believe and who is the maker of heaven and earth, of things visible and invisible is not out to punish or embarrass us; neither does He need a payment in order to earn His forgiveness. All that He wants us to do is to come to ourselves, to see the truth about the mess we have made of our lives, and begin the journey home. That is why we fast, pray, give alms, reconcile with enemies, confess our sins, and devote extra time and energy to the spiritual life during Great Lent. These practices help us to see how we have weakened and distorted ourselves with sin. They help us to gain insight on how far we have fallen from the glory intended for the children of God. We do these practices, not to change God, but to change us: to bring us to the point where we know in our hearts that we have rejected our Father.

Just as we proclaim in the Liturgy, saying "For all good gifts and all perfect bounties come down from above, from you, the Father of light," so also today we need to open ourselves to receive the eternal mercy of God the Father through His Son Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the good news of the Gospel that we proclaim in preparation for Lent, for it is time to come to our senses and return to the Father whose love, mercy, and forgiveness are beyond anything that we can imagine. No matter what we have done; no matter how far we've strayed from the path; no matter how unfaithful we've been to the creed of the Church, the maker of heaven and earth is always right next to us with open arms. He is always standing ready to welcome us home.

And so, the Father who we confess in the Creed is the same Father who we witness in today's Gospel reading. Even though none of us has never seen God the Father as He is, but He manifested Himself in many ways and still manifests Himself today so that we see His love towards us which is beyond what we can imagine. And just as in today's parable the father waited for his son to return so does God the

Father waits for us during this Lenten season to come to our senses, to recognize what we have done to ourselves with our sins and passions. Like the father in the parable, He gives us the freedom to make mistakes and to learn from them. He never forces us to do anything. And no matter how far we fall, no matter how low we go in life, He is eternally watching for us, ready to run and embrace us, to restore us as His beloved daughters and sons, and to celebrate our return to church, to the place from where we all are born spiritually. As we take this life-changing step our Father takes us back to church, to our home from where He distributes His blessings and reconciles with us, as the celebrant prays in the Armenian Liturgy, “We thank you, Father almighty who did prepare for us the holy Church as a heaven a temple of holiness, where the Holy Trinity is glorified. Գոհանամք զԲԷն, Հայր ամենակալ, որ պատրաստեցեր մեզ նաւահանգիստ սուրբ զԵկեղեցի՝ տաճար սրբութեան, ուր փառաբանի ամենասուրբ Երրորդութիւնդ: (Pew book pg. 51)

In what ways does the Gospel reading relate to the Nicene Creed that we recite directly after it? How does the idea of the father in the parable relate to God the Father?

Some thoughts on possible links between the parable of the Prodigal Son and the Nicene Creed:

- In many ways, integrating the Nicene Creed as a part of your everyday Christian life, and not just on Sunday mornings, can allow you to experience the same spiritual practice conveyed by the righteous father depicted in the parable of the Prodigal Son. One of the most apparent features of the father in the story is that there is noticeable consistency in his approach to both sons, whether seemingly righteous or not. Sometimes as followers of Christ we get so caught up in the ways of the world that we forget to act out our apostolic faith and use moments of trouble and difficulty as opportunities to be more Christlike. Learning the Creed and making it a central part of our everyday lives gives us a handy tool, a constitution of sorts, but not for guidance of a country, but for guidance of our souls. So that we may do justly by others, as the father in the parable did for his sons.
- One of the parts of this parable that I always see going missed is the following: Why did the prodigal son fall into his dark and misguided ways in the first place? The focus of the parable is usually focused on the openness and

readiness of God the Father to accept us, even after we have fallen. But often times we don't ask, what could have prevented this prodigal son from going astray in the first place? Could we ask ourselves this very question in our lives, when we go astray ourselves? There are in fact many answers and the Nicene Creed is one of them. Having a steady spiritual base, having a text that has been worked on by our ancient Church Fathers who undoubtedly had us, the future flock of the Church, in their minds as they compiled it, absorbed and understood by our minds can help us choose against the sinful and misguided path when it becomes an option in our lives.

- There is no doubt that we love our earthly fathers wholeheartedly and unconditionally. With that love comes wisdom and guidance; lessons and memories. But as we make our way through this life, sometimes we forget the pillars that hold up our virtues that were instilled in us by our parents. We must remind ourselves of not only the lessons of our youth, but the experiences found within them. The Nicene Creed that was compiled by our Church Fathers many centuries ago is exactly that: not just a reminder of the spiritual virtue that we stand on as Armenian Christians, but also a record and confession of faith. So that we do not forget. So that we remind each other of why we have chosen to congregate, to come together. So that others who do not know Christ like we do, hear and come forward in baptism. The Nicene Creed is a gift from God the Father to his children. A divine note left behind for all to read and hear, given to remind them - to remind us - that when we gather to celebrate the liturgy in His name, that we know what we believe, of what we confess, of what *type* of faith we wear on their hearts and minds.