

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



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Glory be to Jesus Christ!

Glory be Forever!

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32nd Sunday after Pentecost-Christ and the Rich Young Man

Sunday, January 17, 2021



As we slowly watch the feast of Christ's Nativity and Theophany recede, we must prayerfully contemplate Who He is and why He was born in the flesh. We celebrated the eternal Son of God, Who spoke the universe into existence, becoming fully one of us while remaining fully divine. He did so in order to restore and fulfill us

in the image and likeness of God. The God-Man had to be truly human in order to make us participants in His divinity by grace. He was not born to teach or embody a few rules about piety and morality, but to make us radiant with the divine energies as "partakers of the divine nature."

The rich young ruler in today's gospel lesson, however, did not view the Lord in this way. He thought that he was merely another teacher of the Jewish law. That is why Christ corrected him for saying "Good Teacher," for "No one is good but God alone." This fellow was testing the Savior with the question of what he had to do in order to gain eternal life, but from the beginning of their conversation Christ was actually testing him in a way that would help him see his spiritual brokenness.

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** Christ and the Rich Young Man **

*** St. Anthony the Great ***

Epistle: Colossians 1:12-18

Gospel: Luke 18:18-27

St. George Orthodox Christian Church is a community of believers who strive to live a life according to the Gospel of Christ and teachings of the Church.

We worship God in Trinity -
Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

We are dedicated to living out Christ's commandment to, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, ad with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.*

Life and Time according to St. Basil the Great by George Mantzarides

St. Basil the Great experienced the relationship between time and life and presented it in the most penetrating manner in his written works. His teaching on the subject, which had a profound effect on later theology and thinking in general, is still remarkably topical today.

It is true that this great hierarch from Cappadocia did not write any systematic work on the matter, but in his interpretation of Scripture, and, in particular, the 'Six Days'

of the Old Testament, as well as his rebuttal of the Eunomian heresy concerning the person of Christ, he often referred to time and the issues related to it.

We usually divide time into three parts: the past, present and future. But this tripartite distinction seems not to have any real objective existence. In fact, if we want to define the present objectively, we shall see that it is nothing more than the dividing line between the past and the future. So a

tripartite division of time automatically becomes bipartite.

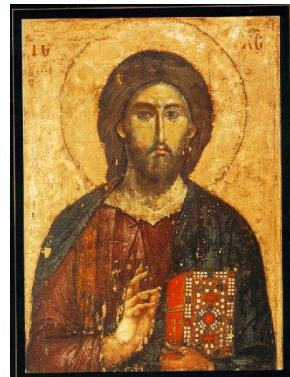
This is why Aristotle talks about only two dimensions of time, the past and the future: 'Of time some parts have been, while others have to be, ... for what is 'now' is not a part: a part is a measure of the whole, which must be made up of parts. Time, on the other hand, is not held to be made up of 'now's.'

Of course, this position
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

If you have any questions about the church or would like to speak with our pastor, please call Fr. Matthew at 607-280-1586

Glory be to
Jesus Christ.
Glory be
Forever.





Troparion to St. George

As the deliverer
of captives
and defender
of the poor,
healer of the infirm
and champion of kings,
victorious great
martyr George
intercede with Christ
our God
for our souls
salvation.

News and Notes

We welcome all who are worshipping with us today. Because of COVID-19, our social hour has been canceled until we receive further instructions from the Department of Health.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

We ask that you keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Olga, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Louise, George, Evan, Ryan, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Paula, Laura, Elizabeth Matthew, Corella, Ron, Daniel, Frankie, Dean, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Updates in our parish

We send our deepest sympathies to Mike and Paula Tucker and Jim and Nancy Perfield on the recent passing of Olga Melnick. Olga often worshiped with us, and we fondly remember her cheerful greeting and love of her native Russian language. May her memory be eternal.

Words of Wisdom

St. Anthony teaches: "Learn to love humility, for it will cover all your sins. All sins are repulsive before God, but the most repulsive of all is pride of the heart. Do not consider yourself learned and wise; otherwise, all your effort will be destroyed, and your boat will reach the harbor empty."

If you have great authority, do not threaten anyone with death. Know that, according to nature, you too are susceptible to death, and that every soul sheds its body as its final garment."

In Byzantium there existed an unusual and instructive custom during the crowning of the emperors in the Church of the Divine Wisdom [Hagia Sophia]. The custom was that, when the patriarch placed the crown on the emperor's head, he also handed him a silk purse filled with earth from a grave, so that even the emperor would recall death, avoid all pride and become humble.

St. Anthony the Great was the greatest of Desert Fathers and influenced many who fled the world in the 3rd and 4th centuries.

Life and Time, continued from p.1

seems to be entirely theoretical, because it is not possible for there to be real time without the 'now', that is the present. But the present cannot be understood as temporal duration, because, of necessity, that implies past and future. This is why we can say that the present is not a time, but is rather that infinitesimal or indivisible moment which separates the past from the future. And although this moment of the present is, in reality, all there is, it is elusive because, as a matter of course, it recedes into the past.

And while the present is a fleeting and elusive moment, neither the past nor the future belong to us. The past is lost, and the future is not at our disposal. As Saint Basil says: 'Is time not thus: the past is no more, the future does not yet exist, and the present is not observable before it is recognized?' But we do not experience time solely as isolated moments, but as a broader continuum, made up of all the 'presents' and embracing both past and future. By remembering and

expecting, we transcend the moment, and experience the present as a transcendent composite of the past and the future. In this way, the present in our life is shown to be a transcendence of time and an indication of eternity. This is why ancient Greek mythology attributed a supernatural dimension to time and personified it as the god Cronus, who exterminated his children.

According to Basil the Great, time is the 'co-expanded dimension in the composition of the world.' The word 'Dimension' here has a temporal meaning, with qualitative, or, more accurately, moral significance. It denotes the duration of this present life, in contrast to that of the future. It is the time of changeability and peril, in contrast to the stability and security of eternity. But it is also, for precisely this reason, the only time when we, as people, can prepare for eternal bliss. In this way, time becomes a juncture, that is an opportunity for us to acquire eternity, or, as Elder Sophrony writes, a 'locus' where we



encounter God and our immortality.

Time is linked organically with space and cannot be understood without it. It was created instantaneously. In other words, both time and space were created outside time, by the will of God. This is how Basil the Great interprets 'in the beginning God made the heaven and the earth'. He observes that, just as the beginning of a road is not yet a road, nor is the start of a house yet a house, so the beginning of time is not yet time, nor even a part of time. If you were to claim that this beginning were time, you would be able to divide it, also, into a beginning, middle and end, which is impossible.

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(Homily on Christ and the Rich Young Man, cont'd from p.1)

In response to the question about eternal life, the Savior told him to obey the commandments from the Old Testament. The man then said that he had followed them throughout his life. That response indicated that he had a shallow understanding of what God requires. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ said that “unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 5:20) Christ came to fulfill the law and the prophets, not to abolish them. (Matt. 5:17) He taught that the commandment against murder forbids anger and insult. (Matt. 5:21-22) He said that the commandment against adultery forbids lust. (Matt. 5: 27-28) He called His followers to be perfect as their Father in heaven is perfect, especially by loving even their enemies. (Matt. 5:43-48) None of this is about mere outward compliance that anyone may claim to have mastered, but about acquiring the purity of heart necessary to see God.

To open the eyes of the rich young ruler to the true state of his soul, Christ gave him a commandment that he lacked the strength to obey. “Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” This made the man sad because he loved his great wealth. The Savior responded, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” Everyone was shocked at those words, for the common assumption then was that wealth was God’s blessing for those who were righteous. The Lord concluded with the statement “What is impossible with men is possible with God.”

The man’s sadness at hearing the Lord’s command indicated that whatever level of legal observance he had accomplished had not healed his soul. Rich people in that time and place were few and far between. His wealth presumably gave him status, power, and an abundance of food, clothing, and shelter. He was likely used to getting his own way and being told what he wanted to hear. Understandably, that way of life had shaped him. Even for the sake of acquiring eternal life, the man could not turn away from his addiction to the self-centered pleasures of this world. Following conventional religious rules was one thing, but entrusting His life to

Christ to the point of poverty was an entirely different matter that manifested his spiritual brokenness.

It is not accidental that the Lord told him to sell his possessions and give to the poor. The Savior identified Himself with suffering persons in the parable of the Last Judgment in Matthew 25 to the point that what we do to “the least of these” we do to Him. Luke’s gospel also records Christ proclaiming: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now for you will laugh.” (Lk 6:20-21)

With his command to give to the poor, Christ was inviting the fellow to offer his possessions to bless them as a sign of the coming reign of God. Such an offering would indicate that he sought God’s Kingdom first and trusted in the Lord to provide his needs. The rich young ruler did not make that offering because he had a surface-level faith that had not healed his soul. He thought that he could serve both God and the wealth that fueled his passions, but Christ made clear to him that that was simply impossible.

Nonetheless, the Savior held out hope for this man, as “What is impossible with men is possible with God.” The superficial religious legalism that he had pursued cannot make us like God in holiness, for the sickness for which we need healing is far too grave for that. Not a “Good Teacher,” but the Son of God Who became one of us is

alone able to make us participants in the divine life by grace.

Through His death and glorious resurrection, He has liberated us from slavery to the fear of death, which is at the root of the obsessive need to justify ourselves as being righteous even as we remain blind to how deeply corrupted we are by addiction to our self-centered desires. Only the God-Man could deliver us from that wretched state. When, like the rich man, we catch a glimpse of our need for restoration well beyond what we can give ourselves, it becomes possible to unite ourselves to Christ in faith such that we find the healing of our souls by His grace.

Unlike that fellow, we must not walk away in sadness when our weakness becomes apparent. To the contrary, we must entrust ourselves to the mercy of Christ as we struggle to reorient the desires of hearts toward God and

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(Homily on Rich Young Man, continued from p.3)

away from serving ourselves. We fast in order to gain strength in refusing to satisfy our self-centered desires for physical pleasure, which should enable us to serve Christ in our neighbors by giving generously to the needy of our time, energy, and resources. Nothing reflects the true state of our souls more than how we put meeting the needs of others before our own. All the more is that the case when those we help are in some sense our enemies.

When we seem to fail in fasting, prayer and serving our neighbors, let us not walk away in sadness, but instead use our struggle as a reminder that only the God-Man can save us. He was born to restore the holy glory of the human person in God's image and likeness, which is something that not even the strictest religious observance could achieve by its own power. We must never think that spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, and almsgiving somehow earn eternal life. They are, however, essential practices for opening our souls to receive God's merciful and healing grace, which we never deserve.

The same is true of our preparation to receive the Eucharist through prayer, fasting, and confession. We are never worthy in our own right of the Lord's Body and Blood, but must receive Him with the humility of those who know that they are the chief of sinners. Instead of walking away in sadness when we confront the truth about our souls, we must embrace the Son of God born for our salvation. His holy birth and baptism in the Jordan show that what is impossible for us by our own power is possible for Him. Let us use the remaining weeks before the start of Great Lent to embrace our Savior and to share as fully in His life as possible as we "lay aside all earthly cares that we may receive the King of all."

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The church, my dear ones, in which we are now, every church, is a model, a model, a type, an image, a piece of heaven. When we are in church, we really feel like we are in heaven. Why is there such a big dome up? To raise our hearts directly to heaven. Why is there this beautiful gate that opens when it is in operation? To show us how the heavens open. Why is it full of crosses? Why does he depict Christ working there? To show that when we are here, we are transported to heaven. We live secretly but also truly heavenly moments.

That is why St. Gregory Palamas says that the church

The Divine Liturgy by Archimandrite Emilianos

"rises from on high, angelic to other beings and a supernatural space"; an angelic, a supernatural space is the one in which we are. The temple, he tells us, "raises man to heaven, and ... this representation of God above all." The church takes us and lifts us up and presents us before God Himself. Do we feel it? When we come to church, are there senses in our souls that capture this reality?

But what are we humans! We know all the breeds of dogs and horses, we know the species of plants, the brands of cars, the radios, but many times we do not know those that are directly related to our lives. That is why I want you to pay attention to what I am telling you today.

Everything around us, the endless depths of the ocean, the heights of the skies, the thousands and myriads of stars, if we think about it, we will realize that it really is nothing but the slum of our earth. One day - have you seen how old houses crumble when they want to build apartment buildings? - so everything in the universe will crumble. Nothing will be left; only the spiritual heaven, where Christ is, will remain. So there let us focus our gaze.

We are in the church. It is the most suitable place to see the sky. But what is the window? How do we open it? But it is so simple. It is the divine function we perform. Because but we are going to look at such spiritual things, let us turn our souls to the Holy Spirit and ask him to throw his projector into the darkness of our thoughts, to enlighten us to feel, to believe, to understand, to we make our property all that is done and said and heard during the divine liturgy.

You came with so much effort and in the cold; you stand up. You should not waste your effort. That is why let us pray to the Spirit of God and not a single thought will be left incomprehensible in you. We must not leave here unless our hearts worship God, unless we feel our souls have been thrown into heaven and have seen all that is done in it.

When we have finished our speech, you must feel what a saint of our Church said "Now my soul is heartbroken, and I cannot hold your flame, from where you praised you I walk". Oh my God, he says, I felt you, I listened to you, I saw you by my side; I felt you pierce my heart with your arrows, to burn my soul, to light a flame that I cannot stand. That is why I praise you and I leave taking you with me. He will teach us all the truth.

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