

# 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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3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Great Lent—Elevation of the Precious Cross

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Our Lord Jesus Christ says to us today, “Whosoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” And yet, the very idea of denying ourselves anything, sounds foreign to us. But here is Christ’s call standing before us, confronting us.

The death of Jesus of Nazareth is a historical fact, but many live today as if this death and the empty tomb that followed are irrelevant, preferring in-

stead to put off grappling with the ramifications of this truth and its calling on their lives: Out of sight, out of mind! But then, they find themselves empty, hopeless, alone, robbed of the peace only Christ can give, striving in vain to fill their lives with distraction, entertainment, addiction to stave off the hunger of their souls, which only God can fulfill.

Without the cross, this is all there is to life no hope, no rescue from ourselves, our passions. Without the victory of the cross, each person has no reason not to live for his own pleasure, to deny himself nothing. Without life with God, Nihilism, in all its despair and insanity, is the only rational recourse. God has desired better for us all along. The reality of who we are as human beings, whom God created us to be is not fallen, depressed, lonely,  
*(continued p.3)*

++ 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Great Lent ++  
+Martyrs Chrysanthus and Daria+

Epistle: Hebrews 4:14-5:6

Gospel: Mark 8:34-9:1

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.*

## ***And not Judge my Brother and Sister, by Fr. George Dorbarakis***

During Lent, the prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian is a powerful reminder which we repeat on a daily basis: ‘And not to judge my brother and sister.’ And how could it be otherwise, when Jesus Christ himself, the head of the faith, gave us the commandment which expresses the existence or absence of love towards other people: ‘Do not judge, that you be not judged?’

Therefore, this confirms our love for and faith in God- or lack of it. But we need to make certain

clarifications. In the first place, the Lord condemns judgementalism, not judgement. This is because judgement is a basic feature of the human mind and the Lord doesn’t wish to abrogate this- Christ didn’t come to destroy us, but to save us.

Of course, he said ‘Don’t judge’ (Matt. 7, 1), but in the sense of denunciation. Because, at another point he remarks that we can judge other people, but only when we judge fairly: ‘Do not judge by appearances,

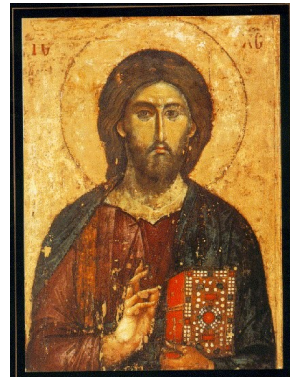
but judge with right judgment’.

What is the proper judgement that the Lord accepts? He himself guides us: ‘My judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of the father who sent me’. Fair judgment is that which comes from people who live the will of God as their own. And since the will of God is love that’s why we judge in a proper manner when our judgement is full of love for others. Of course, from this point of view,  
*(continued p.2)*

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.





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 that our souls  
may be saved.

### **News and Notes**

We welcome all who are with us today and invite you to join us at our coffee social following the Divine Liturgy.

### **Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)**

Please keep the following in your prayers: Mother Onufria, Fr. Michael, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Mackenzie, Mike, Jessica, Lisa, Jeff, Bonnalee, Joann, Skip, Georgia, Colleen, Stan, David, Carol, Norris, Debbie, Linda, Grace the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

### **Blessed are the Merciful**

The aim of the fast is that we should spend less on ourselves, in terms of quality and quantity, as compared to other times of the year; and that any surplus funds should be given to others as charity. Among other things, this is what the Gospel of the Judgement tells us on the third preparatory Sunday of the Triodion: that we should serve the needs of others, because Christ takes this as a gift to himself.

God loves the charitable who give willingly, with a cheerful countenance, and also of their own volition.

Alms-giving that is begrudged or enforced is unacceptable and execrable. The root of charity lies in the heart. It begins in the heart and ends in our hand. Charity warms when there's the flame of love. Alms-giving without love is cold and desultory. It's a dead body without light or sun. It's a flower without beauty or scent. When you give without love, you insult. Because where's the value in the most wonderful and expensive gift if it's offered without a smile?

So, no matter how difficult Lent may seem initially, in essence it's a search for the joy which comes from giving alms to any suffering person, in the same spirit as St. Nicholas, who provided a dowry for each of the daughters of a man who could not afford their dowery. St. Nicholas threw the money through the window so that nobody would know who had performed the good deed and therefore he wouldn't be praised for it. Let us become charitable, so that we might obtain mercy.

### **And Judge not my Brother and Sister, cont'd from p.1**

Of course, from this point of view, the only just judgement is God's, since he is love (1 John 4, 8); as is that of the saints since they strove to make God's will their own.

It follows that, as long as we see our own will holding sway within us and not that of God, we shouldn't rely on our judgment. We should distrust it, and question whether we're judging fairly. Because if we're like that, then our judgement is certainly misguided and not right. The Lord pointed this out in other words. In his Sermon on the Mount, for example, he calls judgement which doesn't come from a pure heart hypocritical: 'You hypocrite', he cries, 'hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of someone else's eye' (Matt. 7, 5).

If you're under the influence of your passions- and who can claim not to be?- it isn't possible to arrive at a proper judgement of someone else. Only those of pure heart, that is people who love, can see others correctly

and therefore judge them without causing harm.

So what's condemned is censure, that is judgement associated with passion, with egotism, ill-natured judging. But things get worse: at bottom, censure is the subversion of God's right, which means that it reveals in



the most obvious way the lack of self-awareness on the part of the person doing the condemning. It's no accident that just before he speaks of censure in his prayer of contrition, St. Ephrem says: 'Grant me to see my own errors'. So people who condemn are spiritually blind and, in a demonic

manner, place themselves even above God! Don't we see here the 'reprise' of the attitude of the wicked devil? He dared to compare himself to the Creator and even dreamt of more than equality with God.

So, in the end, only God has the right to judge us for our thoughts, our words and our actions, because we're his and we belong to him: 'For from him, through him and for him all things were made'. And also because he alone can make a proper assessment, since he has all the evidence before him, bare and in the open. And there's another aspect that we don't take into account when we condemn other people which is particularly horrific for us: censure acts as a prophecy regarding our future sins: 'As you judge, so will you be judged' (Matth. 7, 1). The Lord himself confirms this: whatever we condemn in others, the Lord will permit us to suffer ourselves. This is a spiritual law which we thoughtlessly and frequently ignore when we censure other people.

*(Homily on the Elevation of the Holy Cross, (cont'd from p.1)*

slaves to the passions. God has created us to be bearers of His image and likeness, angels in the flesh, children of God.

God has created us for glory, life with Him, but how often we exchange this glory for enslavement to the temporal attachments of this world. We exchange the glory of God, the freedom to grow, heal, and work out our salvation, for that which is passing away.

Christ's death on the cross reminds us, first, that by the tree our first parents, Adam and Eve fell into sin through their disobedience and were exiled from paradise; they preferred relationship with Satan and his lies to relationship with God and His life. They introduced death into the world through sin, that is, through apartness from the life that is in God alone.

Our first parents and we, every time we sin, willingly "play with death," we choose apartness from God, Life itself. The Fall, in this sense, becomes personal for us because of our choices. But Christ descended into Hades and raised the dead who were there, who had longed to see His day—this victory over sin and death. Christ died the vilest of deaths so that He could defeat on our behalf the vilest of our sins and passions, yes, even our indifference.

Third-century Saint Irenaeus, explains the Mystery in this way: "He (Christ) by His obedience on the tree renewed [and reversed] what was done by disobedience in [connection with] a tree..." Likewise, St. Paul says, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive."

Christ inaugurates a new race of Adam—a race no longer enslaved to sin and death, but one capable of healing from sin-sickness and growth into the likeness of the Holy Trinity. In Christ and His Church we've been given the tools of salvation by which we overcome our greediness, our reliance on having things 'our way,' on living for self in all its pride and loneliness.

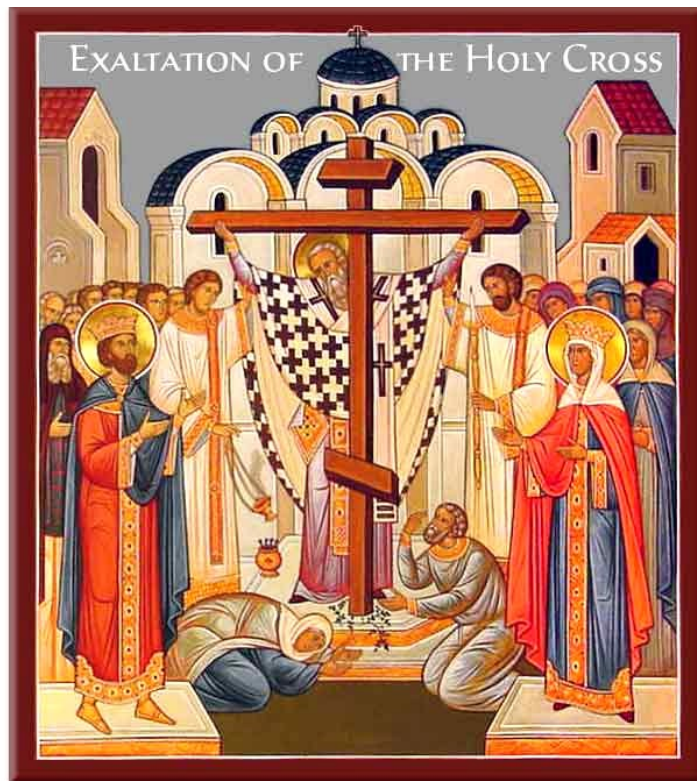
We venerate the cross of Christ then, not just as a symbol, a sign, but a reality, marking that final victory over sin and death, over our passions that have darkened our human nature and obscured the image and likeness of God in us. By Christ's death on the cross, death is transfigured into life for all those who live for and with God. Christ beckons us then to die to life apart from Him, life

for and of ourselves—in all its vainglory, loneliness, and separation, and to live instead in Him, that we may also become fellow partakers of the resurrection and co-heirs with Him.

For this reason, we herald the cross in the hymnography of the Church as the "trophy invincible." We sing in the Canticles from Matins for the Feast, "Thy cross, O Lord all-merciful, is honored by the whole world, for Thou hast made the instrument of death into a source of life. Sanctify those who venerate it, O God of our Fathers, who alone art blessed and greatly glorified." How then do we interiorize and apply the cross to our lives? It's not enough to carry the cross around our necks; we also need to carry it on our hearts, in our souls.

Jesus says, "whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel's will save it." Christ, in denying Himself for us, gave Himself, His own life, to defeat death. So we, in order to live, in order to obtain the true life that is in His life, learn to take up Christ's call. In self-denial and love for God, we fight our vain attempts to create the mirage of temporal 'stability' in and around us with all the creature comforts one can accumulate. We learn through our fasting that we don't live by bread alone. We learn that the pursuit of all the world has to offer, can't bring us true joy. This realization is the first step.

Because He loves us, Christ God warns us by asking us, "What will it profit a



man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" In other words, Christ is saying, "What are you doing, man, living as if there's no God, no resurrection from the dead." Without Christ's victory on the cross and our participation in it, there's nothing left but emptiness, which would be all there is to life without Christ, without the cross and its victory for mankind and for each of us personally.

This truth is summed up in this hymn from Matins for this Sunday: "I died through a tree, but I have found in thee a Tree of Life, O Cross of Christ. Thou art my invincible protector, my strong defense against the demons. Venerating thee this day, I cry aloud: Sanctify me by thy glory." May this be our prayer too this day, "Sanctify me by thy glory."

n the middle of the time of Great Lent, we have the Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross. The rubrics for the day begin as follows: ‘Since we, too, are, in a sense, crucified through the forty-day fast, mortified by the passions...the precious and life-giving Cross is brought forward as though elevating and supporting us.’

Christ’s Cross, which we venerate on this Sunday, isn’t to be found only in the middle of Great Lent, but informs the whole of the period. It’s immanent in the whole of the history of God’s providence for our salvation. Last Sunday, we celebrated Saint Gregory Palamas, who had this to say on the subject: Christ’s Cross ‘was foretold and foreshadowed from ancient times and no-one has ever been reconciled to God except through the power of the Cross.’

Christ’s Cross, or rather the mystery of the Cross, is the only path we have towards our salvation and renewal. This mystery, which culminated in Christ’s crucifixion, was foreseen and foreshadowed even in the Old Testament. So while Saint Gregory holds up Abel, Seth, Enoch and all those until Noah as being pleasing to God, he also presents in detail Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses, who were tested harshly in their lives and adumbrated Christ’s death on the Cross.

The abolition of sin wasn’t achieved only through the Cross of Christ, but actually on the Cross of Christ. The ‘locus’ of the Cross and the ‘sign’ of the Cross link time to eternity, combine our human wretchedness with God’s majesty. It’s this which makes it the crux of the mystery of the Christian life..

The pre-eminent ‘hour’ of Christ, the ‘hour’ of His manifestation as the Redeemer and Saviour of the world, is the hour of his death on the Cross. Christ entered real life through His death, which is when His glory was revealed. The culmination of His self-emptying (‘God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’) was also His entry into the glory of the Father (‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit’).

The gift of the resurrection and unending life was granted to us through Christ’s death and His descent into Hell. This is how ‘the whole of Adam’s race’ was raised. This is why, in icons of Christ’s descent into Hell, which, for the Orthodox Church is the icon of the Resurrection, what’s written is not ‘Christ’s Resurrec-

tion , but simply ‘The Resurrection’. That which was achieved in Christ, applies to the whole world. And this is why it must be repeated, at least to some extent, in every Christian who lives in the world as a member of His body.

In the final analysis, we Christians are called upon, but also enabled, not only to pass through the Cross in order to experience the Resurrection, but to experience the Resurrection on the Cross, the glory that’s to be found in total self-emptying, which makes the manifestation of the glory of God possible. Christ was glorified on the Cross, where His task was accomplished [6]. He resurrected us through the Cross; He liberated us by decrying ‘sin in the flesh’ [7].

The devil wasn’t defeated after Christ’s death, but with His death. Christ didn’t defeat death after His death but with His death: ‘trampling down death by death’. And He vindicated us before God when He was abandoned by God and died as a human person, as someone who was dying unjustly. This is how the tomb of Christ became the fount of our Resurrection

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The one who knows God will follow the Lord’s footsteps, bearing the cross of the Savior. The Lord says, “He who loses his life will save it.” We can “lose our lives” in one of two ways.

First, we can risk our lives just as the Lord did for us. Secondly, we can separate our lives from the customary

things of this world. Bearing the cross means to separate our souls from the delights and pleasures of this life. If you do this, you will find your life again – resting in the hope of what is to come. Dying to ourselves means being content with the necessities of life. When we want more than these necessities it is easy to sin.

*St. Clement of Alexandria*

The Cross, is wood which lifts us up and makes us great. The Cross uprooted us from the depths of evil and elevated us to the summit of virtue.

Do not seek the perfection of the law in human virtues, for it is not found perfect in them. Its perfection is hidden in the Cross of Christ.

*St. John Chrysostom*

The knowledge of the Cross is concealed in the sufferings of the Cross.

*St. Gregory the Great*

