

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!

Volume 13 Issue 601

32nd Sunday after Pentecost-Christ heals the blind

January 14, 2024



Today in Luke's gospel we hear about the blind man with great faith. In this passage the Fathers explain that; the blind man symbolizes future generations such as us – who would come to faith only by hearing without seeing Christ in person – as Christ says to Thomas (John 20:29) "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*"

Those who tried to silence the blind

man represent those who are persecutors and tyrants, who in every generation try to silence the Church and the Son of God and hinder those who are seeking. The low-lying city of Jericho, at 850 ft. below sea level, represents sin and fallen humanity, and Christ passing through Jericho represents His incarnation into this broken and sinful world.

The restoration of sight to the blind signifies the healing available for all of humanity through His grace. Christ's subsequent journey up to Jerusalem, at 2750 ft. above sea level, represents Christ bringing us on the path to the heavenly kingdom, and we are represented by Bartimaeus, having received healing from our spiritual blindness, joyously glorifying God and drawing our seeking brothers and sisters to join us in following Christ!

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++ 32nd Sunday after Pentecost ++

+ Holy Martyrs slain at Raithu +

Epistle: Ephesians 6:10-17

Gospel: Luke 18: 35-43

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 Christ's commandment, *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.*

A Conversation with your Soul, by Fr. Ioannichie Balan (part 3)

Don't waste time talking or sitting idly. Do not waste the few days that God has given you, but avoid everyone, hide in your cell, in your heart, and pray there with much fervor.

Love secluded, quiet places to learn how to pray better. Kindle a thirst for prayer in yourself, always reading only useful things. Always immerse in yourself and ask in prayer that God will give you the strength to know yourself, that God will give you tears and weeping in prayer,

patience in obediences, humility in everything, zeal and the fear of God.

Thus, pray always, and God will give you everything useful in this life, and in the life to come He will grant you everlasting bliss in Paradise. Hurry up, my soul, always be diligent, pray here in this "desert" where God has brought you so that your life here would not be in vain. Love this trinity of virtues: Love, Obedience and Prayer. Love everyone, obey everyone and always pray.

So, rejoice that God has ordained this for you! Where were you six years ago? Where did you wander? Who knew you? Who helped you and what hope did you have? But it's all gone. Behold, God has had mercy on you. Hurry up, strive, do good in time and not in time. Amen.

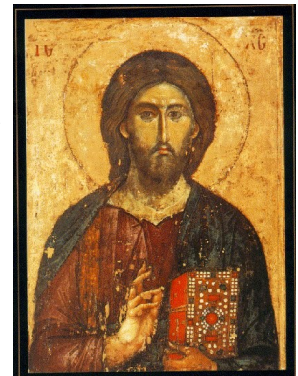
Meekness. How loving and dear to one's heart is someone who is gentle in word, calm in his actions and reconciled with himself! Therefore, I exhort you, my soul: try to

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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.





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, Larissa, Jack, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Mackenzie, Mike, Lisa, Jeff, Bonnalee, David, Carol, Norris, Debbie, Linda, Daniel, Michael, Abraham, George, Rochelle, Brianna, Tamam, Catherine, Liz, Chuck, Theresa, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

From St. John Kronstadt

God's saints are near to believing hearts and, like the truest and kindest of friends, are ready in a moment to help the faithful and pious who call upon them with faith and love. We have for the most part to send, and have sometimes to wait long for earthly helpers, whilst we have not to send for nor wait long for spiritual helpers: the faith of Him who prays can place them close to his very heart in a moment, and he

will as speedily receive through faith full spiritual help. In saying this, I speak by experience; by this I mean the frequent deliverance from affliction of heart through the intercession and patronage of the saints, and especially through the intercession of Our Lady, the Holy Virgin Mary.

Probably some would say that this is the action of simple and firm faith, and a determined assurance in our deliverance from affliction, and not the intercession of the saints for us before God. No, it is not so. How can this be proved? It can be proved by the fact that if I do not call upon the saints known to me in hearty prayer, without making any distinction, if I do not see them with my spiritual vision, then I shall obtain no help, however great assurance I may have felt of being saved without their help.

I recognize, I feel clearly, that I receive help through the names of those saints upon whom I have called, because of my lively faith in them. This happens just as everything happens in the usual order of earthly things.

A Conversation with your Soul, cont'd from p.1

acquire meekness. Strive at any time, in any circumstances and with whom ever you meet to show yourself meek, peaceful, quiet, unperturbable and calm. At least forcing yourself, if not from the heart, strive to be meek.

How sweet is a kind word, seasoned with the salt of love, spoken in the spirit of peace, adorned with meekness and charged with the power of wisdom! How much good a troubled and distressed soul gains when it is greeted with a gentle, meek, loving word! How much unity is formed between fathers and brethren when they speak with meekness, when they command with timidity and love! How much love is born where the elders give orders with meekness, gentleness, without getting annoyed, and the younger ones carry out orders with peace and love, with conviction and without grumbling!

And what an invaluable benefit an obedient person receives, living with great prudence at a monastery in peace and harmony with everyone without upsetting anyone in word,

without condemning anyone in anything, without judging or quarreling with any of the brethren! Such a person lives in the community as in Paradise and stays in his cell like a king!

He doesn't have a single enemy or ill-wisher in his life. He does not



grieve anyone, does not contradict, does not argue, does not wrinkle his forehead like a bull, does not gnash his teeth in rage like a dog and does not wave his hands in anger like a madman. He never raises his voice, does not shout, does not scold anyone, does not resist, does not shame his neighbor, does not worry, does

not lose peace of mind because of anything, but remains the same in any circumstances.

Blessed is he who follows Christ in meekness. Follow, my soul, this blessed way of life. You have had enough of all sorts of worldly cares in your life, so strive now to be detached from them in order to always have peace in your soul. Try to remain unperturbed in any event. Try always to speak meekly to your brother, but not with false, crafty meekness; flee from such speech as from snakes. Be sincere at all times. Speak from the heart so that it can go to your neighbor's heart.

Perform your obedience with meekness, in peace, without confusion, without grumbling. Trust everyone, give sweet advice to those who are in trouble, support those in temptation by deed and word, soothe the pain of the sick with words full of hope. Strengthen the weak with warm words full of exhortations. Always exhort and so you will receive mercy.

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Homily on Christ healing the blind man, (cont'd from p.1)

"Jesus, Son of David" Bartimaeus cries out. Everyone in this Jewish crowd knew exactly what he was saying when he addressed Jesus with this title. "Son of David" was the title of the Messiah. This was great revelation given by God to Bartimaeus. When he asked who was passing by, Bartimaeus was simply told, "Jesus of Nazareth." No hint of Divinity in that title. Might as well have been "Joe from down the road."

Yet somehow through the gift of faith, Bartimaeus knows this is the promised Messiah. He who created all things -in heaven and on earth – visible and invisible. Thrones, dominions, principalities, powers – these are all orders of angels – the pre-incarnate Christ created them – In Him ALL things consist. It is hard to even begin to get your head around this reality, but once we begin to get a small glimpse of understanding and knowing who Christ really is in all His fullness, our faith is established.

Hearing Bartimaeus calling Him, appealing to Him as the Messiah and crying out from the depth of his heart the Jesus prayer, "Lord have mercy on me," Jesus immediately stops and asks, "what do you want Me to do for you?" God hears us when we are desperate, when we pray from the very depths of our being! When things get messed up in our lives, this can be a great blessing – it can bring us back to dependence on Him.

When in our despair we desperately call on Him to help us and He meets us in our deepest need, our faith naturally grows. When things are just coasting along smoothly, we often neglect to turn to God in thanksgiving. We may even start to think it is all because we are so wise and deserving that our lives are so comfortable, rather than understanding with gratefulness that all things come from His great ever-present love for us. Any situation that ultimately brings us closer to God in faith and love is a great gift.

Christ then restores Bartimaeus's sight saying, "Your faith has made you well." What is this faith that Christ refers to? It is the foundation of all reality. Without this faith we are blinder than blind Bartimaeus ever was. This faith is the knowledge that Christ is the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, the Creator of all that exists in both the material and immaterial realms. Paul says in Colossians (Col. 1: 16, 17) "For by Him all things were

created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist." Bartimaeus's faith in Who it is that he is addressing, is all that is required to have both his physical and more importantly, his spiritual eyesight restored to 20/20.

Once we start to have this faith, this knowledge of what true reality looks like, and Who Christ really is, we also receive our sight and wake up from the slumber of delusion that infects the race of Adam. God is everywhere present and fills all things, but sin blinds us to that which is all around us, right under our noses. God is not some "super spiritual" force like we encounter in Star Wars. Christ is fully human and fully God – true God of true God. God beyond what we are even capable of encountering or experiencing at any level of our being.

All of the visible and invisible world, all of matter and non-matter is filled with His presence. He created and holds all things together, and apart from Him nothing exists. Science is discovering this reality, showing that even such dense matter as rocks are really alive and vibrating with the energy of God in the orderly vibrations of the atoms, molecules, electrons, and quarks which make up all matter. Some of our saints have been able to hear in their spirits, stories from even rocks and trees.

When we reach out and give each other a hug, this is a spiritual act. Our spirits flow into each other as we touch each other, both physically and spiritually. The physical created world is completely infused with God. The entire physical world is good, blessed and created by God, and fearfully and wondrously made, beyond our comprehension. We know this chiefly through faith, although the more we advance in scientific discoveries, the more these scientific "breakthroughs" enable us to also know these things intellectually, through true science.

All through the scriptures, Christ is talking about spiritual blindness as He heals physical blindness – always drawing parallels between the two. As He starts His ministry Christ quotes (Isaiah 61:1), that one of His chief purposes is to bring "recovery of sight to the blind." Christ describes the Pharisees as "Blind guides, (continued p.4)



Homily on Christ healing the blind man (cont'd p.3)

(Matt. 23:24) *who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.*"

When they ask Him if they too are blind, Christ replies (John 9:41) *"If you were blind you would have no sin; but now you say 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains."* There are many other references to blindness throughout the scriptures. My favorite children's book *From I-Ville to You-Ville* starts out *"Although everything seemed fine in the kingdom of I-Ville, the people had a problem. Their vision was blurred so they could not see clearly. They didn't even know how bright the sun was. But they didn't know this, because they thought everyone saw things the same way."*

One of the chief characteristics of spiritual blindness is that we have no idea that we are suffering from it. The Pharisees are continually held out to us as examples of those who are most deluded and at the same time most confident that they are right. The Pharisees are completely resistant to having anyone intrude upon their world view; even God Himself standing in front of them in the flesh. Unfortunately, they aren't really all that unique. Our sinful human nature has not really improved, no matter what our new age friends in the human potential movement try to tell us.

This is why the Church gives us the prayer of Blind Bartimaeus – the Jesus prayer – as an antidote to our great spiritual blindness. *"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God have mercy on me a sinner."* As this prayer seeps into our hearts, faith and humility grows, and the scales covering our eyes slowly dissolve as the light of Christ begins to fill our vision. Once we begin to suspect that our paradigm, our view of the world is very flawed and extremely limited and limiting, we become more open to receiving a new paradoxical understanding.

Suffice to say Orthodoxy is a paradox in this culture. Anything that can challenge our misplaced faith in our own firmly held world views, our political persuasions, our judgmental opinions of those lesser humans that don't think like we do, can be a great blessing. We do not easily give up our very comfortable and self-affirming world views. We tend to surround ourselves with those who think as we do; who have similar political views, similar diets, like similar books, music, mov-

ies, even cheer for the same sports teams, so we can continually reassure each other that we are all viewing life and reality properly.

In a healthy church we will find people of every age group, belonging to every political, social, and economic group, cheering for different sports teams or that even dislike sports. Thank God, we have the one thing needful in common – faith in Christ. Only in union with Christ and His love do we have union with brothers and sisters from every age of history, every part of the world, and even our neighbors. This is what Christ offers to us, and has faithfully delivered since He established His Church through the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. How do we grow and increase in faith and love? Our



mother the Church, carefully lays out a sure route to salvation and Theosis – being transformed into the image of Christ – through the Liturgical cycles. Participating is a time proven recipe to grow in faith.

The Orthodox Church's daily, weekly, yearly, and festal cycles that breathe life into the very depths of our souls as they bring us constantly to Christ. As we allow ourselves to partake of this divine eternal rhythm, a slow soaking healing transformation occurs, and we grow and fulfill the promise of our baptism into Christ's Church. These four Church cycles rotate within the framework of the fifth great cycle – the cycle of our lives which takes in our birth, baptism,

chrismation, vocation, possibly marriage, ordination, and other sacramental realities, and ends in our burial and new birthday into the kingdom of God, at the end of our great life cycle. Today in our busy lives, we take in but a small taste of all that is available for us in the Church, and therefore our faith sometimes flounders, but it is all there awaiting our attention.

If we want to increase our faith and grow in Christ, we need to re-examine our actions and thoughts. What do we devote to the things of God compared to the things of the world. So, like Bartimaeus our blind friend with the excellent spiritual eyesight, let us cry from the very depths of our being *"Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me."* Let us ask God continually to heal our blindness, to allow His precious light to illuminate the areas in our lives that keep His grace and tender love from reaching into our hearts, and to give us the strength and courage to carve out the time to come to Him, and allow Him to heal and transform us.