

# A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor



*Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen! Al Masih Kham! Hakken Kham*

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2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pascha-Thomas Sunday

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Belief in the great miracle of the Resurrection did not come to the disciples right away. The first witnesses were the myrrh-bearing women. It was still dark out when they came to the cave in the garden belonging to Joseph of Arimathea. The stone which had sealed the tomb was now rolled away.

While they stood in astonishment, an Angel stood before them and said, *Fear not ye: for I know that ye*

*seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay (Mt. 28:5-6).*

It was enough for them to see the empty tomb and hear the words of the Angel in order for them to believe. Their sensitive and loving hearts were not touched by doubt. When they ran to tell the Apostles, Jesus Himself met them and said, *All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him (Mt. 28:9).* The Apostles did not believe the women (cf. Mk. 16:11).

On the same day, when evening had come, Jesus revealed the great mystery of His Resurrection to two more disciples (Luke and Cleopa, Apostles of the Seventy), who were walking to Emmaus, which was 7 miles from Jerusalem. To make them believe in the

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+++ 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Pascha +++

++ St George the Confessor ++

Epistle: Acts 5: 12-20

Gospel: John 20:19-31

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.

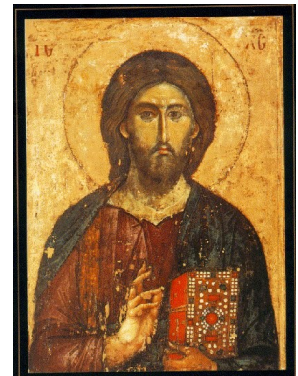
We worship God in Trinity - Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

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.*

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.



## **Homily on the Beatitudes by St. John of Kronstadt**

Mourn inside whenever you feel a flush of impure thoughts to your heart; weep whenever you are overwhelmed with pride, anger, envy, greed, stinginess; mourn and pray whenever you feel hostility, not love for your enemy, for it is said: "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you. you (Matt.5:44).

Mourn before God with the inner cry of heart, whenever the passion of drunkenness, love of money and covetousness captivates you, whenever resistance and disobedi-

ence to your parents or superiors and elders confuses and carries you away. Mourn at the feeling of poverty and the damnation of our nature, at the thought of countless blessings of the Creator to us and our ingratitude to Him.

May your tears be a weapon against all sin. Let the Lord see your humility, recognition of your weakness, and strong desire to keep yourself clean from all sin, stretch out a helping hand, send you a Comforting Spirit to stop the

violence of sin, extinguish the fire of passions and bring down the dew of grace upon your heart.

Mourn over your own sins, and for the sins of other people. Weep over the nations that still don't know the true God and Lord Jesus Christ, wandering in the darkness of paganism, worshiping creatures instead of the Creator. Mourn because the Christian faith is persecuted in the infidel lands, mourn over your brothers who suffer under their yoke. Mourn over the

*(continued on p.2)*



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 for the blessing of Easter foods and breaking the fast 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, Lisa, Jeff, Bonnalee, David, Carol, Norris, Debbie, Linda, Daniel, Michael, Abraham, Katrina, George, Rochelle, Brianna, Catherine, Chuck, Theresa, Sally Lou the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

**On the Fear of God**

There are two kinds of fear: one initial and the other perfect—one fear is characteristic, so to speak, of those who are beginning to be pious, while the other fear is that of perfect saints, who have attained to the measure of perfect love. For example: he who fulfills the will of God because of fear of tortures, is, as was said, still a beginner; for he does not do good for the

sake of good itself, but rather out of fear of punishment.

Another one fulfills the will of God out of love for God, loving Him just in order to please Him; he knows what the essence of good consists in, he has understood what it means to be with God. He has true love, which the Saint calls perfect. And this love brings him to complete fear, for such a one fears God and fulfills the will of God not out of fear of punishment, not in order to escape tortures, but because having tasted the very sweetness of being with God, he fears falling away, he fears being deprived of it. This perfect fear, which is born from this love, banishes, casts out the original fear; and this is why the Apostle says: *Perfect love casts out fear* (1 Jn. 4:18). Nevertheless, it is not possible to attain perfect fear in any way other than by the initial fear. (Abba Dorotheos)

Fear is the beginning of love, and then it all turns into love. Fear of God is not dread of God, but dread of falling away from God and falling into sin and passions. (St. Clement of Alexandria)

**Homily on the Beatitudes, cont'd from p.1**

Lies that reign in the world, that makes all “who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus” suffer (2Tim. 3:12).

Mourn over the violence and oppression of the rich and the powerful, weep over the poverty and helplessness of the poor. Mourn over the Christian love that dried out in the hearts of many, and over the pride, voluptuousness and carnivorousness that reigns in its place. Mourn over the Christians who topple from the height of redemption and respect neither the Church nor the Sacraments, nor her teachings. You may ask: What is the use of my tears? With them, you fulfill the commandment of the Apostle “to mourn with those who mourn” (Romans 12:15), and generally fulfill the commandment to love your neighbor, and love is the fulfillment of the law. The tears bring you a reward, that is the consolation from God and forgiveness of sins. This is the use of the tears you shed.

Blessed are they that mourn. What else is there worth weeping? We may

mourn over our unpreparedness for the terrible and righteous trial at the universal judgment. Many holy saints mourned throughout all of their lives, day and night, at the thought of the Last Judgment and the subsequent eternal the torment of sinners, while



we are indifferent to this final formidable decision of our fate as if we were righteous saints of some kind. Some of us may even dare to reject the truth of the future Judgment and hell. “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the Heaven: A time to mourn, and

a time to laugh” (Eccl. 3:1–4). Now is time to mourn. So, let us mourn over our sins. Amen.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Blessed are the meek ones, for the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, Lord Jesus Christ, Who they looked up to in meekness and patience, took away all their sins, granting them eternal rest and bliss; for in his name they suffered. Now is the time to talk about meekness. “Blessed are the meek,” says Lord, “for they shall inherit the earth.” Previously, the Lord called blessed are those who mourn over their sins, but he says that the meek are blessed this time. Why are the next beautified after those weeping over the sins are the meek? Because meekness is the fruit and consequence of grieving over our sins and powerlessness; mourning over our sins makes a person meek and gentle, like a lamb.

While meekness and gentleness go hand in hand with serenity and

*(continued p.4)*

## Homily on Thomas Sunday, (cont'd from p.1)

Resurrection of their Teacher, Jesus cited the messianic prophecies from the Scriptures (cf. Lk. 24:27). Nevertheless, they only fully believed after He showed the sacrament of the Eucharist: *And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight* (Lk. 24:30–31).

Luke and Cleopa returned that same day to Jerusalem and told the Apostles what had happened, but they didn't believe them, just as they did not believe the myrrh-bearing women. Late that evening, Jesus appeared to the Apostles, who had gathered behind locked doors, out of fear of the Jews. The Savior passed through the closed doors. In this was shown a particular quality of the Lord's body, which was transformed after the Resurrection, and no longer subject to the laws of the physical world. Jesus could pass through material objects.

The disciples were perplexed, because they thought that they had seen a spirit. *He shewed unto them his hands and his side* (Jn. 20:20). This was important not only in order to convince them that He had bodily appeared to them, but in order to vanquish their unbelief. The Lord allowed them to touch His hands, feet, and side. The wounds from the nails proved to them that this was the same body that had been crucified on the Cross.

The events to which *Antipascha* is dedicated took place on the eighth day after the Resurrection. The Apostle Thomas was not present at the Savior's first appearance to the disciples. Apparently, he was not in town. The Apostles whom Thomas then met joyfully announced their Teacher's Resurrection to him. It can be supposed that they also related to him how Jesus had allowed them to touch His feet, hands, and side. Thus, his own desire for this is understandable: *Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe* (Jn. 20:25).

The Apostle Thomas's unbelief has nothing to do with the hardened unreceptiveness that we see in the Jewish leaders toward the miracle of the Resurrection. This was a perfectly natural wish to confirm his faith through a

manifest and obvious testimony. The Resurrected Jesus renewed His appearance to the Apostles on the eighth day, standing before them in the chamber where the doors were closed. He answered the Apostle Thomas' doubt with the same words that Thomas had used to express it.

This could not but have amazed the doubting disciple: *Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing* (Jn. 20:27). This is probably the reason why Thomas did not make use of his Teacher's invitation to touch His hands, feet, and side, but rather believed immediately and confessed Jesus Christ as

God: *My LORD and my God* (Jn. 20:28)! People who stubbornly reject the divinity of the Savior of the world, pass over this passage in the Gospels.

The first week after Pascha is called *Renewal* week, or the week of *Antipascha* (the Greek prefix, *anti*, means "in place of")—that is, the renewal of Pascha. On this Sunday, the Lord repeated and renewed for all eleven of the Apostles His appearance on the first day after the Resurrection. But because the renewal of the Savior's appearance was especially for the sake of the Apostle Thomas, the eighth day after Pascha is called Thomas Sunday.

Following directly after the Paschal week, it completes the most solemn part of the great feast. Therefore, Thomas Sunday is sometimes called *the eighth day after Pascha*. St. Gregory the Theologian writes, "The law of honoring the *day of renewal* is ancient and of good intent; or it would be better to say, to honor with the day of renewal a new act of goodness. But was not the first day of Resurrection, the Sunday which followed the holy and light-bearing night, the day of renewal? Why is that name given to the present day? That day was the day of salvation, and this day is the day of remembrance of salvation" (Homily 44, on the Sunday of Renewal).

### **Troparion for the Feast of Thomas Sunday**

From the sealed tomb, You did shine forth O Life! / Through closed doors You did come to Your disciples, O Christ God! / Renew in us, through them, an upright spirit, / by the greatness of Your mercy, O Resurrection of all!



## Homily on the Beatitudes, cont'd from p.2

and beatitude, for what can be more precious and divine than the peace of mind? What do we seek more than serenity? At the same time, no one is more unfortunate than that who lacks peace of mind, lives in constant anxiety and fear. No wealth, no fame, no earthly good is of any value for him. But even the poor one living with peace of mind feels content and happy. For Blessed are the meek.

But what is meekness, what is it about, how can it be recognized? To define it better, let us turn to the Gospel, where we find a beautiful, shining, and sublime image of it. Here is how the Lord describes and teaches it: "But I say to you, don't resist the one who is evil. But if

anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. What I tell you is this: love your enemies and pray for your persecutors; only so can you be children of your Heavenly Father, who causes the sun to rise on the good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the righteous and the wicked" (Matt. 5:39-45).

"Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart" (Matt. 11:29).

From these words of the divine teacher, you will see, my brothers, that meekness is a calm disposition of the soul steadfast in Jesus Christ through faith and love; it is the state of the soul calmly enduring every evil caused by people or deceit of demons. Meekness is never irritated by the adversities and obstacles on our way; it willingly forgives the human insults and never wishes bad to enemies out of respect for their human and Christian dignity.

A meek man never repays evil with evil or insult with insult. he does not get angry or raise his voice at those who sin or offend him: "he will not contradict, he will not shout, nor will his voice be heard in the streets" (Matt. 12:19); "When he was abused he did not retaliate, when he suffered he uttered no threats, but delivered himself up to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23). This is the genuinely sublime image of meekness! This is what it is! And how can we do it differently, my brothers and sisters? How can we not get irritated, angry, or revengeful? God, our common father, before whom we sin over and over again, always treats us with meekness. he does not destroy us, he tolerates us, and whatever happens, he does us good.

This means that we must be meek, lenient, and patient with our brothers. "For if you forgive others the wrongs they have done, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you," says Jesus Christ, "but if you don't forgive others, then your Father will not forgive the wrongs that you have done" (Matt. 6:14-15). We Christians are the members of one body. We must take care of each other in all ways. We are the sheep of Christ's celestial flock, but why are we called so? Because sheep are meek, gentle, and patient. This is what we should be.

Only those of us belong to Christ's flock who are meek and as gentle as lambs, and those who lack the spirit of Christ, his meekness and gentleness, are not

his. "Anyone who does not possess the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Christ" (Rom. 8:9). At the dreaded Judgment, only the sheep will stand at the right side of the Judge, and the head-burrowing goats will be at the left; and the sheep will go to Heaven, while the goats will be sent to Gehenna. And how absurd and unnatural is malice and rage! And how akin meekness is to our nature!

Look at the face of the meek: how beautiful, clear, serene, calm, and attractive it is! What spiritual fragrance a meek man spreads in other souls: looking at him, an ill-tempered man learns to be meek. And look at a foul, angry man: his face is restless, gloomy, ugly; with a single look, he can annoy many others, as though infecting them with his poison. As you gaze at him,

you unwillingly look away to rest your eyes on someone else. Where do rage and anger come from? They come from our sinful self-love, pride, vanity and ambition, insatiability, drunkenness, pursuit for women, thirst for money. Almost every one of you sees and knows why drunkards, proud, ambitious, money-loving, etc., get angry: because of drunkenness, dissolute women, offensive words, and money – how many troubles and quarrels do they cause?

If nothing else can do it, let at least such harmful consequences of irritation and anger and the beneficial effects of meekness make us meek; for meekness brings us peace of mind and joy, as the Lord says: "Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:29). You will see that as soon as we learn from the Lord to be meek and humble, the serenity will fill our hearts, followed by "joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). *(continued next issue)*

