

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

Christ is in our midst!

He is and ever shall be!



Volume 13 Issue 622

3rd Sunday after Pentecost-Discerning Light from Darkness

June 9, 2024



In today's Holy Gospel we hear the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in which He exhorts us toward a complete and perfect trust in God, our loving Father. He implores us to not worry about things... what we shall eat or what we shall wear – all of those material concerns that can so completely eclipse our life and preoccupy us with stress and anxiety over things. And what does our worrying about things solve? Absolutely nothing... worrying

is entirely wrapped up in our thoughts; it has no positive bearing on the outcome of things.

It demonstrates our false perception of control and our lack of trust in God. Instead of worrying and tying ourselves in knots, we need to pray and we need to trust. Indeed, the final words of today's Gospel reading are a distillation and perfect summary of the spiritual life – we must 'seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all things will be added unto us'.

If our eyes are focused toward God, toward the perspective of eternity and of the disposition and health of our soul; then we will not get so thrown off balance when things unexpected or troubling or tragic occur in our life. We read in today's Gospel: 'The Lord said: "The lamp of the body is the eye."
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++ 3rd Sunday after Pentecost ++

++ St. Cyril of Alexandria ++

Epistle: Romans 5:1-10

Gospel: Matthew 6:22-33

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.*

Homily on the Beatitudes, St. John of Kronstadt

It will be there until we are dead. And to the great shame of humanity, in some of us, it only reveals itself right before the grave with particular brazenness and audacity.

The impure always sees everything impure, as his mind and conscience are defiled. And the Lord, the knower of all hearts, says: "From inside, from the human heart, come evil thoughts, adulteries, fornication, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, fool-

ishness; all these things come from within, and they defile a person" (Mark 7:21–23).

This is what impurity of the heart is! It is a prickly thorn that stings a person from inside, keeping him restless. It is a trap that is so brutal to get in, but people still often willingly go and get caught in it. It is a dark cloud and haze in the soul that conceals God's true path of salvation that can take the people to their foreordained goals.

And, at last, it is the sinful scabs that cover and

devour our hearts.

Cleansing the heart requires great effort and sorrow. It takes a lot of tears and relentless inner prayer, restraint, and reading the Word of God, writings and Lives of the holy saints. But most importantly, it requires frequent repentance, communion of the Most Holy Mysteries and daily self-examination; reflection about how pure the man was created and how the filth of sin came to the world; about the likeness and image of God in us,
(continued on 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 our coffee social in the church basement immediately 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, David, Carol, Norris, Debbie, Linda, Daniel, Michael, Abraham, Karen, George, Rochelle, Brianna, Catherine, Chuck, Theresa, Tamam, Patti, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Prayer in Our Life

Prayer is undoubtedly the highest expression of our love for God. Therefore, we can say that we love God as much as we pray. Everything in the Orthodox Church—architecture, church paintings, icons, hymns, singing, and rites full of symbolism—is designed to create a prayerful atmosphere, to help believers pray from the heart, in experiencing their

mystical union with God. Through the Holy Church sacraments and services, through daily prayers, through our thanksgivings and prayer petitions, through the Word of God, through the Holy Mysteries the Lord Jesus Christ is invisibly present among the faithful.

The Eucharist symbolically presents Christ to us in the fullness of His earthly life. During the Divine Liturgy we become like His contemporaries—we listen to His Word in the Gospel readings, immerse ourselves in contemplation of His image on icons, feel His fragrance in the aroma of incense, and like the Apostles at the Last Supper, we are at the same table with Him when we partake of His Body and Blood.

Through prayer, we enter into living communion with God. In this way we participate in the life of God Himself, Who is the Trinity of love of the three Divine Persons. The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5)—this should be the fruit of prayer. And it must be extended with love for neighbors and for the whole world around us.

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

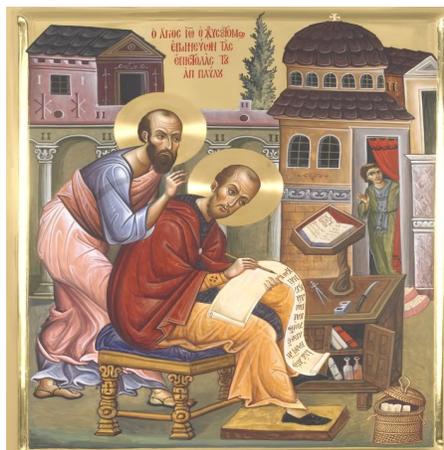
and our duty to liken ourselves to the Prototype – the Most Pure God. We should ponder on our redemption by the priceless blood of the Son of God, our adoption in Christ Jesus, about the commandment to be “holy in all your conduct” (1 Peter 1:15). We should keep thinking about death, judgment and fiery Gehenna.

We say it takes a great sorrow, for it heals the disease of sin and burns the passions. “To enter the kingdom of God we must undergo many hardships” (Acts 14:22), and all the saints underwent the great sorrows to achieve purity of heart, and none of them was crowned without it: some of them endured all sorts of torments from their persecutors, others willingly wore themselves out with fasting, vigils, and physical labor.

They kept vigil by prayer, and its sweetness kept every filthy onslaught of sin away. They frequently partook in the Holy Mysteries as the most powerful way of cleansing, sanctification, and the renewal of soul and body. They learned relentlessly from

the Word of God, engaged themselves in deep meditation of God. And as they did that, some of them had tears flowing from their eyes all the time, like St Ephraim the Syrian.

These sincere and deep tears are



what we need most, for they cleanse our hearts of filth. “Teardrops grant me, O Christ, to cleanse by defiled heart” (Prayers before Communion). “Give me abundant streams of tears, flowing unceasingly from my eyes and thoroughly cleansing me from head to foot” pray we in the canon to

our Guardian Angel, “that, having donned the garment washed whiter than snow by repentance, I may enter into God's bridal chamber” (Canon to the Guardian Angel).

“Implore the Lord to give me the grace of shedding drops of flowing tears, o Holy Angel, that thereby my heart may be cleansed and may see God” (Canon to the Guardian Angel). Everyone who has ever wept for his sins knows how tears help achieve purification, serenity and beatitude of heart, for with the tears, the sin flows out from our souls, and after that, quiet and calmness dawns upon our conscience, and comes spiritual fragrance and joy.

With wiser eyes, man can look into himself to see God taking all his iniquities away and granting mercy to him. This is when the man learns by his experience how blessed, calm, and content are pure in heart, for their conscience does not torment them, their sins have been levied with the endless mercy of God.

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Homily on Christ calling His Disciples, (cont'd from p.1)

If therefore your eye is pure, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.”

What does this mean? It is addressing this issue of the focus and the disposition of our soul. If we keep our eye on God, if we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, then our whole experience of things is full of light. We see things in a positive way; we assume the best of others and wish goodness toward all. When troubles come upon us we are not so easily defeated, but we can take these sorrows in stride and trust that the Lord is watching over us and that our difficulties can be endured in a spirit of humility and hope. As we read in the Epistle today: ‘We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ... And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.’

If our eye is not pure, if our vision is limited only to the triumphs and tragedies of this brief earthly life; then the inevitable ups and downs of this life are going to take us on a roller coaster ride of emotions and worry. In such a state, our vision and our life is not full of light, but of darkness; and we tend to see things negatively, we suspect others and we’re tossed to and fro by our passions – reacting to everything that comes our way. It is a miserable way of life – but we all do it to one degree or another.

This way of life is based on our pride and in trusting ourselves rather than having a perfect trust in God. Our unwillingness to trust in God stems from our pride and from not really understanding the love of God.

Listen to the words of the Epistle from this morning: ‘God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.’

Do we understand what the Apostle Paul is saying here?... We must never fall into the trap of thinking that

our sinfulness is more powerful than the love and mercy of God. God’s love and care for us is so great that, even when we were estranged from Him, He was willing to die for us. How much more then, when we are reconciled to Him through our baptism, through our repentance, through our partaking of His Body and Blood... how much more then may we be assured of His love for us?

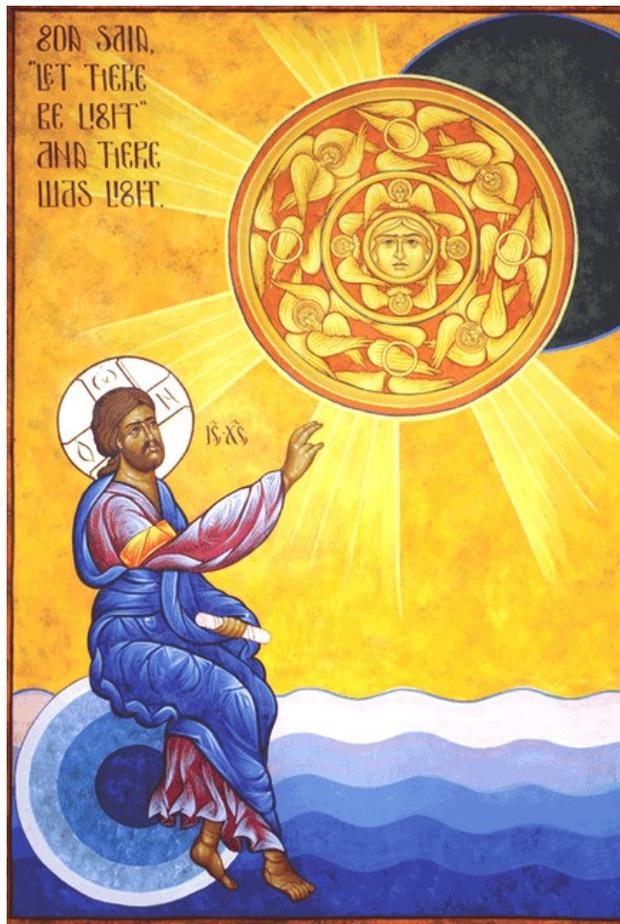
God’s love is constant. He is eternal and is not subject to change. He loves you with a perfect love that encompasses His willingness to die for you. You cannot win His love or persuade Him to love you more than He already does and always will. The only thing we can do is accept or obstruct that love, we can seek it or we can

hide from it, we can receive it or we can reject it. But the constancy of the outpouring of the grace and love of God is eternal and unchanging. Several fathers have likened it to a radio signal... God’s love is broadcasting clearly at all times, but we are not tuned in to the right channel to receive it. Our lives are filled with static and we do not perceive or receive fully the love of God. Perhaps we ‘tune in’ during the quiet hours of morning prayer or in the beauty of the Divine Services at church... but this does not reflect a change in the broadcast of God... it only reflects the changing and fickle nature of our ability to tune ourselves to the right frequency.

This is both a source of great hope and also a source of great challenge to our understanding and experience of God. Through a life of prayer, of fasting and spiritual discipline, of reading and praying the Scriptures...

through a life of service and sacrificial love... through a life lived in the Church – participating in Her Sacraments... through all of these means we do not earn the love of God. We do not bring forth a love that has been withheld because of our sins and selfishness. No... it is through seeking first these things of the kingdom of God that we remove the obstacles and the static blocking us from the ever present love of God.

Let us make every effort to attune ourselves to the right frequency of God’s grace and love. And may God grant us good and clear ‘reception’... that we may seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, that the eye of our soul may therefore be pure and full of light. To God be the Glory. Amen.



Why do we pray to Saints?

One of the most common objections I hear from Protestants on praying to saints, is: "The saints are dead, they can't hear you." The saints in Heaven are not dead. That is a fundamental rejection of what Christ did during His decent into Hades. He emptied the graves of the righteous dead and pulled everyone into heaven. Christ Himself said in the Gospels, *God is not the God of the dead, He is the God of the living. For in Christ, all are alive* (Luke 20:38).

The saints who are alive in Christ in Heaven partake of the uncreated energies of God, as He shares some of His attributes with us (cf. 2 Pet.1:3-4). Therefore, the saints in Heaven are actively aware of what is going on with us down here on earth in the Church and act as a cloud of witnesses for us (cf. Heb. 12:1-2). This is also evidenced by the fact that St. John was able to hear all living creatures in Heaven, on earth, and under the earth (cf. Rev. 5:13). Because they are aware of us, they very much are still concerned with what goes on with us here on earth and actively cheer us on until the end of days, praying fervently for us on our behalf. They want vengeance for us even in Heaven (cf. Rev. 6:10), and it's been shown that Rachel wept over her lost children of Benjamin and Judah during King Herod's massacre of the infants (Matt. 2:18, referencing Jer. 31:15).

The saints praying for us is seen in the Bible (Rev. 5:8, and 8:3-4), and with all of this being put together, the cherry on top is that if all these accounts are true and they are aware of us, they intercede for us on our behalf, and are alive in Christ, then what more shall we doubt? That we can ask the saints in Heaven to pray for us, just as the holy Apostle James encourages us to pray for one another. He also says the prayers of a righteous man avails much (James 5:16). This means that some people's prayers mean more to God than others, which is a fact (see Prov. 15:33).

This sentiment that some people's prayers are worth more than others is reflected many times in the scriptures, but one particular instance is reflected in St. Job, where God tells Eliphaz that he and his two friends are unworthy before Him, that they need to sacrifice bulls and rams before God, that Job will pray for them, and that God will actually answer if Job prays (cf. Job 42:8).

Therefore, if that is true, then since the saints in Heaven

have absolutely no more sin, they have MUCH more valuable prayers than anyone on earth does. Remember what Our Lord said in the Gospels that he who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than the greatest man on earth (Matt. 11:11). So why wouldn't we seek out the prayers of those who are deified in heaven if they hold this much power in prayer?

We Orthodox Christians believe it would be unwise not to ask them. There are usually two objections that protestants bring up if they make it this far into the scriptural references that I listed above. First, they usually bring up this verse: *For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus* (1 Timothy 2:5). This is not an adequate objection to



anything I've said. The word mediator here means "bridge," not intercessor. Christ, is the only mediator between God and man because Christ is both God and Man. Since He is both God and Man, He alone bridges the gap of salvation between God and man because He is the God-Man. Mediation is not intercession. 1 Tim 2:5 is a soteriology verse. It talks about salvation, not prayers and intercession. These are two completely different things, so this verse is not saying what some Protestants might claim it says.

The second objection goes like, "Okay, so maybe the saints are aware of us and pray FOR us, but where does it say that we can pray TO them? Where does scripture show anybody asking a saint for intercession?"

The parable of the Rich man and Lazarus is where we see this happen (Luke 16:19-31). The whole parable is fascinating, but verses 24, 27, and 30 particularly stand out, because the man in hades is asking not for Jesus or for God the Father, but for Abraham to have mercy on him. This shows that God delegates authority to His saints, and this account by Christ Himself reveals the active communion of these people beloved of God. "A man who isn't even a believer calls out from Hades and converses with Abraham." Souls of the departed have awareness of and concern for the state of those still on earth, but the intercessions of the wicked man are also heard, although they avail nothing, which in contrast to James 5:16. If this is the case in the Old Covenant, it's even more the case in the New Covenant.

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