

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



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Christ is in our midst!

He is and ever shall be!



Volume 13 Issue 624

5th Sunday after Pentecost-Christ heals the Gergesene Demoniacs

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“Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town.” (Mt. 9:1) This is, indeed, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, a puzzling reference, for which city or town could be considered “His own” when only a few verses earlier He himself said that “foxes have dens, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (Mt. 8:20)?

So, He comes “to his own town,” yet, we are reminded of the Gospel of St John when so succinctly affirmed

that “he came to that which was his own, but his own did not received him” (Jn. 1:11). So, even if He is not received—and the Gergesenes end up doing precisely this—He comes nevertheless to that which, in one sense, is His own, for everything that was made was made through Him and for His sake, and yet, in another sense, it is not His own, namely, this place, our world, which God formed in its creation, man deformed in his Fall, and Christ came to transform.

When we read in today’s passage that “Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town” we are given to understand that the place where the encounter of our Lord and the two possessed men was, by implication, not his own. Matthew names it as “the land of Gergesenes, as other manuscripts have it. I believe that this

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++ 5th Sunday after Pentecost ++

+ Martyr Agrippina of Rome +

Epistle: Romans 10:1-10

Gospel: Matthew 8:29 - 9:10

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

Homily 9. “*Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God.*” Blessing the peacemakers, the Lord inspires us all to seek peace and hold on to it, for without peace, according to the apostle, “no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). For “he is our peace, who has made both one” (Eph. 2:14), and who came down to earth, to re-establish his peace on it, and “has laid to his Church the word of reconciliation” (2Cor. 5:19). Therefore, those who aim

to reach eternal beatitude must be peacemakers.

How can this commandment be fulfilled? First of all, each of us, my brothers, must not allow passions to disturb us, and repel the passions at their first appearance, keeping ourselves in a peaceful disposition as the apostle commands: “Be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thess. 5:13); “and the God of love and peace shall be with you” (2Cor. 13:11). And where do all the quarrels, conflicts, and disagreements between us come from?

Since we have not learned how to restrain the onslaught of passions in our hearts, nipping them in the bud, we have not learned to remain peaceful within ourselves, in the depth of the soul. This is why each of us is obliged to acquire a peaceful spirit, that is, to bring ourselves to the point where our spirit will not become indignant with anything.

We need to be like dead, or completely deaf or blind, when we encounter all the sorrows,

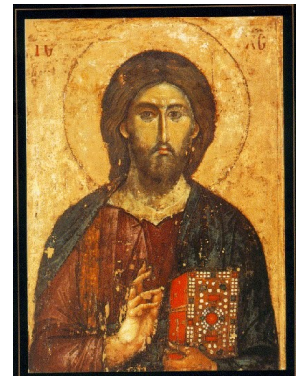
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

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 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, Theresa, Tamam, Patti, Priscilla, Helen, Loretta, Sybil, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Christ is in our midst. Always!

We should not despair or imagine that the globe is somehow spinning out of control. Christ is in control, and the world will end as it pleases Him. It will not end with a whimper or a bang, but with the glory of God filling it like the waters cover the sea. One sometimes hears of frightened despairing people refusing to have children and saying that they would not bring an-

other child into a world like this. Nonsense. We need not fear. Do you ask why one should bring children into a world like this? So that they can meet Jesus.

Christ is the source of comfort to us whenever the evils of the world tempt us to quail and despair. The sea may swell and roar and its proud waves break against us with thunder. But Christ is on the throne, and He says to them, "Thus you shall come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped" (Job 38:11). The world may soak us, but it will never drown us. Jesus has ascended on high.

Christ is still with us—and in fact is nearer to us than ever. In the days of His flesh, His presence was limited: if He was in Galilee and you were in Judea, you had to leave where you were, travel north, and then find Him somewhere among the cities of Galilee. But now that He has ascended to the Father's right hand, any of His followers may have immediate and instant access to His presence, whether they live in Galilee or Judea or London or New York. Christ is only a prayer away and is always with us.

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

slanders, insults, deprivations that inevitably happen to all who wishes to walk the saving path of Christ.

And who wouldn't say that the people who have achieved such a state of spirit are truly blessed, for they attained God's grace, the source of "peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17)? They don't become indignant at anything contrary to them. So St Theophylact of Bulgaria says: "Peace is the mother of God's grace; the indignant soul must become a stranger to quarrels with people and with itself if it wishes to attain God's grace." This is the truth many of us have learned from our own experience. So let us, my brothers, make all effort to attain the peaceful disposition of spirit. Let us attain peace from passions, and then we will reach God's grace that will make us blessed and children of God. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

As we calm ourselves, we must, secondly, be peacemakers for our neighbors, being friendly with everyone,

causing no disagreement and preventing it by all means if it ever occurs due to someone's insult, or unfairness, or encroachment upon someone's property or right. We must try in every way to end it, even if it



requires sacrificing whatever belongs to us, let it be our property, or honor, or our precedence, as long as it is not contrary to our duty and does not hurt anyone. We must attempt to reconcile those warring with each other as much as we can or pray to God for

their reconciliation, for what we cannot do, God can, as he can even make a brutal heart lamb-like. So that they who have realized the importance of peace in human life, let it be in church, society, or in family, which feels so natural and beautiful, and who know the harm of disagreement and fighting which break everything up, will strive to act agreeably with everyone, and promote peace and harmony among people: "God has called us to peace" (1Cor. 7:15).

Peacemaking is a special duty of all pastors of the Church. This is actually the purpose as to why they were appointed to this position, to reconcile everyone with God and each other. It is they who must put out all family quarrels, disagreements between husbands and wives, parents and children, people of different titles and ranks. And a great reward of being called the sons of God lies before them if they work hard to return peace and concord to the world of people.

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Homily on Christ healing the Demon possessed men, (cont'd from p.1)

I believe that this land of Geresenes is a metaphor for our world and for our condition in the world.

For notice, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, that about this land the evangelist gives only two indications, only two images through which one can think of it: tombs and pigs. The two men our Lord encounters in this land “came from the tombs” (8:28). We wonder if there is anything else other than tombs in this allegorical land that is ruled by death. Two other indications bespeak of the unusual location of the land: that is situated “εις τὸ πέραν” (8:28), as the Greek original has it, that is, at the utmost end, and that, on account of the two possessed men, “one could not pass that way” (8:29), that is, the land itself is not only “at the end,” but is itself a “dead-end,” an impasse from which one can have no escape, where there is “no exit”. These are appropriate pointers to the true character of the land of Geresenes, that is, of a land defined by the inescapability of one’s mortality.

The second image, that of the herd of the swine to which the evil spirits will soon flee, reminds us of that distant land from the parable of the Prodigal Son. There too the only living creature that was mentioned was pigs—the pigs which had their husks while the son who had abandoned his paternal house was going hungry. The pigs, on the other hand, in the land of Geresenes do not eat or live much, for as soon as they are mentioned they become associated with death, for “the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water” (8:32).

In that strange land demarcated by tombs and pigs, Christ encounters humanity as it is represented by the two possessed men—for all humanity in its state of separation from God can be understood, in one way or another, as possessed. The evangelist gives us the dialogue that took place during that brief encounter: “What do you want with us, Son of God?” [the possessed men] shouted. “Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?” (8:29)

The first startling element in this exchange, my dear brothers and sisters, is the confession/profession of Christ’s divinity by the two demoniacs: “Son of God.” Only a few days ago, on the feast of Ss. Peter and Paul

we read again in the Gospel of St Matthew how it was precisely this same confession that made Peter the rock upon which Christ was to build His Church and it was this very confession that merited the extraordinary honor of giving to Peter “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” so whatever he binds on earth is bound in heaven and whatever he looses on earth is loosed in heaven (Mt. 16:17-19).

How is it possible that the two possessed men and the chief of the Apostles share the same profession of faith? And how is it possible that this recognition of Christ’s divinity is for the one the reason of his blessings (“blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah...”), while for the others the cause of their damnation?



It is at this point and by posing precisely this question that the crucial difference between faith and knowledge can be illuminated. Christ’s divinity, His identity as the “Son of God” is for the possessed a matter of knowledge: they, indeed, know that, and one could argue that as far as such knowledge is concerned it surpasses in certitude that of any believer, even that of Peter, whose profession of faith was not the affirmation of a matter-of-fact statement (“you are the Messiah, the Son of God”) but precisely a profession of faith, that is, a belief that he held to be true and to which he saw himself bound with the promise of salvation (“you are the Messiah”).

On the other hand, the possessed men’s knowledge not only does not imply any relationship but, on the contrary, it excludes it in the most emphatic way: “What do you want with us?” “What is it between us and you?” Yes, for them too, Christ is the Son of God, but this fact, as fact and nothing more but a mere fact, is something indifferent to them. While Peter’s confession—and after Peter, for each one of us—who Christ is makes the whole difference.

Thus, when we read in today’s passage that “Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town” we are given to understand that the place where the encounter of our Lord and the two possessed men was, by implication, not his own. Matthew names it as “the land of Geresenes” (or Gergesenes, as other manuscripts have it. And yet, within the realm of in-difference
(continued p.4, column 1)

the possibility of at least one relationship is foreshadowed even for the demoniacs: "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" What for Peter was a blessing, that very same thing is here for the possessed men the cause of their suffering.

Christ Himself, Christ's presence, His parousia is also what we usually refer to as "the last judgment," which, in many senses, goes on continuously and therefore it is not "last" but in the sense of an ultimate judgment. Christ will judge the world—and the "prince of the world"—not by appealing to the violations of the Law or by taking into account the transgressions of any moral system, but He will judge the world by revealing Himself and by doing so, revealing at the same time our attitude toward Him. The very event of His parousia will be perceived either as the fulfillment of our expectations and thus as the highest blessing or, alternatively, as an unbearable and most painful experience—the torture of which the possessed men spoke and which is, it should now be understood, only a self-torture and for that reason inescapable, for not even God can save me from myself.

The event—the criterion—is one and the same in either case: Christ, the Son of God. The experience of that reality is, however, dramatically different depending on whose experience it is. I hope that for all of us it will be the culmination of our hopes, the fulfillment of our desires, a pleasure that, as has been promised, will have no end. Amen

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The Holy Trinity Icon

All icons are intended to provide a visual interpretation of difficult philosophical concepts. Orthodox icons are particularly famous for this, but, even among them, 'The Trinity' by Andrei Rublev is in a league of its own and a truly unique phenomenon.

The icon painter, who was a monk, not only succeeded in conveying one of Christianity's most important and difficult-to-grasp doctrines about the Divine Trinity, but he also did so at the highest artistic level. Theologians believe that the icon encapsulates Christian ideas about God and love. The icon's history is inextricably linked with the Trinity Lavra of Saint Sergius. One of the most important Orthodox monasteries, it was founded by Sergius of Radonezh.

'The Trinity' is believed to have been painted in the first half of the 15th century (between 1422 and 1427,

according to experts at the State Tretyakov Gallery. Nikon, a disciple of Sergius of Radonezh and the second abbot of the monastery, is said to have asked Andrei Rublev to paint an image of the Holy Trinity "in praise of his father, Sergius" for the monastery's newly-built Trinity Cathedral. It is believed that Rublev's team of craftsmen also frescoed the entire Trinity Cathedral.

"Taking the well-known biblical story 'The Hospitality of Abraham' (when the Lord appeared to Abraham as three travelers [Genesis, Chapter 18]) as a starting point, Saint Andrei stripped it of secondary detail and turned it into a symbolic representation of the mystery of the Holy Trinity - God being one, but in three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit," explains Orthodox priest Antony Borisov.

The composition of the icon is based on three angels and a table. On the table, there is a cup containing the head of a calf. The cup is the center of the icon and the figures are depicted in a circular arrangement around it (and even the heads of the angels are inclined so that the composition creates a circle). The cup as a symbol of the Eucharist, the holy sacrament of communion, alludes to the New Testament and Christ himself. Two of the angels bless the cup - that is, the sacrifice of Christ.



Art historians and theologians still can't agree on which of the angels symbolizes whom. One of the leading theories is that God the Father is on the left and God the Son in the center (this interpretation is supported by well-known experts on iconography and many prominent religious figures, among others). According to another theory, God the Father is in the center, thus emphasizing the centrality of his figure in the doctrine of the Trinity.

ing the centrality of his figure in the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Trinity doctrine about the three hypostases of the one God, his triunity, is one of the most important in Christianity. But, the difficulty of depicting God lies in the fact that God is incomprehensible and that "no-one has ever seen God", as the Gospels say. In Christian iconography, there had been attempts to show God the Father as a venerable old man, God the Son as Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, but this visual treatment contradicted a true understanding of the Trinity doctrine and was felt to be problematic (to a large extent because God the Father was unimaginable and could not be depicted).