

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 640

21th Sunday after Pentecost– Parable of the Good Samaritan

October 13, 2024



The man in today’s gospel was already rich. He had everything he needed already. Therefore, this is not a parable against being prosperous. This is a parable against excess and wastefulness. What you have will be given to someone else: that is true for all of us. So why not give away the excess now?

What I see in the today’s gospel reading is a toxic and worldly kind of joy. It is a joy that consists in en-

joying what feels good right now. All of us are drawn to something that only gives us momentary satisfaction. All of us have something we feel we have to have right now

But it’s never enough. Never enough of the newest and latest stuff. Never enough control over the people in our lives. Never enough of the arguments and scandals of politics. Never enough TV, food We all have something that we can never get enough of, and at the same time it is weighing us down and causing us to become cut off from the needs of others.

Today’s gospel reading, made me think of addicts; about the mindset of a person who can never get enough. Recovering addicts know that getting your quick fix only gives us fake joy. Recovering addicts know that the quick fix, the seemingly happy and

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++ 21th Sunday after Pentecost ++

+The Holy Apostle Thomas+

Epistle: Galatians 2: 16-20

Gospel: Luke: 12: 16-21

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.*

On Faith in the Christian Life, by St. Seraphim of Chernigov

Usually, the grace of God leads the proud and self-reliant to fall into the very sin that previously seemed impossible to them, in order to bring them to the knowledge of themselves.

Thus, fathers lose their wealth due to their inability to manage them; they squander their last penny, and their families continue to exist with God’s help and even feed the unfortunate fathers. Mothers repent of their former views on the upbringing of children and their everyday worries,

seeing that their children have grown up weak in body and spirit, faint-hearted, and of little faith.

Leaders become guilty of their subordinates’ mistakes or of the general disorder, and realize their former arrogance. State and public figures who thought highly of themselves receive, according to the assessment of their subordinates, the reputation of incapable and impractical wheelers and dealers, and so on.

It’s not hard for us to come to the realization

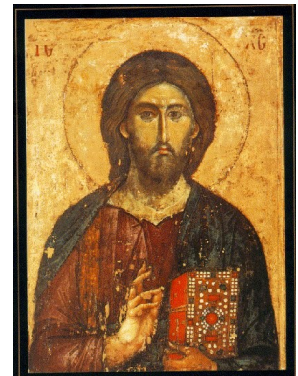
that misfortunes, disasters, and bodily illnesses are sent to us deluded, arrogant, and proud people in order for us to come to self-knowledge and humble ourselves. It only takes one day of observing your thoughts, words, deeds, and actions, in order to convict yourself of untruth, hypocrisy, infatuation, and pride.

The fight against pride
To combat pride and destroy vanity, conceit, and arrogance in ourselves, the holy elders
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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 for the Centennial Celebration of our Church.

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, Debbie, Linda, Daniel, Michael, Abraham, Karen, George, Rochelle, Theresa, Tamam, Patti, Priscilla, Helen, Loretta, Sybil, Frankie, Jim, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Words from St. Isaac of Syria

Cover a sinner, so long as you receive no harm from him, and give him encouragement; then your Master's loving-kindness will bear you up. Support with a word the infirm and those who are grieved at heart in so far as this lies within your hands, then the Right Hand that sustains all will also sustain you.

Through the toil of prayer and the anguish of your heart commune with those who are grieved at heart, and the Source of

mercy will be opened up to your petitions. Weary yourself with constant supplication before God with a heart possessing a pure, compunction-filled meditation, and God will protect your mind from filthy thoughts, that His way may not be defamed through you.

Continuously apply yourself to the study of reading the divine Scriptures with precise understanding, lest by reason of the idleness of your mind, your sight be polluted with foreign pollutions. At a time when you think you will be worsted, do not voluntarily make trial of your mind with lewd reflections which tempt you, because in this way wise men have been darkened and made fools. Do not store a flame in your bosom.

The lover of virtue is not he who does good with valiant struggle, but he who accepts with joy the evils that attend virtue. No kind of repentance that takes place after the removal of our free will will be a wellspring of joy, nor will it be reckoned for the reward of those who possess it.

On Faith in the Christian Life, cont'd from p.1

counsel first, that we understand that we can't do any true good worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven by ourselves, and therefore we're completely insignificant. This conviction can be achieved by clear and correct thinking.

We're born naked and crying, says St. Tikhon of Zadonsk; we live in troubles, misfortunes, and sins. We die with fear, sickness, and sighing; we're buried in the ground and turn into dust. There you can't tell where lies a rich man, a poor man, a noble, a servant, a master, a slave, a wise man, or a foolish man. Why should earth and dung exalt itself?

Second, to destroy vanity, arrogance, and conceit within ourselves, we must renounce ourselves and the world and seek help in humble, fervent prayer. Entreating what's necessary, useful, good, and even more so the gifts of the Holy Spirit, there's no doubt that we'll truly receive them.

Third, we have to learn how to repel the works of the evil spirit, and in doing so, we must be cautious to a

certain degree and remember that our enemies are innumerable and the struggle against them is beyond human strength, because the evil spirits are cunning, tireless, resourceful, and can transform into an illusory or false



good and secretly set traps and snares along the path of virtuous living. Excessive harshness and self-confidence in relation to the world of evil spirits is spiritually harmful.

Fourth, when we fall, when we're arrogant, conceited, vain, and proud

in general, there's no need to be confused, to ponder and waste time, but rather seek salvation in repentance and in the consciousness of our own infirmity. God allows us to fall so we might better know our weaknesses and thereby learn to despise our passions. True humility is based on knowledge, on the experience of our powerlessness and unreliability.

Finally, to destroy pride within ourselves, we must remember the words of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself: *Without Me ye can do nothing* (Jn. 15:5).

The pride of the mind

"To be foolish by nature is not a fault," says St. John Chrysostom, "but to become foolish by the abuse of the mind is impermissible and entails great punishment." These are those who, because of their wisdom, have great dreams for themselves and fall into extreme arrogance.

If the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, then the beginning of foolishness is ignorance of the
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Homily on the Foolish Rich man , (cont'd from p.1)

joyful experience of getting what you are yearning for now, does not give you *real* joy. They know that people who say they're just having fun, people who claim that they just like to party, those people are usually not *truly* happy.

Because recovering addicts understand this they try to find a deeper joy. Some of them call it Serenity. This joy a sober kind of a joy that is joyful because we know that we are weak but Jesus is strong. The sober joy knows that true strength comes from admitting our weakness. True joy comes from taking an inventory of our character and of our actions, and then admitting to another person the ugly and complicated truth of who we have become. We do that because we trust that God can make us who he wants us to be. This sober joy is real joy. I remember asking God one day, many years ago, "I want to find a church that is a kind of AA for sinners." I want to go somewhere where I can confess my sins to someone, and take that kind of "fearless inventory" regularly.

And God answered my prayers. For me, the Orthodox Church is AA for sinners. All sinners. We get to admit that unless Jesus helps us, sin has power over us; that we need help. The Greek word for confession is also the word for exclaiming and rejoicing. Confession is to joyfully proclaim God loves me despite these sins.

These are the sins I believe God can and will help me to purge out of my life. I trust in God's love and in his healing, and so I joyfully confess.

The sober and true joy of recovery is to discover what really matters. Feeling a temporary fix of emotion, a fake sense of well-being, giving ourselves a false sense of security: that is *me*-centred, and it only attempts to fix my first-hand experience.

But when we stop trying to feed the first-hand experience of *me*, then we are free to discover that the most precious things in life are our relationships. Not me but *us*. And salvation stops being only about me and God. Salvation begins to be a matter of *us* and God. Addicts have often sacrificed their relationships in order to get what they are addicted to. And in recovery they make a list of people they have hurt. They try to make amends. And they try to keep making amends whenever they realize that they have hurt someone. It becomes a

lifestyle of relationship and humility. That is true joy. It's not a woo-hoo kind of joy. It is a peace that passes understanding.

One of the most advanced levels addiction recovery is when someone has achieved enough sobriety for a long enough period of time, that they begin to reach out and help other people. Eventually someone will become a sponsor and a leader. The whole enterprise of recovery is others-oriented: I need others, I admit my faults and sins to others, I am supported by others, I make amends to other. Finally, I give back to others.

The peace that passes understanding is a motivating joy. This is a joy that causes us to give the love of Jesus Christ to other people. It is not joy for the sake of feeling joy. It is not ecstasy for the sake of feeling ecstasy. There are many religions institutions, including many Christian ones who offer lots of happiness and excitement, but whose vision of joy is so distorted by a world-

ly and me-centred mindset that they end up offering a false joy. There are many loud and boisterous expressions of the Christian faith that promise us an experience. A Christian entertainment experience. They promise that we will be overcome with emotion, sort of transfixed by a spiritual high.

This too is also an unsober, addictive and me-centred kind of joy. The feeling is always going to fade. The entertainment will one day begin not to have the same effect. When we don't find a more substantial reason to follow Jesus Christ than emotion and entertainment, one day we will

not be able to remember *why* we were ever following Jesus to begin with. It's never enough, and never enough, and then one day we can't get any at all. The joy that Jesus Christ gives us is not a fleeting experience. The joy that Jesus Christ gives us is a calling to serve him. The joy of Jesus Christ is the joy of following him to the Cross. One of our hymns says, "through the cross, joy has come into all the world."

The joy of Jesus Christ is the joy of finding our life hidden in his life, which was one long journey to the cross. The true joy of life is the joy of dying to our sins, and living for God. It is a joy that is not predicated on what we get or how we feel; it is a joy that comes from knowing *who we are*. I don't need to treat other people

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people with disrespect and disdain: that's not *who I am* anymore. I don't need to puff up my ego and use material things like a car, an expensive watch, the latest gadgets, just to show people that I'm important. I am a disciple of Jesus Christ. That's *who I am*. I don't need those things. I don't need to try to make you think I am important. I know who I am. I am a servant of Jesus.

Knowing who we are is what sets us free, not a quick fix of hyped up emotional addiction. Christianity is not a relationship with a God who gives me goodies in the form of feelings, emotions and experiences. Christianity is a relationship with a God who lives in me, who heals the world through me; a God who gives me the words to say at the right moment.

Everything God has given us is given in order for us to live a life of service, in order for us to live a life of loving our brother and sister, of taking up our cross and following Christ. The food we eat is the food that will give us energy to carry our crosses. The house we live in and the bed we sleep in are given to us in order to nurture us as we carry our crosses.

True life is sobriety. True life is knowing who we are, and what we are called to in Christ. True life is placing the ten talents God has given us on the table, and then taking out ten more talents, and saying, "Master, I have doubled your money." True life is the hope and the longing to hear the words, "good and faithful servant."

I may be addicted to anger and rage. I may be addicted to politics. I may be addicted to a sense of self-righteousness and legalism. I may be addicted to my emotions. I may be addicted to my pride. I may be addicted to controlling other people. I may be addicted to self-pity. I may be addicted to my image and my ego. Let us share the resources God has given us in order to walk together and struggle together with our brothers and sisters who are trying to recover from addiction.

May God give us a vision today of the truly joyful, sober and life-giving journey of following Jesus Christ who did not come to entertain us but to send us out to the nations to proclaim the good news. God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference!

Amen.

of the Lord. People carried away by pride and high-mindedness make an idol out of their own mind.

There's nothing more dangerous than this condition, because it's difficult to treat and nigh unto incurable. The pride of the mind is much more disastrous than the pride of the will, because the pride of the will can be observed by the mind, which can insist on the will's subjection to itself. But when the mind is proud and believes that its thoughts and judgments are indisputable and better than those of others, then who or what can make the mind submit? Therefore, the holy Apostle Paul writes: *If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise* (1 Cor. 3:18).

Let the Christian fear excessive knowledge and idle curiosity, for together with the necessary knowledge, the enemy of salvation can also cause us to acquire useless, vain, and harmful knowledge, which only weakens the mind.

The enemy usually conceals his bitterness under the guise of sweetness and creates attractive and beautiful illusions to deceive minds by imitating the truth. The devil attempts to defeat those who are strong and firm in their spiritual life through the mind, so as to take control of both mind and heart. To this end, he usually instills in them lofty, subtle thoughts, astounding to both the man himself and those around him. Witty people are more susceptible to this deception than others. Being carried away by their lofty thoughts, they forget to guard the purity of their heart and humble their self-righteous minds.

In order to avoid high-mindedness, truly spiritual don't relate passionately to the affairs and events of the world, don't attach their hearts to it, and therefore they seem like backwards, imperfect people. As St. Basil the Great says: "May hearing worldly news leave a bitter taste in your mouth, but hearing the stories of holy men be as sweet as honey."

Sins

Only those who still work for sin don't see their sins. A man will never master himself until he repents, he won't repent until he condemns himself, and he won't condemn himself until he comes to know his sins. Therefore, those who understand the need for constant repentance should more often give themselves a clear account of whether they see and are aware of their sins.

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