

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!



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26th Sunday after Pentecost—Christ and the Wick Vinedressers

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In this week's Gospel, Christ is warning the people to take their work seriously. In the parable, the landowner had grown weary of the way the vinedressers had misappropriated his vineyard and how they had treated his representatives. Now he had sent his own son to correct them. This was their last chance to repent of their behavior and see themselves as stewards and servants of God's will – and of his son.

The warning to the nation of Israel was clear: they had ignored God's instructions and they had ignored the corrections offered by the prophets. At the time of this Gospel proclamation, God had sent his own son. If they ignored him and his instructions – worse yet, if they killed him and tried to set themselves up in his place, not only would the vineyard finally be taken away from them, they would be punished according to the wickedness of their deeds.

But this warning was not just for the religious leaders of yesterday, it is a warning to us now as well. With this parable, Christ is reminding us of the terms of the contract when it comes to our own parish: he has not given us this parish. We do not own it to do with it as we want. He is simply leasing it to us. It is not ours by right, but
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++ 26th Sunday after Pentecost ++

+St. Gregory the Wonderworker+

Epistle: 1Corinthians 16: 13-24

Gospel: Matthew: 21: 33-42

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

The second, the path of faith, which is more accessible, sincere, lively, and fruitful, is fervent prayer to the one true God for enlightenment. Take a look at the world around you and you'll see that all sincere men of faith believe on such grounds and as a result of *personal experience*.

True generosity

True generosity is the forgiveness of enemies and prayer for slanderers, because such actions and traits make us like God.

True Christians

All that will live godly in

Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution, says the holy Apostle Paul (2 Tim. 3:21). Therefore, all true Christians will be persecuted until the end of the age; they will suffer from sorrows, griefs, temptations, slander, and calamities. We shouldn't be disturbed by such a state of affairs.

A man who battles evil, says St. John Chrysostom, can't but be tested by sorrows. A fighter can't indulge in luxury, a warrior can't feast in battle. Therefore, let no one engaged in a struggle

seek rest or give in to pleasures. The present is a time of struggle, battle, sorrows, and sighs; it's an arena of spiritual feats.

The time for rest will come later, but now is the time for effort and toil. The righteous suffer tragedies for their testing, and sinners as punishment for their sins. Those who know the Holy Scriptures as they should are not tempted by anything that happens; they endure everything courageously, accept some things by faith and attribute them
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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, Abraham, George, Rochelle, Theresa, Tamam, Priscilla, Helen, Loretta, Sybil, Frankie, Brittany, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Prayer

When praying, we must pronounce each word from the heart with the same power that is contained in each one of them, just as medicines are usually taken with a curative power corresponding to each of them, and bestowed upon them by the Creator.

If we leave out the power or the essence of the medicine then it will not take effect, but will only set our teeth on edge; likewise, if during prayer we pronounce the words, disregarding their power, without feeling in our heart their truth, we shall not derive any benefit from the prayer, be-

cause true, fruitful prayer must be in spirit and in truth.

The words of the prayer correspond to the component parts and the different ingredients of the medicine, each of them having its own power and forming together a curative dose for the body. In the same way as chemists preserve the power of the aromatic medicinal ingredients, keeping them firmly stoppered in glass or other vessels, so we must firmly preserve the power of each word in our heart as in a vessel, and not pronounce it otherwise than with a power corresponding to it. When praying, we must represent to ourselves the whole of creation as nothing before God, and God alone as everything, containing everything as a drop of water, existing, moving in everything, and vivifying everything.

Prayer is a golden link connecting the Christian man with God the Source of life. There is great benefit from prayer to those who pray: it gives rest to the soul and the body; it gives rest not only to the soul of him who prays ("I will give you rest") but also to the souls of our departed .

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

to the incomprehensible providence of God, and for other things they see foundations and find examples in Scripture.

Enmity, persecution, and martyrdom aren't new, and therefore Christ teaches us to look at it unaffectedly, without fear or confusion, telling us: *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you (Jn. 15:18)*. Take courage, and may your heart be strengthened, all you who trust in the Lord!

Look at the true Christian. He isn't tolerated among companions who usually serve all worldly things— whoever or whatever they want, only not God. He's hated by his elders, although he's humble and respectful, because he's independent and sometimes unwittingly becomes the judge of their conscience.

A true Christian is hated by many learned people of this world who consider themselves luminaries and therefore demand reverence, while the disciples of the Gospel are considered darkened, deluded, and back-

wards people. He's boring and shy for modern society because he has nothing in common with it. He often seems heavy and lifeless for his family, because the majority of modern wives and especially children want to



enjoy all the inventions of the age, unconstrained by gender, age, or Christian institutions.

Only a worldly, perverted Christianity is comfortable and acceptable to this world, and therefore it persecutes disciples of the Gospel and truth-lovers with such malice as had the

ancient pagans. They're accused of unprecedented schemes and misdeeds, bombarded with slander and all kinds of filth, dishonored in print and in public, often deprived of service despite their poverty and large families, deprived of the last piece of bread; their family life is disrupted, they try to present them as dangerous and harmful people, subverting existing customs, laws and social life; they're enthusiastically and delightfully given over to the mockery and ridicule of the crowd, with the glory of the dull-witted and foolish.

"And so when you see a righteous man performing great and excellent deeds, yet suffering innumerable ills, marvel not," says St. John Chrysostom. "On the contrary, one might well marvel, if the devil receiving so many blows were to keep quiet and bear the wounds meekly. Even as you ought not to be surprised were a serpent, continually goaded, to grow fierce and spring on the person that goaded it."

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Homily on Christ and the Wicked Vinedressers (cont'd from p.1)

by his own good will. And if we do not run things according to his desire, then we separate ourselves from his grace. He will send us warnings to get us back on track, but if we ignore those as well, he will find others to take our place and we ourselves will suffer according to our own wickedness.

I don't want to take this metaphor too far, but in what way does God send his son to us to ensure that we are doing things according to his will? There are at least three ways: Wherever two or more are gathered in his name, he is there (St. Matthew 18:20). His spirit guides those who work in his name. The leaders of this parish are given a blessing to manifest his will in a special way, but this is something that we are all called to participate in. Because God's son is in and amongst us, we monitor and police ourselves.

He sends us sojourners, people in need of a home, people in need of spiritual food and drink, people in need of love. Whatever we do for "the least of these", we do for him as well (St. Matthew 25:40). These are a continual check on our management of this parish. He is manifested most clearly in his living Body and Blood at the Holy Eucharist. The way we approach this mystery demonstrates our love of Christ and service to His Father.

So, in the light of today's parable, we have to ask ourselves, how are we doing? Have we done what the vinedressers did; have we thought of this parish as our own? How have we treated those he has sent us to instruct us? How have we treated him as he manifests himself among us? Is everything we do here done to glorify him and spread the good news of salvation through his son? We are the body of Christ in this world. We are called to do his work, to transform the world according to his will. When we refuse to work, when we shirk our duties, everyone is affected. It is too bad that we think of Sunday as a day off – it isn't. It is the culmination of all we do. The work we do here is so important that we are forbidden to do any other work on this day.

We call what we do together the "liturgy"; this literally

means "the work of the people." Why do we so often treat this work as if it were unimportant? People who would never dream of showing up late to their jobs – much less skipping it entirely – think very little of doing this very same on Sunday. We know better; it isn't right.

Outside these doors, very few people have the kind of jobs that allow them to see how much their efforts contribute to the health of our society; for people like farmers and nurses, the contribution is obvious, but for others it is much more abstract. I want you to know that what you do here, what we all do here together, is making a real difference. The changes Christ is making to this world through his church are profound. Occasionally we get to see glimpses.



You can see it in the healing that goes on among those of us who have been hurt (the example of the recently widowed priest in our community, a man who is struggling with the most profound grief and heartache, but who even know – at this very moment – is being healed through his service to the Church); you can see it in the joy that we share when we gather and fellowship together; you can see it in the awe that grows among us during our celebrations; you can see it in the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation that is practiced through confession here; and you can see it in our communal participation in

Christ's Body and Blood.

Let me leave you with one final thought: Virtuous people do not work to make money or because they enjoy their jobs (although this is welcome when it comes). They work because they are good and work is what good people do. The Liturgy on Sunday and Feast days is this kind of work. It is what good people do. It is what God's people do. When people "out there" work, they become better and the economy and the culture flourish. This is good, but it is a pale reflection of what happens here. Because the work we do here is done in Christ, we don't just become better – we are perfected; and through this labor, the world doesn't just flourish – it is recreated in Glory.

Whether side by side or separated by distance, their friendship endured. Later, Cosmas would become the Bishop of Maiuma, a port region near Gaza. Yet even as circumstances took them down different paths, their creative partnership and mutual support remained steadfast.

According to tradition, John of Damascus initially faced restrictions on composing hymns when he entered the Monastery of St. Sabbas the Sanctified. A strict elder had forbidden him to engage in hymn-writing, but through the intercession of the Most Holy Mother of God, John was eventually allowed to create his celebrated hymns. In contrast, we know very little about how St. Cosmas began his hymn-writing or how it developed within the monastery. However, it is clear that both monks were deeply committed to their sacred work, creating beautiful canons and hymns together.

Their compositions reflect not only their devotion but also their formal training under their teacher, Cosmas, who had instructed them in theology, poetry, and music. At the time, traditional monastic custom favored chanting scripture over what was perceived as “urban” liturgical singing, which may explain the initial resistance John encountered.

Today, the exact sound of these ancient hymns remains a mystery, with reconstructors of early music only able to approximate the melodies, and much of this music owes its structure to John of Damascus himself. Even more, we hear these hymns in translation, usually in Church Slavonic. Yet despite the language shift, these hymns are still sung, preserving their timeless beauty.

As Christmas approaches, we’ll soon hear the vibrant irmos “Christ is born, glorify Him!” composed by Cosmas of Maiuma. Interestingly, there is another canon for the Nativity written by John Damascene, as there are for many other feasts, including Epiphany, Pentecost, the Transfiguration, and the Dormition of the Theotokos. Though some may call these parallel canons a form of “poetic competition,” there is no sense of rivalry in their work. Rather, their hymns seem united by a shared vision and profound spiritual alignment, each offering

unique imagery and depth.

Among the two Nativity canons, Cosmas’s is the most familiar, while for Pascha, we sing only John Damascene’s celebrated canon: “It is the Day of Resurrection, let us be radiant, O ye people!” These two great feasts are thus linked by the work of these two remarkable brothers.

Among John Damascene’s most enduring works is the Paschal Canon, as well as the funeral verses sung across the eight tones: “What pleasure in this life remains unmarked by sorrow?” He is also credited with creating the system of the eight ecclesiastical tones foundational to the weekly liturgical cycle.

In turn, Cosmas authored the well-known Nativity hymn, “Christ is born, glorify Him!” and contributed to the moving Great and Holy Saturday canon, including the lines, “Weep not for me, O Mother...” Perhaps most widely known is his composition of the hymn to the

Holy Spirit sung at Pentecost, “O Heavenly King...”

There is much more that could be said about their contributions, but we’ll conclude with these familiar examples, which offer a glimpse of the unparalleled skill and devotion of these hymnographers.

Although scholars regard this story as a legend without historical documentation, one can understand why the tale has endured. Some may even find it entirely believable.

Together in Life and in Death

Throughout their lives,

John and Cosmas shared a deep bond. Though separated by distance when Cosmas was in Maiuma and John in the Monastery of St. Sabbas, they remained united in spirit and in their creative work, often expressing an inner dialogue—a sign of a profound and true friendship.

While the exact dates of their lives differ among sources, it is believed that Cosmas was slightly older than John and likely passed away about a year after him, also at the Monastery of St. Sabbas at the age of around 78. Both saints were buried at their beloved monastery, and John Damascene dedicated his last and greatest work, *The Fountain of Knowledge*, to his brother, addressing it to the “Most Venerable and God-Honored Cosmas.”

