

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 644

25th Sunday after Pentecost—Christ's Invitation to the Feast

November 10, 2024



The master of the feast made doubly sure that the guests received the invitations. He issued two invitations to each: the first was to tell each one that he was invited; the second, on the day of the dinner, to announce that all was ready: "Come; for all is now ready." "Come!" The Gospel is not so much a command as an offer; not so much a demand as a gift – an invitation to share in the unbelievable joy of the kingdom.

"Come!" God is expecting you! He is ready for the poor, the maimed, the blind, the lame. He is ready for those who have spent their lives in the high-ways and byways of life. He invites all: "Come; for all is now ready." As a shepherd seeks for the lost sheep, as a woman gets down on her knees to look for a lost coin, as a father waits for the lost son to come home again, so God is ever seeking, calling, inviting.

"Come; for all is now ready." Come you who seek meaning for life. Come you who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Come you who falter under the burden of sin and guilt. Come you who are anxious and fearful. Come you who mourn. Come you who seek peace and fulfilment. Come, "the table is richly laden. Fare ye royally on it.

The calf is a fatted one. Let no one go
(continued p.3)

++ 25th Sunday after Pentecost ++

St. Orestes Martyr of Cappadocia

Epistle: Colossians 3:4-11

Gospel: Luke: 14:16-24

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

But this written Law only convicted people of their iniquities, not correcting them. It only pointed to the path, but didn't give the strength to follow it.

Then the merciful God first promised, and then revealed a different way for people and gave a new law, a new heart, in which He wrote *the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus* (Rom. 8:2).

Therefore, it depends solely on us now whether to be in communion with God and always know His will. It can be known

in spiritual discernment, if we discuss every question of life, every heart-felt desire, every intention with the thought of God's truth and His law.

But since we people can't always be equally spiritually blessed all the time, the holy elders teach that we should pray about every matter three times and then listen to where the heart inclines, if even a little, and do that. The heart always perceives and understands the message.

The Kingdom of God

Seeking the Kingdom of

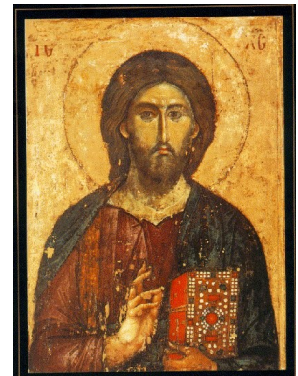
God isn't a retreat into the wilderness or a complete renunciation of the world; withdrawing from the world for the salvation of our soul and to serve God is one thing, while seeking the Kingdom of God is another. Renunciation is possible only with a special calling from God. Man can't renounce the world by his own will, which is confirmed by the lives of the Apostles and other saints.

The search for the Kingdom of God is another
(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 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.

Love and Forgiveness

Love every person in spite of their falling into sin. Never mind the sins but remember that the foundation of every one is the same—the image of God. Other people's weaknesses strike us: they are malicious, proud, envious, avaricious, covetous, greedy; but you too are not without evil—perhaps even there is more in you than in others. At least in respect to sins, all are equal. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

All are guilty before God, and we all equally require His mercy. Therefore, be-

sides loving each other, we must bear with each other and pardon—"forgive them that trespass against us"—in order that our heavenly Father may "forgive us our trespasses." Thus, with all your soul, honor and love in every person, the image of God, not regarding their sins, for God alone is Holy and without sin; and see how He loves us, how much He has created and still creates for us, punishing us mercifully and forgiving us bounteously and graciously. Honor them also, in spite of their sins, for they can always see repentance.

When you see that anybody bears malice against you, do not consider their malice as their own doing; no, they are only the passive instrument of the evil one; they have not yet recognized his flattery and is deceived by him. Pray to God that the enemy may leave them and that the Lord may enlighten the eyes of their heart, darkened by the poisonous, noxious breathing of the spirit of evil. We must pray fervently for all those subjected to passions, for the enemy works within them. Guide yourself by the same rule also in regard to others.

From St. John of Kronstadt.

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

matter; it teaches us how to reach a point where worldly and earthly affairs don't interfere with spiritual and Heavenly affairs. Therefore, Christ said that we must *seek first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness* (Mt. 6:33), and then take care of our earthly affairs, which by God's mercy will be added, arranged by themselves when a man proves his love for God and the desire to save his soul by fulfilling Christ's commandments.

Therefore, seeking the Kingdom of God doesn't prevent us from engaging in worldly affairs without detriment to spiritual matters. We can fulfill our professional duties, attend to family matters, acquire scientific knowledge, and glorify the Heavenly Father through work and charity. The Christian life requires only that care for the soul and the future eternal life be placed before all else.

How do we seek the Kingdom of God? The Kingdom of God is sought not by the flesh, not on earth, not by works of the world, but by the spirit,

by the heart, by thought, in the Heavenly realm, by fervent prayer and sighs at the feet of the Savior, kneeling before the Most Blessed Mother of God.

Prayers and spiritual offerings can't



interfere with taking care of our family, daily bread, work, and studying the sciences and arts. But for the heart to find the way and reach the gates of the Kingdom of God, it must be pure, free from passions, like those who are blessed in the Kingdom of God. Such a purified, sanctified heart

is a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, which is why Christ told the Pharisees: *Behold, the Kingdom of God is within you* (Lk. 17:21).

Thus, seeking the Kingdom of God is building a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

A test of faith

Every man is obliged to test his faith and make sure whether the faith he holds is true, and if it turns out to be false, then find where the one true faith that leads to the true God and grants eternal salvation is. In order to incline His audience to believe in Him and His teaching, Christ said: *Search the Scriptures* (Jn. 5:39), and the Apostles also drew men to the faith by persuasion, not violence.

But how, you ask, can we be sure and how should we test ourselves? There are two ways: the external, intellectual path, and the inner path of faith. The first is necessary, but it's not universal, because it's based on knowledge that isn't accessible to everyone.

(continued next issue)

Homily on Christ's Invitation to the Feast (cont'd from p.1)

away hungry... Enjoy ye all the riches of his goodness.. Let no one mourn that he hath fallen again and chain; for forgiveness hath risen from the grave. Let no one fear death; for the death of our Saviour hath set us free.”

There are many people who consider Christianity a type of tyrannical religion. To them it is nothing but a series of commandments, You should do this. You should not do that. But Christianity is not first and foremost a “should” religion. It is first and foremost a “come” religion. The great drawing power of Christ is not in His “Thou shalt not” but in His “Come to me.” Come be filled with the Holy Spirit. Come be filled with the power of God’s presence. If we come to Him, then we shall do certain things, not because we “should” do them, but because we delight in doing them as an expression of our love for Jesus.

Commenting on this word “Come” and, in particular, on the words of Jesus “Come to me all you who labor.” St.

John Chrysostom wrote these precious words, “His invitation is one of kindness. His goodness is beyond description.

‘Come to me all, ‘ not only rulers but also their subjects, not only the rich, but also the poor, not only the free but also the slaves, not only men but women, not only the young but also the old, not only those of sound body but also the maimed and those with mutilated limbs, all of you, He says, come! For such are

the Master’s gifts; He knows no distinction of slave and free, nor of rich and poor, but all such inequality is cast aside. ‘Come, ‘ He says, ‘all who labour and are burdened!’

“And see whom He calls! Those who have spent their strength in breaking the law, those who are burdened with their sins, those who can no longer lift up their heads, those who are filled with shame, those who can no longer speak out. And why does He call them? Not to demand an accounting, nor to hold court. But why? To relieve them of their pain, to take away their heavy burdens.” When Jesus says, “Come” He does not stand on the top rung of a long, high ladder in heaven to signal us to start climbing. For He Himself has climbed down the ladder to stand at our very elbows.

He has come to us. “For us people and for our salvation (He) came down from heaven, and was incarnate by

the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary, and became man” (Nicene Creed). “She brought forth her first-born Son and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger. “He came, born in a stable. He came and died on the cross. He came to prepare the banquet of salvation for us. And now – today – He sends His servants to extend us His invitation: “Come, for all is now ready.”

Far from being accepted, this gracious invitation was rejected. “I have bought a field .. I have bought five yoke of oxen... I have married a wife... I cannot come. Have me excused.” This was the response. Is it not the same response today? Our great tragedy is that we end up accepting the wrong invitations in life. We miss the banquet, the abundant life of Christ and settle for the lesser, and the fleeting. And Jesus still laments, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under

her wings, and you would not ” (Matt 23 37). “Come, for all is now ready.” ‘But,’ you object, ‘I am not worthy to come. My clothes are not suitable. I wouldn’t know how to act in the Master’s palace.’ None of this makes any difference.

The invitation goes out to all. The good news is that you don’t have to be perfect to come. Come as you are – with all of your sins and sorrows, weaknesses and failures, problems and anxieties. Come to the only One who can forgive you and

heal you. Come to the only One who can make you worthy.

“Come, for all is now ready.” Coming to Jesus is a way of life. It begins with baptism. It involves daily commitment, repentance, obedience, worship, prayer, Bible reading, and regular communion. It involves a daily walk with Jesus.

It involves not only “Come!” but also “Go!” “Go out into the world and be my disciples. Be servants. Be lights. Be salt.” None of us will ever know the wonder of the brightly lighted banquet hall, the goodness of the food, and the joy of being a part of this amazing fellowship unless we lay aside the excuses and dare to accept the invitation. Come to Him now and be assured that on the last day He will direct to you the greatest “Come” of all; “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”



St. John of Damascus and St. Cosmas of Maiuma-Brothers and Hymnographers

In 7th-century Damascus, a Christian named Sergius Mansur and his wife raised an orphan boy named Cosmas alongside their own son, John, born a few years later. These two boys—one adopted, the other biological—would grow to be not only saints of the Orthodox Church but also renowned hymnographers. On 25 October, the Church celebrates the feast of St Cosmas, Bishop of Maiuma, and honors his bond with his foster brother, St John of Damascus.

Many of us sing the sticheron “O Heavenly King” daily, unaware that St Cosmas was its author. This is just one example of the many hymns he composed, which are still sung in Orthodox services. When we read the canons for the Twelve Great Feasts, we often encounter hymns written by St Cosmas and St John, either individually or collaboratively. For instance, the Paschal Canon is attributed to St John of Damascus, while the canon for the Exaltation of the Cross is the work of St Cosmas.

Sadly, little personal information about these hymnographers has survived. They left few writings about themselves, and later biographers recorded many details of their lives, leading some scholars to question their authenticity. Consequently, historical sources offer differing accounts of the exact years of their lives. However, the Orthodox Church preserves a rich Tradition that honors their memory, blending historical research with a timeless devotion. Following this Tradition, we celebrate their legacy with joy, supported by both faith and history.

Brothers in Faith and Genius

In 661, Damascus became the capital of the Islamic Caliphate, a young but rapidly expanding empire. Though Islam had only been founded in 632 with the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the Caliphate now spanned a vast territory. In Damascus, Christians and Jews were allowed to practice their faith freely and often held influential positions within the state. One such official was Sergius Mansur (known in Arabic as Sarjun ibn Mansur), the “great logothete” or chief treasurer to the Caliph. Sergius and his wife had two sons: their natural son, John, and their adopted son, Cosmas, who was three to five years older. While exact birth dates remain uncertain, it’s believed both boys were born in the latter

part of the 7th century.

The shared genius of Cosmas and John is a marvel. While the influence of a gifted teacher is undeniable, it is rare for even the greatest mentors to inspire disciples to such heights. Could this brilliance be attributed solely to their teacher, or to the faith and love instilled in them by their father, whom Byzantine chroniclers describe as “the most Christian man”? Perhaps their genius was nurtured by both, yet no amount of education or parental devotion alone guarantees such extraordinary gifts.

Instead, it seems the brothers were blessed by God with a unique spiritual gift. Their works inspire reverence and spiritual wonder in generations who hear them, even in translation. As Scripture reminds us, “The Spirit breathes wherever He wills” (John 3:8)—and often, His grace responds to a heart open to learning, raised in love, and steeped in faith.

Friendship, especially over the span of centuries, is hard to capture. Few words can do justice to true friendship, which often needs no words at all—a friend is one with whom you can share silence, understanding, and an unwavering connection, even over long distances.

A pivotal episode in the life of John of Damascus highlights the strength of his character and his unshakable convictions. John, who had inherited a prominent position at court, became an outspoken defender of icons when icon veneration was being challenged. The iconoclastic Emperor Leo the Isaurian orchestrated a plot, forging a letter in John’s handwriting, proposing that Damascus be surrendered to Byzantium. This deception led to the Caliph ordering John’s punishment: his hand was cut off and he was imprisoned. Yet, after fervently praying to the Virgin Mary, a miraculous healing occurred.

This event inspired the chant “All of Creation Rejoices in Thee” and is also linked to the icon of “The Three Hands.” Moved to remorse, the Caliph pardoned John, but John had made up his mind—he left his courtly life behind to pursue monasticism. While this dramatic story is often depicted as John departing alone, most hagiographies suggest that he and Cosmas left together, renouncing their possessions and entering the Monastery of St. Sabbas the Sanctified near Jerusalem.

(continued next issue)

