

# 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!*



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24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost—Christ heals 10 Lepers

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Leprosy in the past was considered an incurable illness which vanished from Europe only during the last decades of the 20th century. Death was slow and accompanied with great pain. The lepers were seeing their body's parts decaying, rotting and breaking off, and their faces deforming. The worst of all was their isolation and loneliness. No one was allowed to approach them, because of the danger that they might be exposed to the illness. But, even if

they had the courage to surpass this fear, then, only the view of their wounds was enough to scatter away even the closest and most beloved relatives. They were as living dead, awaiting death as their only deliverance.

Ten lepers, among so many thousands, condemned to continuous isolation, hopeless of any human help, had only one hope. They have heard about Jesus of Nazareth, the Teacher who was God sent and performed miracles. But, their problem was, how to meet with Him. They could not approach the cities or villages and for this reason the Lord Who knows the secrets of men's hearts, guides Himself to the territory of the ten lepers.

The Ten lepers stood from a distance and with a loud voice the cried out: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"  
*(continued p.3)*

++ 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost ++

+St. Akepsimas—Bishop /Martyr+

Epistle: Ephesians 2: 14-22

Gospel: Luke: 17: 12-19

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 sea of life*

Oh, this treacherous sea of life! It's vast, majestic, deep, beautiful, and mysterious, irresistibly drawing human hearts to it. It's almost never quiet, calm, and azure, but more so agitated and stormy. The constantly surging waves, as if chasing and fight each other; they roar, converse, argue, and foam with some kind of malice and hatred.

Seeking to destroy unlike themselves, these waves hurl themselves with fury and passion

against the immovable stones and cliffs on the shore. But breaking against them as against impregnable fortresses, as against indestructible eternity, they run back into the depths of the lawless sea, mimicking the clamor and discontent of an innumerable human crowd with their noise, seething, and groaning.

Men who have surrendered to the will of this raging sea of everyday life, exhausted by the elements, are involuntarily drawn into its passions, eternal struggle, and mal-

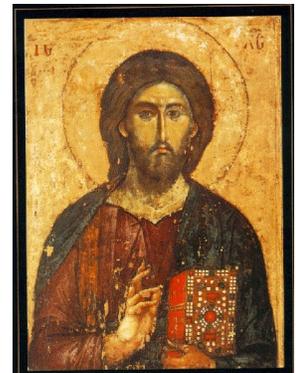
ice. They stop even considering anything that might challenge their captivity, humiliation, and surrender to sensuality.

They are imperceptibly lulled by the movement and lapping of the waves, and they lose awareness of the danger, the nearness of destruction, and the inevitability of God's judgment. Many people spiritually sleep day and night, their whole lives, from the cradle to the grave! Those who live by sensuality alone do not  
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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.

**The Power of the Holy Eucharis**

For an Orthodox Christian, one of the ultimate spiritual weapons in our warfare is Holy Communion. We believe that the Holy Spirit transforms the offering of bread and wine into something much more. Into the very body and blood of Jesus Christ. The bread and wine continue to have the properties of bread and wine. Yet they are changed in a spiritual manner into the mystical body and blood of Christ.

When all else fails as a Christian, the sacrament of the eucharist won't fail us if we approach with a humble and faithful heart.

Listen to the words of St. Cyril of Alexandria, "If the poison of pride is swelling up in you, turn to the Eucharist; and that Bread, Which is your God humbling and disguising Himself, will teach you humility. If the fever of selfish greed rages in you, feed on this Bread; and you will learn generosity. If the cold wind of coveting withers you, hasten to the Bread of Angels; and charity will come to blossom in your heart. If you feel the itch of intemperance, nourish yourself with the Flesh and Blood of Christ, Who practiced heroic self-control during His earthly life; and you will become temperate.

If you are lazy and sluggish about spiritual things, strengthen yourself with this heavenly Food; and you will grow fervent. Lastly, if you feel scorched by the fever of impurity, go to the banquet of the Angels; and the spotless Flesh of Christ will make you pure and chaste."

In essence, St. Cyril says that the sacrament will give you whatever you are lacking in your spiritual struggle. So don't neglect this part of your walk with Christ.

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

notice how these waves, lifting them to their peaks for the sake of glory and deception, then drop them lower and deeper, ready to engulf, destroy, ruin, and cast them out like unnecessary, disgusting corpses onto the wild, rocky shore.

People are lonely in this sea of life. And how difficult it is for them to come to the realization that they have only one sincerely loving, forgiving, unchanging, and all-powerful protector, true friend, and merciful Savior Christ! They don't know the truth and righteousness of God and are powerless to overcome their spiritual sleep. Like the blind, they don't see Christ standing closer to them, sinners, than to the righteous.

Christ the Savior, acting through the attracting power of Divine grace but without violating the human will, awakens those who are spiritually asleep, calling them to rise, to be reborn through repentance, to come to their senses, especially when they're already beginning to perish in the waves of the sea of life. Grace, like

the breath of boundless love, revives the chilled human heart with its life-giving warmth; it doesn't forsake even the most wretched of sinners.

There is no man who has been spir-



itually reborn by the Mysteries of the Church whom the grace of God doesn't visibly and tangibly call to the awareness of his sinfulness and nearness to destruction.

**The lives of the saints**

Before the Russian people were able to embrace deep Christian truths with

their minds, they understood and internalized the truth of God from living examples, from descriptions of the asceticism and instructions of the saints... All of this was so strongly imprinted in their minds and hearts that the Russian people became sincere followers of Christ, learning the truth of Christian life from the lives of the saints.

It was only under the influence of these poetic, highly moral, and historical readings that the Russian people developed such a Christian and Orthodox attitude towards everything "worldly," which other Western peoples did not and do not have, and therefore failed to retain the truth of precious Orthodoxy in their hearts.

**The law of God**

The fall of the first man violated his spiritual state; his conscience was darkened, and man came to know another law, the opposite of God's. Then the Lord sent the written Law through Moses, to recreate the inner law, the guide to piety.

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## Homily on Christ healing the 10 Lepers (cont'd from p.1)

The Lord, regardless of His tiredness, stood with great compassion and replied immediately to their request: "Go and show yourselves to the priests", in order that they may, according to the Mosaic Law, confirm your healing. As they went their way towards Jerusalem, the miracle took place. The leprosy was cleansed. Their body's parts were restored and healed; new skin appeared and covered their wounded bodies. The miracle was completed. Now, one should wait to see all ten to return back to Jesus with joy, to give thanks. But, unfortunately, the nine did not return to give thanks to their benefactor. Only one as grateful enough to return and he was a Samaritan. The one who was a stranger to the Jewish nation returned and fell down to the ground to show his appreciation.

The rest were nine Hebrew men, who were full of the spiritual illness of ungratefulness. They did not remember the beneficence! They did not remember in which condition they were and that they were now cured! They had forgotten everything; and thus, the Lord questioned: "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" On the contrary with the nine lepers, what great example the grateful Samaritan had shown! We, today, enjoy the countless of God's mercies and, yet, we also resemble the nine ungrateful lepers.

We enjoy the freedom of our country and yet, we enslave ourselves into the sinful passions, which are soul-destroying and destructive. We have been honored with the unique charisma, to be "in the image and likeness of God" and yet, we darken this great honor and glory with a life so antichristian and unorthodox by surrendering ourselves into the sinful pleasures of the flesh.

When, instead of loving our neighbors, we cultivate hatred. When, instead of forgiving, we harden our hearts and find it difficult to forgive our fellowman. When, instead of performing merciful deeds, we struggle to become richer. When, instead of struggling to raise the morality of today's society, we also participate in

questionable behavior. When, instead of helping the youth to cultivate and realize the virtues, we lead them to drug abuse in order to receive riches through their death.

When parents, instead of guiding their children to the Christian way of life, they encourage them to follow the dark path of sin. When, instead of helping the workers, those who offer them work trespass against their rights and deprive them from their insurance and retirement plan. When instead of taking care of our parents, we ignore and through them into a retirement home or institution. Then, we must ask ourselves: are we imitating the nine ungrateful lepers?

Every sin is a spiritual leprosy of the soul. Although, our Lord and Savior and God Jesus Christ granted us our spiritual health, yet, most of today's Christians show so much ungratefulness to God and they turn to other places where they believe that they can satisfy their vain ambitions. But again, how many times we show ungratefulness to one another, when we benefit from others?

How many times we have done good and received ungratefulness? How many times we have shown love to friends and they responded with bitterness or pretended that they did not know us? How many times we have sacrificed ourselves and instead of a simple recognition or a heartfelt gratitude, we found ourselves ignored by those who we helped?

Either in family, or in society, or amongst the persons who serve within the Church, ungratefulness exists as a reality. The greatest example which we have is our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the incarnated Word and Son of God, Who benefited all men, cured all the sick, taught with His heart, and yet, at the end He tasted the bitter cup of death on the Cross.

My beloved, let us examine ourselves how grateful we are to God and to our fellow man. As Orthodox Christians, we should be grateful to all for everything. Let us glorify God for His numerous mercies towards men. Let us be grateful towards our fellow men for their support. The teachings of St Peter, "be thankful for everything" must become a way of life for all of us.



In our fast-paced world, where hours fly like birds and things strike us like bolts from the blue, it's easy to lose sight of what's really important. We plunge into our routine, forget about moments of peace and quiet, and have no strength to rejoice in the small simple things that make up our whole lives. Like frightened animals, we hide in our "burrows", which take the form of endless work business, and have stopped looking at heaven.

We run, overtaking each other in the subway, we are afraid to be late, and we hurry even when there is no need to hurry. This is a habit developed over the years—the habit of running after time. And how can we see clearly the



world around us at such a speed? But we do not see each other, not to mention the world! We keep running, pushing one another, trying to make it to our destinations in time... But where are we hurrying?... On the way we scroll through news feeds, a string of chats, peek at the alluring and attractive "lives" of other people living on the other side of the screen, and reflect on how lucky they are.

What will we see when we look away for a moment? Here is a young man standing with a bunch of beautiful flowers, smiling and thinking about something—probably about the one the flowers are intended for. There is a woman standing opposite, so pensive and sad, as if she is about to cry... And tears are already flowing down her face. Who has offended her? What is tormenting her soul so much? There is no answer. The train stops, and the woman disappears into the stream of passers-by.

We move our gaze to the end of the train car. An elderly woman is sitting there, holding a small book in her hands and constantly whispering something. Is she praying? Yes, she is praying for her children, grandchildren, and for all of us, asking the Lord to forgive His children who are "always busy" and "have no time" to remember Him even for a moment.

Vanity can cloud the mind, but it is in moments when we pause that we can find time to meditate. Try to set

aside a few minutes during the day for quiet solitude. It can be a cup of tea in a corner in your office or a stroll in the fresh air. Allow yourself to stop for a while and think about what really matters. At such moments you can turn to God with questions that bother you, or just thank Him for everything that you have in your life.

Keep in mind that every morning is a new page on which we can write down our own unique and original story. To start your day with prayer means to attune your inner world. After all, every morning we brush our teeth, wash our face and put ourselves in order; likewise, prayer puts our souls in order. It doesn't have to be a long and complicated prayer. Sometimes a simple, "Thank You for a new day," or a request for support is enough. Prayers are our shields against everyday vanity.

Work is not only about tasks and reports, but also about the people around us. Each of them is an opportunity for us to show love, care and compassion. Try to see the reflection of God in your colleagues, even when it seems impossible. St. Simeon (Zhelnin) of the Pskov-Caves Monastery used to say, "You don't know a person's thoughts or what he will do in the next moment. So don't judge him and don't speak ill of him..." Thus, you will free your mind from unnecessary thoughts, and your life will become easier.

Pay attention to the world around you: to nature, the



weather, and the people. Feel that you are a part of this amazing and beautiful world, and do not limit yourself to an "electronic box" with a beautiful virtual "life" inside it. Because beyond it real life flows, runs and sings, given to us only once so that we can live it, and not run through it.

Work and prayer should not contradict each other, but they can become two sides of the same coin. It is important to remember that there is a place for God even in the most turbulent flow of life. Every moment is a chance to remind ourselves of His presence. Let God be a part of your life not only when you enter the church, and you will see how vanity turns into harmony, and work into service.