

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

Christ is in our midst!

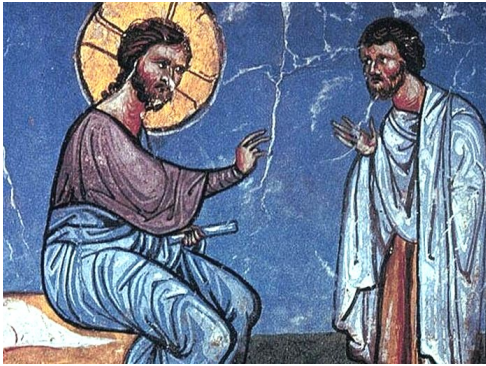
He is and ever shall be!



Volume 13 Issue 647

28th Sunday after Pentecost—Christ encounters a Lawyer

December 1, 2024



If you're like me, you sometimes lose perspective on what is most important in life. We get so busy, so distracted, and so worried about what is going on around us at the moment at home, at work, or wherever that we sometimes lose sight of the big picture, and instead focus on small things that aren't really crucial. So we end up wasting our time and energy on what really isn't very important.

The Pharisees were experts at miss-

ing the big picture, especially of interpreting the Old Testament law in such rigid detail that they ignored the true point of the commandments. When one of them asked the Lord to name the greatest commandment in the law, he was apparently trying to trap Christ in a complicated argument.

But the Lord wasn't about to play that game; He wasn't about to waste time and energy in pointless speculation that served only to confuse people. Instead, He got to the heart of the matter: He quoted from the book of Deuteronomy, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." That fundamental, and often overlooked, central teaching of the Jewish faith is the first and great commandment, according to Christ.

But our Savior wasn't done yet. He
(continued p.3)

++ 28th Sunday after Pentecost ++

++ The Holy Prophet Nahum ++

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 4:6-15

Gospel: Matthew 22: 35-46

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.*

Peace in the Divine Liturgy

In the Divine Liturgy of the Orthodox Church, the deacon or priest intones a series of petitions. The first petition is, "In peace let us pray to the Lord," which means: "With peace of mind, with peace in our souls, let us entreat the Lord."

Inasmuch as the entire Liturgy is a chain of petitions and prayers to Christ, at the very beginning, the Church points us to the necessary condition for prayer—spiritual peace. Only he whose soul is filled with peace can entreat the Lord.

Some may ask: "Is it really possible for us to always have peace in our souls in this life? If we were in, for example, Libya, Egypt, or Japan, then how, in the midst of military conflicts, earthquakes, and floods could we have spiritual peace, in order to pray to the Lord? Maybe this petition is about something else?"

Undoubtedly, the external world is important for man, and the Church also prays for the outside world, which we'll see in the petition beginning

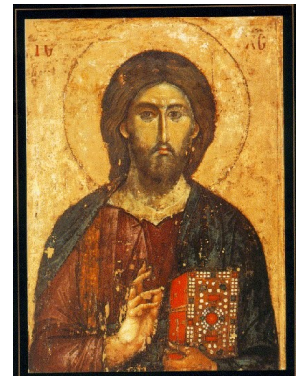
with, "For the peace of the whole world..." It's important that we have peace in our lives, and in our homes, and in our families. However, this external peace is not always achievable. As you know from your own experience, we very often have to go through various troubles—global, national, social, familial, personal.

I remember St. Paisios the Athonite, who would say in the last years of his life: "I'm already an old man, but I've taken care
(continued 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, Bob, Tamam, Priscilla, Helen, Loretta, Frankie, Brittany, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Attacks from the Devil

We must always remember that the Devil is continually trying to choke our soul with the dust of hell, whether your heart be obscured by animosity, or impatience, or irritability, or by grudging your material possessions to your brother or yourself--that is, avarice--or by love of gain, or love of money, or by the quarrelsome and offensive words of others, or by despondency and despair, or by envy, doubt, or incredulity, or by open unbelief, or by vanity, or by slothfulness in prayer or in any good work, and in general in the performance of

your duty, say to yourself with firm assurance: "This is the dust of the Devil; this is the darkness of hell." By faith and hope in the Lord, by continual watchfulness over yourself, you will be able, with God's help, to escape from this dust and darkness. "He that is begotten of God keeps himself, and that wicked one touches him not."

If anyone has offended you, do not bear malice, and when he who has offended you looks kindly upon you and turns to speak to you, do not let your heart incline to evil, but talk pleasantly and with goodness toward him, as if nothing had happened between you; learn to conquer evil by good, malice by kindness, meekness, and humility. Do not say in your heart to him who has offended you: "What! he speaks to me, after having offended me, counting his offence against me as nothing! I do not consider him worthy of speaking to me; I reject, despise him; let him learn what it is to offend me." Do not be proud and bear malice. Do not say thus, lest the Lord be angered by your hard-heartedness.

From St. John of Kronstadt.

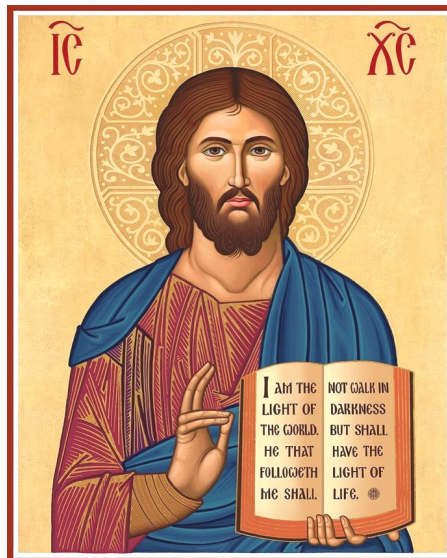
Peace in the Divine Liturgy, cont'd from p.1

of my soul to some degree. Therefore, I pray to God not for myself, but for the world, and I tell God about the sufferings that people endure." It's impossible for a Christian to remain indifferent to human suffering; it's impossible to watch everything happening around us on TV yawning. Unfortunately, so-called virtual reality has taught us to laugh at troubles. We think it's funny that someone's killing someone on the screen. But what's funny about that?

But we adults should have a different attitude towards the disasters that the world suffers. A man who is mature both in age and in his spiritual life won't allow himself to remain aloof from the whole world's pain and suffering. And I think the more a man succeeds spiritually, the more he shares the sufferings of mankind.

Thus, when the Church commands us to pray with spiritual peace, we naturally have the question: "Where can I find this peace? How can I find it when people are dying nearby, when everything is losing its equilib-

rium?" Every day you hear: This one got sick, some misfortune happened to that one, a third one died, a fourth has nothing to eat, a fifth has no money to take of his child...



What kind of peace can be found in such a world? That peace that Christ brought to earth when He was born, about which the angels sang: "Glory to God in the highest, on earth

peace." Yes, but what were they singing about? After all, as soon as Christ came into the world, enmity immediately rose up against Him: There was the massacre of infants and many other evils. And Christ Himself said: I came not to send peace, but a sword (Mt. 10:34)—that is, war. So what kind of peace are we talking about?

As we've already said, it's very important for us that peace reigns in the environment around us as much as possible. But in the petition we're examining today, we're talking about that genuine peace that only God can give a man. Peace is not a psychological state, when everything is going well, and we say, full of optimism: "How wonderful everything is with me!"

The word of God clearly says that Christ is our peace. Christ is peace. If we have Christ in our souls, then we will find peace. If we don't have Christ, then we don't have peace, even if external conditions are extremely favorable for us.

(continued next issue)

Homily on Christ and the Rich Young Man, (cont'd from p.1)

added a second commandment “that is like it,” taken from the book of Leviticus: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” And He concluded that all the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. In other words, the ten Commandments given to Moses and all the other legal material of the Old Testament, together with all the prophetic teachings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos and the rest of the prophets, grow from these two basic commandments: to love God with every ounce of our being and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Jesus Christ got to the heart of the matter, for He knew that the law and the prophets were intended to direct the people to communion with God, to loving fellowship and union with Him which would include their relationships with one another. Remember His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount: Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. In other words, those who are blessed in the eternal life of the Kingdom are those who have been purified by the love of God to the depths of their souls and who show that love in their relationships with others.

No, Christ did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them. He called His followers, and He calls us, to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. That doesn't mean that we will follow more laws than they did, but that the meaning and purpose of the Law will be fulfilled in us: that we will grow in the likeness of God, that we will be united fully with Him through love; that His love will overflow into every relationship that we have and will become present in the world through us. In other words, we will become holy through the love of God and neighbor; indeed, that's what true holiness means, to be purified in love and union with God and with one another.

Though we may not yet have the eyes to see it, our entire life in the Church—and every bit of our life in the world as Christians—presents an opportunity to grow in holiness through the love of God and neighbor. Indeed, that's the point of it all: of our services, our prayers at home, our fasting, our feasting, our generosity to the poor, our forgiveness of others, our marriages and family life, our recreation, and all our work on the job or at school. They are all part of fulfilling our most funda-

mental calling: to grow in the likeness of God, to become partakers of the Divine Nature, to grow in loving union with the Holy Trinity and with one another.

But that may sound strange. After all, we work to make a living. We go to school to learn and to prepare to make a living. We spend time with friends and family, play games and watch sports or listen to music because we like to. We don't often think of these activities as religious at all. So what do they have to do with growing in holiness or fulfilling the commandments?

Well, the answer is found when we remember that the Incarnate Son of God became a human being with a real body in order to bless, heal, and sanctify us and everything about us and our world. In His resurrection Christ conquered every corruption and distortion of our fallen humanity, and has now ascended into heaven as the God-Man, showing us our destiny for life eternal. The good news of the gospel is that every single bit of our life presents an opportunity to share in His sanctification of our humanity, to grow in love of God and neighbor, to continue on the path trod by our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ.

For example, who isn't worried about the economy these days and how it impacts our businesses, our livelihood, and our personal finances? We don't

like to hear or say it, but bad economic times remind us not to worship the Almighty Dollar and not to look for fulfillment and peace in money or possessions. We are called to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, not to love wealth or worldly success. And when times are hard, we are reminded to place our trust in Him, not in what is here today and gone tomorrow and can never truly satisfy us.

If we want to love our neighbors as ourselves, we never have to look far at all. Every person whom we meet is a living icon of Christ and is called to life eternal. No matter the circumstance, whenever we put someone else's interest above our own, whenever we are generous with our time, our attention, or our resources, whenever we help someone in any way, we serve Christ and grow at least a bit in the divine likeness. No matter our age, gender, occupation, or circumstances, we all have the opportunity each day to love our neighbors as ourselves and Christ in our neighbors.



Our current culture wars tend to divide people into two camps: those supporting the ‘traditional family’ verses those for a more ‘inclusive family.’ They seem so far apart that we may never find common ground. Yet, every year the Church asks us to commemorate the separation of a nuclear family. During the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple, we celebrate the faithfulness of Joachim and Anna, who offered their three-year-old daughter—their only daughter, for whom they prayed for many years—to be raised in the Temple by other people. The hymns do not depict them grieving, however. Rather, they describe them dancing and leaping for joy. And we, as a Church, join them in their gladness.

But while the hymns never ascribe sorrow to Joachim and Anna, they do to the mothers amongst us: *Today let us, the arrays of the assembled faithful, triumph in spirit... Ye mothers, setting aside every sorrow, follow them in gladness, singing the praises of her who became the mother of God...*

Mothers today do not give away their toddlers to be raised at church, but from the first time a mother brings her child to church, she is asked to literally give her child up. The priest takes them from her hands, lays them on the floor in front of the altar, and leaves them there alone before God. When the child is baptized and chrismated, the parents will hand their child off again, this time to the godparents.

Some icons of the Entrance depict the event like a Chrismation. The parents, Joachim and Anna, stand back. Instead of them, two sponsors holding candles escort Mary to the priest, who welcomes her to a red altar flanked by what look to be royal doors. Inside the sanctuary, a piece of bread, fashioned conspicuously like prosphora, is fed to her literally “upborn by an angelic host.”

The readings for the feast day explicitly challenge the primacy of family. The Gospel features the story of Mary and Martha. Martha entreats Christ, “Do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?” (Lk. 10:40) Christ affirms that Mary has chosen the one thing needful, which (unlike family) shall never be taken away from her. Appended to this story is Christ’s later exchange with the woman who declared “Blessed

is the womb that bore You.” (Lk. 11:27) In response, he declares “More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Lk. 11:28)

But while the feast day challenges the primacy of family, it does not dismiss its importance. In the Gospel reading, Christ does not say that Mary should never help her sister Martha, nor does he deny that his mother is blessed for having born him. After churching and baptism, the newly born are handed back to their parents. The feast, after all, is a Marian feast and what makes Mary the Theotokos is that she gave birth to God *in the flesh*. It’s also a feast that celebrates Joachim and Anna, whom we commemorate in the Divine Liturgy as the “grandparents of God.”



As we move through Advent into Christmas, the significance of Christ’s ancestry becomes even more central. At the beginning of Advent, we celebrate the Theotokos’ departure from her parents, but the last Sunday of Advent the Gospel reading is none other than the genealogy of Christ, i.e., his family tree. Central to the mystery we celebrate at Christmas is the reality that God was born into a human family, with parents and grandparents and great grandparents.

It would be a mistake, therefore, to think that the Church were saying that biological family is unimportant. I have two theories about what she is saying instead. The first is that earthly family is not needful, by which I mean that to be blessed, you don’t need to have a certain kind of family, nor does having a certain kind of family necessarily make you blessed. Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it, which includes sheltering the widows and orphans, the afflicted and the poor.

The second is that the life of the family is only blessed insofar as it is ordered toward and within the greater family of the Church. Mary’s role in the Church included literal separation from her family, first from her parents, and later from her child. It also included her being betrothed to a man who was much older than her, which resulted in her becoming a widow. Most people’s vocations do not include this much separation from family. But on some level, every parent needs to give their child up to Christ and the Church. Likewise, every child needs to make the Church their true Mother and God their true Father.