

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

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Glory be to Jesus Christ. Glory be forever.



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35th Sunday after Pentecost—Sunday of the Prodigal Son

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The relationship between parents and their adult children can be difficult, especially when young people assert their independence for the first time. Though it is not always the case, tensions often seem strongest between parents and children of the same sex; that is, between fathers and sons and between mothers and daughters. Perhaps that is because they often have so

much in common and see themselves in one another.

The parable of the Prodigal Son focuses precisely on such a relationship. A young man asked his father for his share of the inheritance, which the father gave him. The son's request amounted to telling his father he wished he were dead so that he could inherit his share of the estate. The old man meant nothing more to him than a source of cash to fund a decadent lifestyle in a foreign land.

The young man did his best to end their relationship and apparently had no intention of ever returning home. He treated his father so shamefully that we would expect neither of them to want to have anything to do with the other ever again. Members of families become estranged to this day over much less.

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The Right Attitude for Lent by Fr. Vladimir Berzonsky

Before the Great Lent begins the Orthodox Church reserves three weeks in order to encourage in its members a proper mental preparedness towards the season of intense prayer, meditation and fasting. We must learn not merely to accept lent as a spiritual obligation, an intrusion into a life of fun and diversion, but rather we must learn to welcome its discipline if we are to benefit by it spiritually.

Let us first mention certain misconceptions re-

garding this period: the great danger of keeping a strict lent is that one tends to become self-righteous. Wisely the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee is put at the very start of the Triodion Cycle to impress upon our minds the distastefulness of self-righteousness. It would be far better not to observe the lent than to have it result in an arrogance, a 'holier-than-you' attitude.

Neither is lent intended for scoring points in heaven. The hairs on our

head may be numbered, as the Lord tells us; but it is highly unlikely the angels keep track of whether we had a cheese sandwich or boloney for lunch. We sometimes tend to keep the letter of the lent and fail to develop an over-view, a general framework for understanding why we deprive ourselves of certain foods and pleasures.

What we are about is to know ourselves. To know ourselves we must withdraw from the world

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**** 35th Sunday after Pentecost ****

Martyr Pamphilus & Companions

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Gospel: Luke 15: 11-32

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.

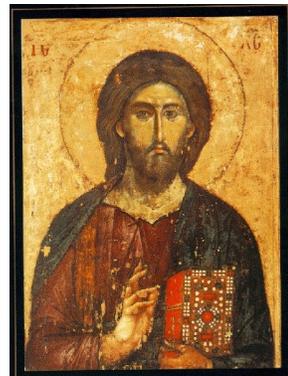
We are dedicated to living out Christ's commandment to, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, ad with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.*

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.





Troparion to St. George

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
for our souls
salvation.

News and Notes

We welcome all who are worshipping with us today and invite you down to the church hall for our social hour.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

We ask that you keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Olga, Lillian, Meg, Larissa, Stephen, Louise, Marcia, George, Lorraine, Peg, Christopher, Jackie, Karoline, Evan, Ryan, Kathleen, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, and those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

A letter to a friend-St. Basil the Great

Remember the mercies of God and how He cures you by pouring on oil and wine. Do not despair of salvation. Recall your memory of how it is written in the Scriptures, that he who has fallen rises, and he who turns away returns; the wounded one is healed, the prey of wild beasts escapes; he who confesses his sin is not rejected. The Lord does not desire the death

of a sinner but rather that he should turn and live.

Do not despair, like the wicked in the pit of evil. There is a time of endurance, a time of long suffering, a time of healing, a time of correction. Have you stumbled? Arise. Have you sinned? Cease. Do not stand in the company of sinners, but spring away. When you are converted, and groan in sorrow for your sins, you shall be saved.

Out of labor comes health, out of sweat comes salvation from your sins that bind you. Beware, so that when you strive to keep certain obligations, you do not break the obligations to God which you professed before many witnesses. Everyone is ready to welcome you; everyone will share your efforts.

Do not sink back. Remember the days of old. There is salvation; there is renewal. Be of good cheer; do not despair. It is not a law condemning you to death without pity, but mercy that puts away punishment and awaits improvement. The doors are not yet shut; the Bridegroom hears you. Sin is not the master.

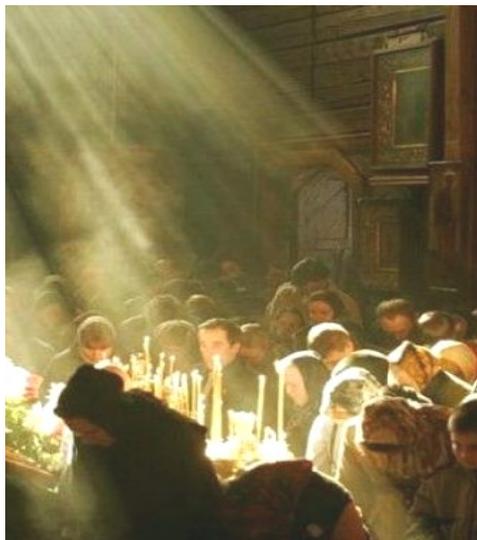
The Right Attitude for Lent, (cont'd from p. 1)

to go into the desert as Jesus did following his baptism. It is essential that we extricate our inner selves from our surroundings, if we are to have an over-view of our lives. If we cannot physically retreat, we must at least retreat mentally. This we are able to do by the very fact that we are human beings.

For example, a fish in an aquarium is alive in every sense that we are who observe him; with one exception. As far as we know, he is not able to transcend himself, in the way we are. Not only are we able to look at ourselves from a distance, we must analyze and evaluate ourselves to be truly human.

Fasting is simply to make us hungry, enabling us to evaluate the person we really are; how enslaved we are to that drive which draws us against our will to the refrigerator! How we cannot think about anything but the growlings of the stomach! "I'll get a headache, I just must eat something," you say. You've learned something about yourself.

We must see how we've surrendered the gift of freedom God intended for us, as we reach out to our ciga-



rettes or bottle, refusing to evade the reality of our slavery until we hate the fetters enough that we will admit that we are imprisoned by our habits, then make the difficult struggle involved in setting ourselves free. I am convinced, however, that concentration on ourselves is no longer

sufficient.

We must mature into a new awareness of life around us, developing a respect for nature and all of God's creatures not previously manifested among us. There is a need for a new attitude towards property, both ours and others, a reverence for living beings over institutions and man-made laws; we must have the courage to analyze and perhaps reevaluate our priority of values. What should be borne uppermost in our minds, nevertheless, is that true, effective and worthwhile change takes place in hearts and consciences, and only their bearers can make them.

Although we may find it difficult to accept change and although many of us may be dissatisfied with the status quo, the change is inevitable. The Church must be restored into the life of the people as a viable and meaningful expression of a person's relationship with God. The Church is the Kingdom of Heaven and we must allow it to give us real experiences. Amen.

When the money ran out, the son found himself living in a time of famine in a strange land where the best job he could find was feeding pigs. He was so hungry that he envied the pigs their food. That is when he “came to himself” and realized that even his father’s hired hands had more than enough to eat. He resolved, “I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.’” The son had learned his lesson the hard way and saw the gravity of what he had done. He had broken his relationship with his father beyond any repair he could imagine. The most he could hope for would be to return as a mere servant.

The father, however, was not concerned at all about what the son deserved for his actions. He must have looked out into the distance every day with the unlikely hope that his son would eventually come home. That is when he saw the prodigal still a long way off “and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.” That was a shocking response, both to the son and to anyone else who happened to see it. In response to the young man’s confession, “‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’”

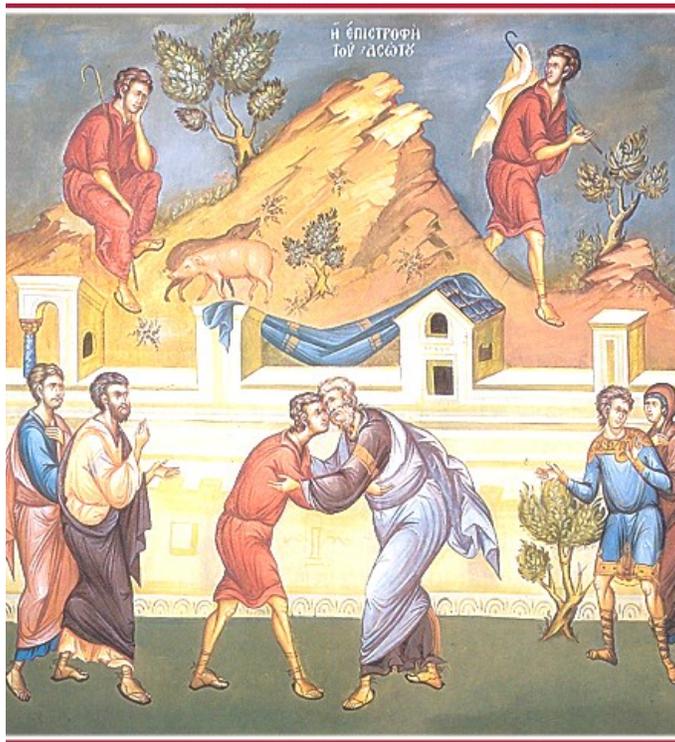
But the father said, “‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’” In response to the complaint of the older brother about the injustice of restoring and even celebrating the prodigal, the father reiterated his reason for rejoicing: “‘for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

The Church directs our attention to this parable as we continue our preparation for the season of Great Lent, which in turn prepares us to follow Christ to His victory over death in His glorious resurrection on the third day. As we anticipate the intensified repentance of the coming weeks, we must learn to see ourselves in the young man who was so enslaved by self-centered desire that he thought nothing of breaking off the most fundamental relationship of his life. He acted not as a son in a life-giving relationship of love, but as an isolated individual out to get what he wanted for himself. Nothing

else and no one else mattered.

We do the same thing whenever we do not live according to our great dignity as those created in God’s image and likeness as His own sons and daughters. Instead of finding true fulfillment by purifying our hearts as we reorient our disordered desires toward union with the Lord in holiness, we think, act, and speak in ways that degrade and weaken us. When we wallow in pride, anger, lust, slander, and other passions, we become barely recognizable as God’s beloved children. By trying to live outside of a relationship with Him, we turn away from the very foundation of what it means to be a human person.

The young man in the parable finally “came to himself” and realized both how needlessly miserable he was



and that he had no right to be called his father’s son. By embracing Lenten disciplines such as prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and forgiveness with integrity, we will have no lack of opportunities to come to ourselves as our illusions of religious self-sufficiency fall away. Our minds will wander, our stomachs and taste buds will protest, our attachment to money will flare up, and we will find it very appealing to hold grudges and say nasty things about others. We may notice all kinds of strange, tempting thoughts and desires popping into our minds. When such struggles arise, we may be tempted not to complete the Lenten journey.

Just as stretching and strengthening a weak, constricted muscle is painful, taking steps to reorient our lives to Christ will make us feel our lack of spiritual health. The more clearly we see the true state of our souls, the more we will know that we have rejected our Lord in ways too numerous to count due to our own ego and pride. The point is not simply that we have broken a law or done something wrong. It is much more serious, for we have made ourselves unworthy and undeserving of being called His sons and daughters.

Lent is not about earning anything from God at all, but instead about helping us prodigal sons and daughters come to ourselves as we take the long journey home to union in holiness with our Lord. No matter how we have distanced ourselves from the Lord, He reaches out to us, calling us to cooperate with His gracious will to restore and fulfill us completely as those who bear His image and likeness.

The Greatest Failure of Modernism by Fr. Theofilos Lemontzis

George Orwell's dictum, expressed in his novel *Animal Farm*, that *'All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others'* is both proverbial and perennially true. In this allegorical and political novella, the animals on a farm decide to revolt against their boss, a man. Once they're free of human domination, however, they realize that their new leader, a stout pig called Napoleon, has seized power and has become a worse tyrant than the previous boss.

Their new boss was very quickly corrupted by power, then, and imposed an even harsher slavery on the other animals, since he considered himself and his collaborators superior to them. Hence the characteristic phrase *'All animals are equal but some animals (obviously those who were of the same ideological bent as Napoleon) are more equal than others'*. What Orwell describes in his allegorical novella is what has happened in most political revolutions, where the new wielders of authority prove to be worse tyrants than the previous incumbents. This is precisely the same thinking that underlies acts of political assassination: *'All people are equal, but the lives of those who don't share our views are worth less than the lives of those who agree with us'*.

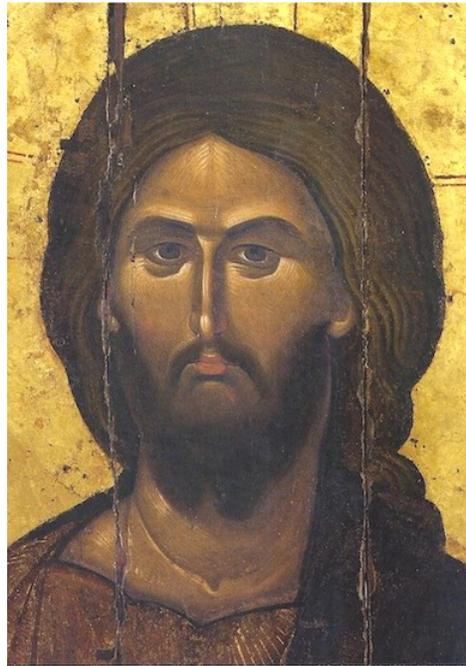
The allegory of *Animal Farm* deals with ideologists and adherents of a concealed dogmatism, who, in the name of purported freedom, are prepared to exterminate their opponents. Christian theology, however, has never identified the actions and ideas of a person with the essence and value of their life. This is the substance of the distinction Christian theology makes between sin and the sinner. This concept has most profound humanist implications, since it refuses to judge human beings on the basis of their misguided actions, nor does it take the Manichean view: that we are bad by nature and incapable of any alteration. The former murderers, robbers and even the executioners of martyrs, who trod the path of sanctity once they'd repented are proof of this. However, those who commit murder for ideological reasons inevitably equate the human life of the victim with his or her actions and, since these are unacceptable, that life of theirs is of no value.

This hypocrisy and the inability of so many modern political theories to recognize the value of each individual person we meet on a daily basis- unlike Christian theology which does just this- and to talk instead and in general terms about the rights of an abstract social totality, is best expressed in Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. The starets [Zosima] tells of an educated doctor who claimed that he could love humanity in general and in the abstract, but not particular people in everyday life.

The great author writes: *'It's just the same story as a doctor once told me'*, observed the elder. *'He was a man getting on in years, and undoubtedly clever. He spoke as frankly as you, though in jest, in bitter jest. "I love humanity," he said, "but I wonder at myself. The more I love humanity in general, the less I love people in particular. In my dreams"*, he said, *"I have often arrived at making enthusiastic schemes for the service of humanity, and perhaps I might actually have faced crucifixion if it had been suddenly necessary; and yet I am incapable of living in the same room with any one for two days together, as I know by experience.*

As soon as any one is near me, their personality disturbs my self-complacency and restricts my freedom. In twenty-four hours I begin to hate the best of people: one, because they're too long over their dinner; another, because they have a cold and keep on blowing their nose. I become hostile to people the moment they come close to me. But it has always happened that the more I detest people individually, the more ardent my love for humanity becomes".

This is hypocrisy on the part of the doctor in the narrative and, simultaneously, an inability to recognize any value in particular people of his everyday acquaintance, who live in a particular place and time. He's unable to embrace them with love. As Dostoevsky implies, this is also true of Modernists, who are happy to go on marches and demonstrations to support the homeless but are unable to care for the actual homeless person they pass on the corner of the street as the demonstration marches by. They're willing to make fiery speeches on behalf of immigrants, but don't give



a bite to eat to the hungry immigrant outside their front door. They work for better living conditions for prisoners, but treat the newly-released convict as a blot on society and marginalize them. They fight for human rights and the right of free expression, but bear a mortal hatred for those who disagree with them and don't rest until they've been dealt with.

Christian theology recognizes the dignity of the life of everyday people, and also of those who are not yet susceptible to bodily sensation because they aren't yet born, the unborn children. Herein lies the greatest failure of Modernism: to recognize the value of unborn life, the right of unborn children to live, the right of children to belong to themselves and not to their parents, who can make the decision at any given moment to take away their life through abortion. Modernists will condemn a woman who kills her child as soon as it's born, but consider it a woman's right to *'have control over her own body'* and kill the child just before birth.