

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

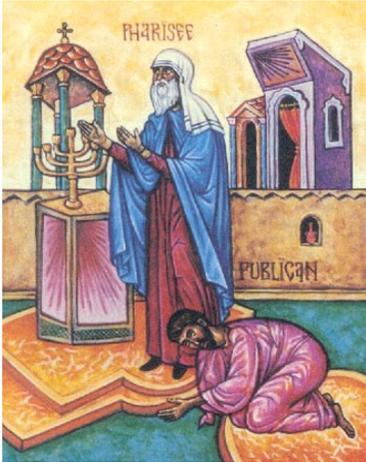


Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be Forever!

Volume 10 Issue 448

33rd Sunday after Pentecost-Publican and the Pharisee

Sunday, January 24, 2021



The Savior said, “He who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” These words speak directly to each of us, for we all follow in the path of our first parents in refusing to live in a manner worthy of people created in God’s image and likeness due to our pride. Our great dignity means that we

will become more fully ourselves only as we become more like God in holiness. True humility requires recognizing how far we are from fulfilling such an infinite goal. It is only through humility that we will be able to participate in the joy of the true exaltation of our Lord’s glorious resurrection.

It is certainly possible to use religion, or anything else, to distract us from humbling ourselves before God. Like the Pharisee in today’s parable, we can make prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and other virtuous actions ways of blinding ourselves to the truth. How appealing it is to magnify our own accomplishments in contrast to what we see as the failings of others. When we engage in that kind of behavior, it becomes impossible truly to offer our lives to the Lord. Instead, all that we say and do becomes simply an act of
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* Publican and The Pharisee *
** St. Anthony the Great **

Epistle: 2 Timothy 3: 10-15

Gospel: Luke 18: 10-14

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.*

The Humility of the Publican

The Publican was a collector of taxes. These were people who were dishonest and hated by the people. This is who the Publican was who entered the Temple in the Savior’s story from today’s Gospel reading. And the other one was the Pharisee. Pharisees were the most respected people in that society, because this was a special part of the religious community that lived especially strictly, and therefore were possessed of great virtues. And

these virtues were not lacking from that Pharisee described by today’s Gospel reading. We know this from the enumeration of virtues that the Pharisee himself made while standing in the Temple. What is the meaning of this story? What can we learn from the Savior? Humility! One was humble, while the other was filled with conceit, pride, and vanity. He was not at all humble but, on the contrary, was proud. The Savior is teaching humil-

ity; the Savior is a teacher of humility.

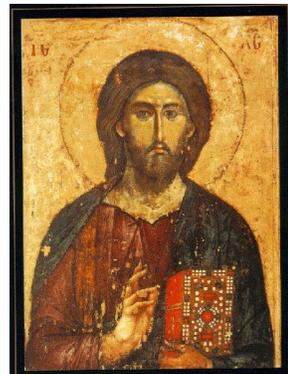
The Gospel of Christ is the Gospel of humility. It is the Good News of humility. The whole life of the Savior was filled with humility! So, allow me to ask you: do we not forget about this, about the very most important thing that Christ teaches? Do we understand the significance of humility in our spiritual life, in our religious life? Do we understand why humility saves us?

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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.





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. Because of COVID-19, our social hour has been canceled until we receive further instructions from the Department of Health.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

We ask that you keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Olga, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Louise, George, Evan, Ryan, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Paula, Laura, Elizabeth Matthew, Corella, Ron, Daniel, Frankie, Dean, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Words of Wisdom-Flee to the Desert

To flee to the desert means to go where something isn't. That is, part of how we flee to God is by fleeing from what's keeping us away or distracting us from God. Simply by removing ourselves from the things that stir up our passions, we find a bit of peace, a space where we can pray

a little and draw near to God a little. What we are doing when we remove ourselves from those things that stir up our passions is fleeing to the desert, a little bit.

For most of us, this bit of desert that we flee to is not a physical place. There may be no other physical place we can go. Rather, the desert is a mental place, a place free of the things that bring the onslaught of our passions. But to get to this mental place, we usually have to do something physical. Turn off the radio. Walk away from the computer. Keep our mouths shut. Leave the conversation. Not go to certain places or hang out with certain people. It's usually not something huge, but we have to do it completely: we have to flee to the desert, a little bit.

And if we flee to the desert a little bit, then we will begin to find peace. We will begin to find a place in our hearts and minds where we can pay attention to God and to the people that God has put in our lives to love and care for. Fleeing to the desert allows us to live the life God has actually given us to live and grow to become the people God has made us to be.

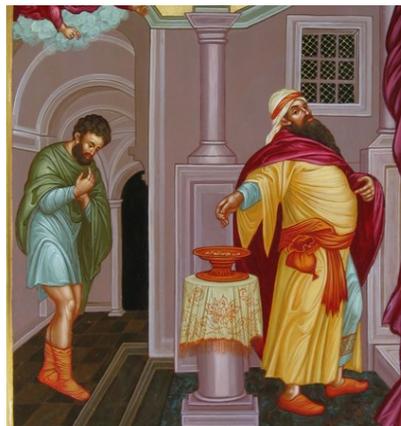
The Humility of the Publican, continued from p.1

If only we understood this, if only we felt this, if only we knew this, if only we always had this in mind – then, brothers and sisters in Christ, we who call ourselves Christians would all live differently! But this, which is the most important thing, we forge.

So why is it, however, that Christ Himself places humility at the foundation of the Christian life? Why humility? What significance does it have in and of itself – or, perhaps, not *only* in and of itself? Or perhaps not *even* in and of itself does it have such saving significance for us? In and of itself, humility has no significance. But the fact is that humility reveals love in us. A humble person will necessarily be a loving person: he humbles himself and his passions, the root of which lies in self-love.

And therefore as soon as someone begins to struggle in humility, he cuts off this root of self-love and destroys self-love. Then there is opened up in him his innermost spiritual substance: the core – the ontological core, if you

will – of our existence, of our substance: love, which makes us conformable to God Himself, for God is love. Humility serves to reveal the most important thing in man, that which links us to God Himself, that which makes us conformable to God Himself.



How often it is said: “Well, one mustn't humble oneself so! One needs to have one's honor; one must defend one's dignity! But this – it's incompatible with the humility that you're offering us, which you Christians

teach us!” But think of it like this, brothers and sisters: put on one side a proud person, who defends his own human dignity, and next to him put a loving and humble person. And judge for yourself: who has more human dignity?

In which is human dignity expressed more distinctly, in which is it more visible, in which is it really present: in the one or in the other? Because he who lifts himself up, he who exalts himself, will be abased, as the Savior tells us; while he, on the contrary, who abases and humbles himself will be exalted, elevated by God's grace, by God's power, because such a person likens himself to God Himself, to Christ Himself; thus our conformity to God is revealed in us and it becomes active, active in love both for God and for people.

Brothers and sisters! Let us not forget these words with which the Savior Himself completes today's Gospel parable: “for every one that exalts himself shall be humbled; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted.”

(Homily on the Publican and the Pharisee, cont'd from p.1)

self-worship, a form of idolatry. The Pharisee in the parable may have used the word “God,” but he was really praying only to Himself.

Anyone who has ever tried to pray in a focused way will understand why he did that. We usually find it extremely difficult to be fully present before the Lord, whether during services or in our private prayers. Profound humility is required to open our hearts to the One Who is infinitely “Holy, Holy, Holy.” When even a glimmer of the brilliant light of the Divine Glory begins to shine through the eyes of our souls, the darkness within us becomes quite apparent. The temptation is strong to shift our attention to whatever we think will hide us from that kind of spiritual nakedness. To focus on how good we think we are, especially in comparison with others, is an appealing way of changing the subject as we become ever more blind to the true state of our souls.

The Publican was an easy target of criticism for the Pharisee. Tax collectors were Jews who collected money from their own people to fund the Roman army of occupation. They collected more than was required and lived off the difference. Consequently, the Pharisee believed that he was justified in looking down on someone who was both a traitor and a thief. Ironically, this tax collector would not have disagreed. He knew he was a wretched sinner, and his only apparent virtue was his humble acknowledgement of this true spiritual state. Standing off by himself in the temple, this fellow would “not even lift up his eyes to Heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner.’”

Despite his miserable way of life, the tax collector somehow mustered the spiritual strength to expose his soul to the blinding light of God in prayer from the depths of his heart. He knew that this was not a time for excuses or changing the subject. No, it was time simply to accept the truth. Christ said that the Publican, not the Pharisee, went home justified that day. The difference was not who had done more good deeds or obeyed more laws; it was, instead, who had the humility that is absolutely essential for opening our souls to the healing mercy of Christ. Without such humility, pride will destroy the virtue of everything that we do. With it, there is hope for us all.



In just a few weeks, we will begin the spiritual journey of Great Lent, the most intense period of repentance in the life of the Church as we prepare to follow our Lord to His Cross and empty tomb. There could be no greater sign of the folly of exalting ourselves and condemning others than the Passion of Christ. He brings salvation to the world in a way completely contrary to prideful self-congratulation that hides from the truth. What could be more humble than for the eternal Son of God to empty Himself, take on the form of a servant, and become obedient to the point of death for our salvation? (Phil. 2:7-8) St. Paul wrote, “Therefore God also has highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2:9-11)

It is only by knowing the depths of our brokenness that we will be able to embrace personally the heights of the Lord’s humble, suffering love, which is well beyond our full rational comprehension. That is why we need to devote ourselves to prayer, fasting, almsgiving, forgiveness, and other forms of repentance in the weeks ahead. If we do not, we will likely fail to gain the spiritual clarity of the tax collector, who was aware only of his sin and need for God’s mercy. We will never enter into the deep mystery of our salvation if we do not open the eyes of our darkened souls to the light of Christ so that we may see our true state before Him.

The Church calls us to pray daily and with special intensity during Lent. Instead of congratulating ourselves for whatever apparent success may have in doing so, it is better to remember that our struggles in opening our souls to God reflect our weakness and need for strength that we cannot give ourselves. They provide an opportunity to pray the Jesus Prayer or otherwise simply to turn our attention back to the Lord the best we can with a sense of our need for His mercy. In contrast, the worst thing we could do when struggling in prayer would be to become like the Pharisee who reminded God of his good deeds and condemned the tax collector. It would be better not to pray at all than to do so in such an idolatrous way.

(continued p.4, column 1)

(Publican and Pharisee, continued from p.3)

Our struggle to pray provides great opportunities for growth in humility, as do our difficulties in fasting, forgiving, showing generosity, and otherwise reorienting our lives to God. Given our spiritual brokenness, we will usually find it much easier to eat whatever we want, hold grudges, be selfish, and otherwise serve only ourselves than to resist our self-centered desires as we open our lives to Christ in humility for healing. To do so, however, is simply a path to greater blindness and weakness. It is a way of degrading ourselves, of refusing to live according to the truth of who we are called to become in God's image and likeness.

Likewise, it is possible to perform all spiritual disciplines in a corrupt way that serves only our pride, especially when we use them to condemn others. As we begin our preparation for Great Lent this year, we should all be on guard against the temptation of self-exaltation in any form. For if anything we do could earn God's favor and make us so much better than others that we would be justified in condemning them, there would be no Lent because there would have been no need for our Lord to conquer death through His cross and resurrection. The weeks of preparation for Holy Week and Pascha are necessary because we cannot save ourselves by religious or moral practices. Our only hope is to participate in Christ's exaltation by uniting ourselves to Him in humble faith. The coming season will provide us with many opportunities to do precisely that. If by the end of Lent, we see ourselves as clearly before God as did the tax collector and ask only for mercy from the depths of our souls, we will be well prepared to follow our Lord to Jerusalem, where He showed, once and for all, how humility leads to exaltation.

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When we have finished our speech, you must feel what a saint of our Church said, "Now my soul is heartbroken, and I cannot hold your flame, from where you praised you, I walk." Oh my God, he says, I felt you, I listened to you, I saw you by my side; I felt you pierce my heart with your arrows, to burn my soul, to light a flame that I cannot stand. That is why I praise you and I leave taking you with me. He will teach us all the truth.

So that our window is the divine liturgy, so well-known in our lives, which we have been accustomed to since our

The Divine Liturgy by Archimandrite Emilianos

childhood and where there is nothing like it either on earth or in heaven.

How does the operation start? "Blessed be the kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen". Why does the priest begin like this? What does he want to say? Christ opens before us a magnificent spectacle. In front of us he presents a celestial vision. Before us Christ opens his kingdom. As you go to a store and the merchant opens the place of the fabric for you and you see it, you catch it, you test its durability, you see its beauty and you say I will buy it, that is what Christ does at that time. Before our eyes he opens his kingdom, to see it, to feel it, to satiate it and to say: I choose her for my life. Does our soul feel this?

The priest realizes this at that time in the altar. His heart beats hard, he goes blind, as Paul went blind on the way to Damascus, when he saw Christ. His spiritual eyes see the dazzling light of God. That is why ecstasy erupts • "Blessed is the kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". Your glory in your kingdom, my Christ, fills everything. Have you seen, when the bride is adorned to photograph her, how her big veil covers the whole room and the curbs of her robe cover the floor, to show her glory and beauty? This is exactly how the Church of Christ at that time spreads all over the place before our eyes.



What is this blessed, glorified, honored, higher kingdom than any other? It is the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God; it is the paradise into which Christ has placed us; it is our holy Church. The King is the three-

year-old God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Served by the king are the angels and the archangels, thrones, ancients, powers, dominions, powers, the cherubim polymaths and the six-winged seraphim. The king's generals are the saints. The Queen is the Virgin Mary. Faithful soldiers are Christians, those who are ready to follow Christ no matter what it costs them, all those who are willing to bear His honored name, all those who constitute His Church. So all, Christ, the saints, the Virgin, the angels,

Therefore, when the priest says "Blessed is the kingdom of the Father", he forgets himself, his home. He forgets the world, all that he sees, and focuses his heart and mind on what he understands, the secrets, the invisible, that Christ presents before him. *(continued next issue)*