

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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1st Sunday of Great Lent-Sunday of Orthodoxy

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We are keeping today, as every year at the end of the first week of Lent, the Feast of the Triumph of Orthodoxy. And every year we must give thought to what is meant, not only as a historical event, but also in our personal lives.

First, we must remember that the Triumph of Orthodoxy is not the Triumph of the Orthodox over other peo-

ple. It is the Triumph of the Truth Divine in the hearts of those who belong to the Orthodox Church and who proclaim the Truth revealed by God in its integrity and directness.

Today we must thank God with all our hearts that He has revealed Himself to us, that He has dispelled darkness in the minds and hearts of thousands and thousands of people, that He who is the Truth has shared the knowledge of the perfect Truth Divine with us.

The occasion of this feast was the recognition of the legitimacy of venerating icons. By doing this we proclaim that God – invisible, ineffable, the God whom we cannot comprehend, has truly become man, that God has taken flesh, that He has lived in our midst full of humility, of simplicity, but of glory also.

(continued p. 3)

Great Lent-Sunday of Orthodoxy * St. John of Constantinople *

Epistle: Hebrews 11:24-26; 32-12:2

Gospel: John 1: 43-51

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.

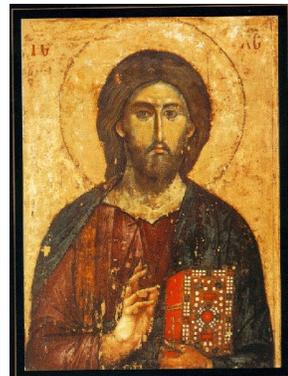
We worship God in Trinity -
Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

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
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Why we Celebrate the Sunday of Orthodoxy by Metropolitan Athanasios

On the first Sunday of Lent, we celebrate the Sunday of Orthodoxy, that is to say the feast of the restitution of the holy icons, as the Church once again, by the grace of God and preserved the faith. This faith has as its result the healing of humankind, our salvation and deification.

Reverencing the holy icons is proof that we confess that God became a describable person, that the Word of God was truly incarnated and became a person, but also

that people truly become children of God and vessels of the Holy Spirit, temples of God and members of Christ.

We reverence the holy icons of the Saints and their holy relics because God dwelt in them. So we celebrate the restitution of the holy icons and have the blessed custom of carrying them in procession, of honoring and embracing the icons of Christ and Our Lady and the Saints of the Church.

Let's remember the icon par excellence, the

icon of God, the human person. The first to make an icon or image- one of Himself- was God. And this icon is the human person. God said: "Let us make a person in our image and likeness" and, indeed, the human person became an icon of the Triune God, an icon of the invisible God.

We can see this image of God. The human person is the most beautiful and lovely of God's creations. Had God wanted to make something better,

(continued p.2)



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 worshiping 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)

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

Wisdom from St John of Damascus

Let us remember the poor, and not forget kindness to strangers; above all, let us love God with all our soul, and might, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves.

Even on the cross He did not hide Himself from sight; rather, He made all crea-

tion witness to the presence of its Maker.

In ancient times before the divine sojourn of the Savior took place, even to the saints death was terrible; all wept for the dead as though they perished. But now that the Savior has raised his body, death is no longer terrible; for all who believe in Christ trample on it as it were nothing and choose rather to die than deny their faith in Christ. And that devil that once maliciously exulted in death, now that its pains were loosed, remained the only one truly dead.

The Lord did not come to make a display. He came to heal and to teach suffering men. For one who wanted to make a display the thing would have been just to appear and dazzle the beholders. But for Him Who came to heal and to teach the way was not merely to dwell here, but to put Himself at the disposal of those who needed Him, and to be manifested according as they could bear it, not vitiating the value of the Divine appearing by exceeding their capacity to receive it.

Why we Celebrate the Sunday of Orthodoxy, continued from p.1

He'd have done so. His image, the human person, was the best He made. But this most beautiful icon of God, which had within it all the gifts which God had given it during its creation, was, unfortunately shattered, broken, because the devil was able to smash it.

The iconoclast struggle wasn't just a phenomenon of the 7th century. It began from the first appearance of the human person. The devil instigated a war against God's icon, against the human person, and managed to shatter it, to make it fall into death, into sin, to make this beautiful image distorted, to the extent that it was no longer testimony to God's beauty, but instead something which had become ugly, full of passions and sins.

But God didn't wish to see His image languishing in misery, He didn't want to see His icon, which He had made with so much love and care, become lost in the desolation of the fall and of sin. And so He Himself became human and the model of our salvation. And to help us rediscover

the beauty and comeliness of our creation, when we left His hands, He created the Church, through which, first and foremost, He gives the grace of the Holy Spirit.

The task of the Holy Spirit is the



renewal of our corrupted nature and our rebirth. This rebirth is achieved through two factors. The first is the grace of the Holy Spirit and the second is human freedom. This is how God remakes us. First and foremost

through the mystery of the Holy Spirit. When we're baptized, the great mystery of our remaking is performed; we cast off the old person and put on Christ, the new person.

Thereafter, with the power of the Holy Spirit which is given to us through the Holy Chrism, we're energized and receive strength, so that the gifts we've been given through baptism and chrismation can be activated to produce spiritual fruit, to glorify and sanctify us. On God's part, everything has been done perfectly and in a manner befitting Him. God has made our salvation and has finished His task; it's now up to us how we make these gifts our own.

People who are baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity, in the Church and through the Church and anointed with the Holy Spirit are thereafter persons reborn in Christ, who can now move forward and activate within themselves the gifts which God has made to them. So we're all baptized with the grace of God.

(continued on p.4)

(Homily on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, cont'd from p.1)

And proclaiming this we venerate the icons not as idols, but as a declaration of the Truth of the Incarnation. By doing this we must not forget that it is not the icons of wood and of paint, but God who reveals Himself in the world. Each of us, all men, were created in the image of God. We are all living icons, and this lays upon us a great responsibility because an icon may be defaced, an icon may be turned into a caricature and into a blasphemy. And we must think of ourselves and ask ourselves: are we worthy, are we capable of being called "icons", images of God?

A human being may not at first appear as possessed of such a beauty, but those who meet him should be able, as those who venerate an icon – blessed, consecrated by the Church – should see in him the shining of the presence of the Holy Spirit, see God revealing Himself in the humble form of a human being.

As long as we are not capable of being such a vision to those who surround us, we fail in our duty, we do not proclaim the Triumph of Orthodoxy through our life, we give a lie to what we proclaim. And therefore each of us, and all of us collectively, bear every responsibility for the fact that the world meeting Christians by the million is not converted by the vision of God's presence in their midst, carried indeed in earthen vessels, but glorious, saintly, transfiguring the world.

What is true about us, simply, personally, is as true about our churches. Our churches were called by Christ as a family, a community of Christians to be a body of people who are united with one another by total love, by sacrificial love, a love that is God's love to us. The Church was called, and is still called, to be a body of people whose characteristic is to be the incarnate love of God. Alas, in all our churches what we see is not the miracle of love divine.

From the very beginning, alas, the Church was built according to the images of the State – hierarchical, strict,

formal. In this we have failed – to be truly what the early, first community of Christians were. Tertullian writing in defense of the Christians said to the Emperor of Rome: "When people meet us they are arrested and say: 'How these people love one another!'" We are not collectively a body of people about whom one could say this. And we must learn to recreate what God has willed for us, what has once existed: to recreate communities, churches, parishes, dioceses, patriarchates, the whole church, in such a way that the whole of life, the reality of life should be that of love. Alas, we have not learned this yet.

And so, when we keep the feast of the Triumph of Orthodoxy, we must remember that God has conquered, that we are proclaiming the truth, God's own Truth, Himself incarnate and revealed, and there is a great responsibility for all of us collectively and singly in this world, that we must not give the lie to what we proclaim by the way in which we live.

A western theologian has said that we may proclaim the whole truth of Orthodoxy and at the same time deface it, give it the lie by the way in which we live, showing with our life that all these were words, but not reality.

We must repent of this, we must change, we must become such that people meeting us should see God's truth, God's light, God's love in us individu-

ally and collectively. As long as we have not done this we have not taken part in the Triumph of Orthodoxy. God has triumphed, but He has put us in charge of making his triumph the triumph of life for the whole world.

Therefore, let us learn to live according to the Gospel which is the Truth and the Life, not only individually but collectively, and build societies of Christians that are a revelation of it, so that the world looking at us may say: "Let us re-shape our institutions, re-shape our relationships, renew all that has gone or remains old and become a new society in which the Law of God, the Life of God can prosper and triumph. Amen." (*Delivered by Metropolitan Antony of Sourozh, 1914-2003*)



(Why we Celebrate the Sunday of Orthodoxy, continued from p.2)

It matters not whether we're infants when we're baptized, because baptism isn't the result of our own will and our own intellection, but is the result and action of the Holy Spirit. It's what happens after baptism that requires our cooperation and consent. At the time of baptism, there's no gift that God doesn't give us. He regenerates the person in toto, reshapes them and really does clothe them in Christ. And so we begin our struggle, and since God doesn't act by magic, nor does He eradicate human freedom, this is why our own freedom is needed: to work with the grace of God.

The spiritual struggle we engage in from the time we become aware of ourselves in the course of our lives is precisely how to activate those gifts we received at baptism and which, of course, we have from our creation. It's because we're wounded and in thrall to sin that baptism's necessary for us and why Christ was adamant: "everyone who believes and is baptized will be saved", because baptism is necessary, together with faith, for us to be saved, since without them we can't be reborn.

And so the struggle begins and it's the struggle against iconoclasm. It's a struggle of Satan, of the sin of our environment, of ourselves against the image of God, against the icon we bear within ourselves. How will the devil shatter the image of God we have both by our nature and from our baptism? Sin is what destroys the image; that's what sullies the image and mars it, which makes people fragmented and unable to function naturally, as God made us.

Sin is essentially captivity, it aims directly at our freedom and kills it, which is why it's an insult to God and to the person. People who are subject to sin don't have freedom. At every point where we're defeated by sin, that's where we're slaves of sin. After that, the love that we had because we were made in the image of God, which was directed to God and through God to the world and creation and to our fellow human beings, becomes a passionate love, idolatrous and corrupt.

As regards the creation, it becomes idolatry and as regards the passions it turns to sensuality, ambition and avarice. The person, who was so beautiful, as made by God and, above all, free, is now a slave and captive in these bonds. Although we're baptized and sealed with the Holy

Spirit, though we have within us the seeds of the beauty of God, we still have to provide our own co-operation in order to germinate all these seeds.

How can people remake this image of God and see the great beauty they possess by nature, by their very creation? This is why this spiritual struggle on the part of the Church is so significant, because we know that the aim of the struggle is to restore the icon of God which has been shattered. Particularly at this period, the Church mobilizes all its forces to help each of us to complete our own struggle and aim.

The Church has spiritual weapons and medicines, because it's a spiritual surgery; it has the equipment to rid the body and soul of disease and knows how to give people their health. So fasting, prayer, vigil, almsgiving, confession, participation in the sacraments, the Divine Eucharist, everything the Church offers are the medication that destroys evil.

The presence of God in the Church reworks our image for us and we really do become as God made us, image and likeness. This takes place when a person enters the realm of grace. And the people who succeed are those who find the key to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, people who've learned repentance, who've been able to change their way of thinking and have humbled themselves. Let us keep this icon of God before us and fight against the iconoclasm of the devil, who wishes to break the image of God with which we were clad at our Holy Baptism.

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The Synodikon of Orthodoxy

As the Prophets saw, as the Apostles taught, as the Church has received, as the Teachers express in dogma, as the inhabited world understands together with them, as grace illumines, as the truth makes clear, as error has been banished, as wisdom makes bold to declare, as Christ has assured, so we think, so we speak, so we preach, honoring Christ our true God, and his Saints, in words, in writings, in thoughts, in sacrifices, in churches, in icons, worshipping and revering the One as God and Lord, and honoring them because of their common Lord as those who are close to him and serve him, and making to them relative veneration.

This is the faith of the Apostles; this is the faith of the Fathers; this is the faith of the Orthodox; this faith makes fast the inhabited world.

