

# A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

*Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!*



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3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Pascha— The Holy Myrrhbearers

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We all know what it is like to receive shocking news. Sometimes it is simply impossible to be prepared to hear an astounding message that we did not expect at all. Today we commemorate the people who received the most shocking news of all time from the angel: “Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, Who was crucified. He is Risen. He is not here...Go tell

His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.”

These first witnesses to our salvation were all women who expected to find the dead body of Jesus Christ in the tomb. They saw Him die on the Cross and now went to anoint Him properly for burial. Like the disciples and everyone else, these women did not expect the resurrection. We can only imagine how sad, scared, and terribly disappointed they must have been as they rose very early on Sunday morning to take their sorrowful journey to His tomb.

When they got there, these women—the Theotokos, Mary Magdalen, two other Mary’s, Johanna, Salome, Martha, Susanna and others whose names we do not know—were the first to receive the shocking news of the

*(continued p. 3)*

**\*\* Holy Myrrhbearers Sunday \*\***

**\* St. Antipas-Bishop & Martyr \***

Epistle: Acts 5: 12-20

Gospel: John 10: 19-31

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 Holy Myrrhbearers, by Metropolitan Anastasios***

‘Do not fear’, said the angel of the Lord to the myrrh-bearing women, who were overcome with ‘fear and amazement’ at the sight of the empty tomb. ‘For I know you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. He has risen, as he said,’ (Matt. 28, 6).

Shortly afterwards, the risen Christ Himself ‘says to them “Do not fear”’. Thereafter, to the group of His cowering and fearful disciples, He declares: ‘Why are you troubled and why do doubts arise in your

hearts?’ (Luke 24, 38). He showed them the imprints of the crucifixion on his hands and feet, confirming the miraculous event of His Resurrection by His presence.

‘Do not fear’. The enduring message of the Resurrection proclaims our liberation from every cause of fear. Christ’s victory destroyed the dominion of the demonic forces, bridged the gap between God and humankind and restored relations between them.

The ontological significance of the Cross and

Resurrection was revealed in a unique way by Saint Paul: Jesus became human and accepted His Passion ‘so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death- that is, the devil- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death’ (Heb. 2, 14-15).

The risen Lord is now the beginning of a new humanity: ‘he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he

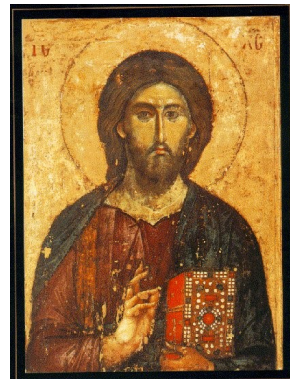
*(continued p.2)*

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.





*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)**

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.

**St. Nikolai on the Holy Myrrhbearers**

And they said among themselves: “Who shall roll away the stone from the door of the sepulcher?” This was the subject of the Myrrh-bearing Women’s conversation as they climbed up to Golgotha, looking for nothing unexpected. The women’s weak hands were not strong enough to roll the

stone away from the tomb’s entrance, for it was very great.

Those poor women! They did not remember that the labor to perform which they were hastening so zealously to the tomb had already be performed during the Lord’s earthly life. At Bethany, at supper in the house of Simon the Leper, a woman had poured precious spikenard over Christ’s head. The omniscient Lord said at the time about this woman: “In that she hath poured this ointment on My body, she did it for My burial” (Matthew 26:12). He had a clear foreknowledge that His body would, in death, receive no other anointing.

You may ask: then why did Providence allow these devout women to be so bitterly disappointed? To buy precious myrrh, to come fearfully through the dark and sleepless night to the tomb and not to perform that loving act for which they had sacrificed so much? But did Providence not reward their efforts in an incomparably richer way, in giving – in place of the dead body – the living Lord?

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

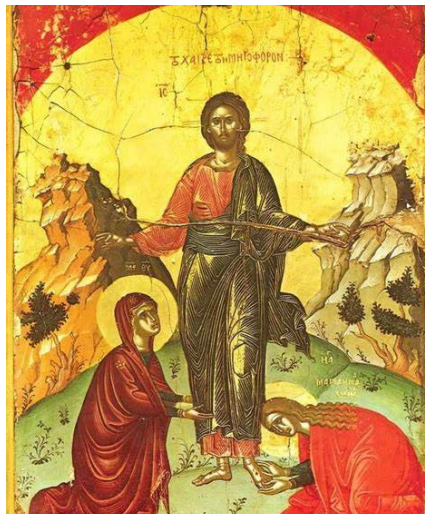
**The Holy Myrrhbearers Sunday, continued from p.1**

might have the supremacy (Col. 1, 18). With Christ’s resurrection, a new mode of existence has begun for humankind. The certainty of the Resurrection, the conviction that He’d been given ‘all authority in heaven and on earth’ (Matt. 28, 19) liberated the disciples from every form of fear and anxiety. And it transformed them into bold and courageous preachers of the new life in Christ.

‘Do not fear’. These days, there has been an increase in the fears that threaten our lives. Recently, in particular, these have been intensified by the general ordeal caused by the global economic crisis. New and old fears surround our thoughts and crush our heart. In this oppressive atmosphere, then, the feast of the Resurrection is a call to all the faithful to walk towards liberty, away from fear.

From the fear that makes enemies of us, from the fear that creates injustice and cruelty in our society. From the fear of the multitude of sins that invade our existence and warp it. From the fear of pain, indigence, sickness,

loneliness, from the dangers and sorrows that threaten our lives. From the fear of the pressing problems of everyday life. From the fear of the un-



known, of failure, of uncertainty over the future. And the culmination of the message of the Resurrection is liberation from the fear of death, ours and that of our loved ones, fear that human life will be crushed. The feast of the Resurrection isn’t merely an an-

nouncement, but an invitation to share in the freedom that Christ has given us.

This freedom, is, of course, founded on faith. When the Church proclaims joyfully that ‘Christ has risen’ it does not attempt to make arguments to enforce the truth it asserts. ‘As many as believe! ‘Happy are they who believe...’. Provided, of course, as Saint Paul points out, that we remain firm and well-grounded in the faith: ‘not moving from the hope of the gospel’ (Col. 1, 23).

Christ’s Resurrection dispels fear because the latter is incompatible with His overwhelming power, and, particularly on this glorious feast, we’re called upon to feel ‘what is the immeasurable greatness of his [God’s] power (Eph. 1, 19).

Through His sacrifice on the Cross and the victory of His Resurrection, Christ, the personification and incarnate love of God, affirmed the unique power of love, which liberates us from any and every kind of fear. Christ is Risen.



*(Homily on Holy Myrrhbearers Sunday, cont'd from p.1)*

resurrection of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ. We also remember today Sts. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, prominent Jewish leaders who were also the Lord's secret followers. Joseph "took courage" and risked his position and perhaps his life by asking Pilate for the Savior's body. He took Him down from the Cross and, with Nicodemus' help, wrapped Him in a linen shroud and put Him in a tomb.

Not only must the women and the men we remember today have been torn apart with grief at the death of Christ, they were surely afraid to be identified with One Who had been rejected, condemned, and publicly executed as a blasphemer and a traitor by the authorities. Nonetheless, they found the courage to do what devotion to their Lord required, regardless of their pain and fear. They served Christ in the only way still available to them by providing Him a decent burial.

There is a powerful realism about this story, for it certainly does not read like something made up after the fact. The Lord's disciples are not even present in it, for they had run away in fear at His arrest. St. Peter, the chief disciple, had denied Him three times before His crucifixion. The first witnesses of the resurrection are all women, whose testimony had no authority in that time and place. Moreover, they went to the grave in order to anoint His dead body, not to find an empty tomb.

Like them, Sts. Joseph and Nicodemus viewed Christ simply as one of the dead at that point. If someone were trying to make up a story to support the truth of the resurrection and to build up the credibility of the first Christians, this would not be the way to do it. It is, however, the perfect way to bear witness to the shocking truth of what no one expected, of what makes no sense according to our usual ways of thinking, and of what truly happened on that great and holy day when Life first dawned from the tomb.

As we continue to celebrate the glorious season of Christ's Passover from death to life, we must not lose the sense of disorienting shock that the myrrh-bearing women received when they saw the stone that had been rolled away from the door of the tomb and heard the message from the angel of the Savior's resurrection. What happened was so amazing that "they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had

come upon them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

Too often, we take the good news of Christ's victory over death for granted as part of a story that we know quite well. Even as we are accustomed to the intensified prayer, fasting, and repentance of Lent, we get used to the joyful celebration of the season of Pascha each year. A way to reopen the eyes of our souls to the unique and extraordinary nature of the Lord's resurrection is for us to put ourselves in the place of the myrrhbearers and of Sts. Joseph and Nicodemus by struggling to overcome anything that would hold us back from devoted service to Jesus Christ, even when it is not easy. Nothing that these holy women and men did in the aftermath of Christ's death was fun, popular, or safe. We can be sure that they would have all strongly preferred to be doing something other than burying their

friend and Lord. But they overcame those struggles and pressed on in serving Him in the only way available to them. If they were to love Him then, they had to give Him a proper burial.

Our situation is obviously different, for we live well after the Lord's resurrection. Nonetheless, the spiritual challenge is the same. No generation gets to pick the circumstances that it faces. Human beings do not get to choose



the illnesses, tragedies, or other problems that they encounter. It is not entirely up to us what temptations and weaknesses challenge us, our marriages, and our families spiritually, morally, or in any other way. Indeed, if we pretend that we get to pick how to serve our Lord in ways that suit us, we will likely ignore what He is actually calling us to do. Our challenge is to be faithful in responding to the situation that is before us, in discerning how to bear witness to Christ's victory over death in the here and now, even if we would rather be doing something else.

We will grow in our participation in the Savior's victory over sin and death by humbly accepting the opportunities for serving Him that our lives, and the lives of those around us, present. Most of us need look no further than our own families, our parish, and our friends and acquaintances in order to discern quite clearly what God is calling us to do.

***Christ is Risen. Indeed He is Risen.***

## On Repentance by St. Gregory Palamas (part 2)

A fundamental stage, which precedes repentance is the recognition and awareness of sins “which is the great cause for propitiation”, as the Holy Archbishop of Thessaloniki put it. (Homily 28). According to Palamas, for people to come to repentance it is sufficient that they first arrive at recognition “of their own transgressions” and show remorse before God, to Whom they have recourse “with a contrite heart”. They cast themselves upon the sea of His mercy and believe, like the Prodigal Son, that they are unworthy of God’s clemency and to be called His children. And when with recognition and awareness of their sinfulness they draw upon themselves the mercy of God, they obtain complete release through self-censure and confession.

In his efforts to define all the stages of repentance, the wise Father said this: “Recognition of one’s own sins is followed by self-condemnation; this is the sorrow for one’s sins which Paul declared to be Godly. He tells us that this sorrow is followed by confession to God with a contrite heart, by supplication and by the promise to avoid evil in future. And this is repentance. As a new condition in people’s lives, repentance is accompanied by certain consequences which, in Biblical and Patristic language are called “the fruits of repentance”. The first of this is highlighted by Saint Gregory as being confession, since, through this, the cure and purification of the soul of the believer is gained and the new life inaugurated: “For the confession of sins is the beginning of this cultivation, that is to say repentance and the preparation for people to receive within themselves the seed of salvation, that is the Word of God” (Homily 56).

Confession is not, however, the only fruit of repentance. In calling people to repentance through his preaching, Saint John the Baptist urged people to embrace charity, justice, humility, love and truth, as well as confession, because these are the attributes of the transforming power of the truth. In his Homily 23, the saintly Athonite hierarch emphasizes that people who really live their repentance do not return to their former sins, nor attach themselves to people and things of corruption, nor engage in

doubtful pleasures, but rather they scorn the present, look to the future, struggle against the passions, pursue the virtues, are vigilant in prayer, do not seek unfair profits, are lenient to those who have done them harm, compassionate towards those who plead, and willing to help, with words, deeds or even sacrifices those who have need.

And when Saint Gregory urges Christians to acquire works of repentance, he particularly stresses a humble outlook, compunction and spiritual grief. Summarizing all the attributes of those Christians who live their repentance, he says that they are serene and calm, full of mercy and sympathy towards others, they desire justice, seek purity, have peace and bring it, suffer pain and trouble

patiently and feel joy and satisfaction in persecutions, insults and slander, losses and anything else they suffer for the sake of justice and truth (Homily 31).

The path of correction through repentance, of escape from enslavement to the passions and of asceticism in order to follow the divine commandments is that of holy beings who have been glorified. Starting with this truth, Saint Gregory emphasizes the following:

“If not all Christians can equal the Saints and the great and wonderful achievements which characterize their lives and are, as a whole, inimitable, they can and should emulate and follow them on their path towards repentance. Because on an everyday basis, “they are unwittingly at fault in many things” and the sole hope of salvation for all of us remains, according to Saint Gregory, the embracing and experiencing of “abiding repentance” (Homily 28).

### **Remorse as a condition for asceticism**

A fundamental condition for the escape from the bonds of the passions and, at the same time, for the beginning and source of repentance is Godly remorse, what the Fathers call “mourning”. In his texts, Saint Gregory refers very frequently to this “mourning” and to the painful but also joyful condition through which Christians have to pass if they want to live the real life. This is why he does not hesitate to call Great Lent the supreme period of mourning and spiritual struggle, as a symbol of the present age and a pre-condition for resurrection for the lives of the faithful.

*(continued next issue)*

