

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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3rd Sunday after Pentecost-Christ's teaching on the Kingdom

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Ours is an age of anxiety. Many people are overcome with worry about matters large and small. Some certainly do need the help of physicians and psychological counselors in order to cope with their fears. The sickness of our souls remains, however, at the very heart of all our collective and personal brokenness. If our souls are not healthy, we will never find the

peace that truly satisfies us as God's children who bear His image and likeness.

The Lord spoke of the health of our souls in terms of vision: "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" Christ taught that, if our spiritual vision is clear and focused, we will see ourselves and our problems in light of God's kingdom. Then we will be able to serve our one true Master and gain strength for being at peace, regardless of the circumstances of our lives.

If our spiritual vision is clouded and unfocused, however, we will not have the strength to see our problems and challenges in light of the Kingdom.

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+ 3rd Sunday after Pentecost +

+ 2nd Sunday after Pentecost +

Epistle: Romans 5: 1-10

Gospel: Matthew 6: 22-34

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.*

All that remains is Prayer and Love, by St. Nikolai Velimirovich

When you go to the Holy Mountain and see the humble monks, you might think that they live a lazy life, without purpose. It may seem like this if you see things from the outside, because not many people are able to understand the terrible, unceasing warfare that's conducted in the souls of the monks.

This warfare is almost supernatural, invisible and is conducted not only against the demonic powers of the princes of darkness, but, for beginners, also against the flesh, that

is against carnal passions and desires.

In his writings, St. Silouan describes how this warfare brought him to despair, and almost to suicide. Our Lady the Mother of God appeared to him and encouraged him so that he could overcome and trample down worldly thoughts and the evil spirits. So it was that, after a quarter of a century of fierce and exhausting warfare, he emerged victorious. Until then he'd been seeking God; now he knew him. He'd been a disciple, but

now became a teacher.

Elder Silouan was also my own teacher. One time I asked him: 'Father Silouan, doesn't having all these people around bring turmoil to your mind and to your prayer? Wouldn't it be better for you to go to a hermitage in Karoulia and live in peace, like Fr. Artemios, Fr. Dorotheos, and Fr. Kallinikos? Or to live in a remote cave, like Fr. Gorgonios?'. 'I do live in a cave', Fr. Silouan answered. 'My body is the cave of my soul. And my

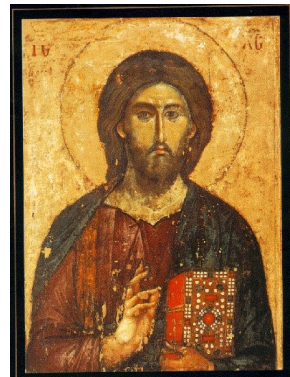
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

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 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, Michael, Bill, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

"The house of the wicked shall be overthrown but the hut of the righteous shall flourish" (Proverbs 14:11).

The palace of Herod lies in ruins, but the cave of the Child of Bethlehem remains. The crowns of the Caesars have been lost, but the bones of the martyrs have been

preserved. The palaces of the pagan kings have been transformed into piles of stone and dust, but the caves of the ascetics have grown into most beautiful churches. The powerful Roman Empire is now only a tale of the dead, while the hut of Christianity, the Holy Church, is today the most powerful realm in the world. Where are the powerful Romans and the emperors who persecuted the church? In the grave.

Go about your own city and inquire how many homes of the godless are excavated? How many huts of the righteous have grown into beautiful houses? Brethren, heaven and earth are founded on justice, on God's steadfast justice. That is why all the pagan creations are like arrogant bubbles, which burst and are trampled on by passers-by. The palaces of the pharaohs and the Babylonians are like trampled bubbles, while the tent of the righteous Abraham flourishes and blossoms in eternity.

O my brethren, how all-powerful and long lasting is justice, and how noisy and transient is injustice, like a storm on a summer's day!

All that remains is prayer and love, continued from p.1

soul is the cave of the Holy Spirit. I love the people of God and serve them without leaving my cave'.

Always willing to serve each person, wonderfully modest and most caring of others, he would talk about God with great enthusiasm, and with the familiarity you might show if you were talking about a friend. 'I know God. He's caring, good and swift to help'. As the Elder was saying this, another monk, Fr. Theofan, overheard and was concerned that Silouan had lost the fear of God. Later, however, when Fr. Theofan read the writings of Fr. Silouan he changed his mind and said: 'Fr. Silouan advanced so far he reached the level of the Fathers of the Church'.

In my view, the works of Father Silouan should take their place among books on psychology. If for no other reason than that they confirm that their author was a great spiritual warrior of the 20th century and that they endorse what was taught and written by the glorified Fathers of the Church.

There's something new in the teachings of Father Silouan: 'Keep your mind in hell and despair not'. Through this reminder, he expresses encouragement against melancholy



and sloth. I personally had never heard such words before.

Another expression is also important: 'Love is superior to knowledge'. This is the everyday, fundamental teaching of Saint Silouan. With his love, which was ac-

companied by prayers and tears, he forgave sins, supported the weak, corrected those who were acting wickedly, healed the sick and stilled the winds. He did exhausting work in the monastery, where he was in charge of a warehouse with heavy goods.

I once told him that the Russian monks were greatly upset because of the tyrannical behavior of the Bolsheviks towards the Church of God. He replied: 'I was also troubled about this in the beginning. After much prayer, however, I arrived at the following thoughts: The Lord loves everyone inexpressibly. He knows everyone's plans and the time allotted to them. The Lord has permitted the persecution of the Russia people for some future good. I can neither understand what this might be, nor can I stop it. I say to my brothers who are agitated: "You can help Russia only through prayer and love". All that's left to me is prayer and love. Anger and inveighing against the atheists isn't going to set matters to rights'.

(Homily on the Kingdom cont'd from p.1)

We will instead stumble in the darkness to the point that we make the passing things of this life our constant obsessions, which is a path only to greater worry, anxiety, and fear. For example, many people make money and possessions false gods for which they will sacrifice just about anything. Jesus Christ teaches that we are not to worry about our food, drink, and clothing. Instead, we are to trust that our Heavenly Father knows that we need these things. "Seek first His kingdom and righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."

This teaching does not condemn reasonable provision for a decent life for ourselves and our families. It does not deny that the necessities of life are God's good blessings. Instead, it gives us a clear example of how spiritual blindness enslaves us to idolatry, which leads only to constant worry.

Poverty, hunger, and famine are always possibilities in our world. Economic depression, natural disaster, war, crime, disease, and disability are obvious threats to having adequate food, clothing, and shelter. There is simply no way that we can protect ourselves completely from such dangers. If we make the physical necessities of life our gods, we cannot avoid being consumed by worry about them. That kind of idolatry inevitably fuels anxiety.

If the eyes of our souls are gaining clarity and focus, however, we will not blindly view life's necessities as the highest good, and neither will we make the lack of them the greatest evil. Instead, we will be illumined with the light of Christ to the point that we will see even the worst circumstances of life in this world as opportunities to serve our one true Master. We will already participate in God's reign as we learn to trust more fully that our Heavenly Father will provide what we need in this life and beyond.

When we struggle to see that God cares for us in the midst of our challenges, we must remember St. Paul's example of using suffering and difficulty for growth in holiness: "We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance character, and character, hope." Not simply wishful thinking, Paul's hope is grounded in "the love of God ... poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who was giv-

en to us." Christ died for the ungodly, including us, and has sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts and souls to enlighten us with the glory of the Kingdom. In this context, our difficulties and needs are opportunities for gaining greater healing for our souls. We must use these tribulations to gain greater spiritual strength, clarity, and vision by growing in trust, humility, and patience.

When we are overcome with worry about any problem or threat in life, we must use our weakness as an opportunity to gain greater spiritual strength: as a reminder to guard our thoughts as we turn our attention from obsessing about what we cannot change to an earnest, humble plea for the Lord's healing mercy. That is how we will open ourselves to greater participation in His life and, thus, find true peace.



Some lose the joy of life because of worry fueled by the love of money; others become miserable because of domination by anger, fear, lust, gluttony, self-righteousness, or other passions. These and all our other habitual sins are symptoms of our spiritual blindness, of our darkened souls which keep us from seeing ourselves, others, and the entire creation in the glorious light of the Kingdom. As long as we remain in the dark, we will never see anything clearly and easily stumble and fall.

Those who are sick do not need relief only for their symptoms; they require healing from the causes of their disease. They need therapy that goes to the heart of the matter. We will find that kind of healing in the spiritual life by: opening our souls to the light of Christ through daily prayer; reading the Bible and the lives and teachings of

the Saints; and watching our minds and mouths to reject thoughts and words that are not pleasing to God. We will find it by fasting in order to humble ourselves before the Lord and gain strength in refusing to be enslaved to selfish desires. We will find it by taking confession on a regular basis as we embrace the mercy of the Lord through sincere repentance. We will find it by: forgiving those who have wronged us and asking forgiveness of those we have wronged; giving generously of our time, attention, and resources to those in need; and attending the Divine Liturgy regularly as we receive the Body and Blood of Christ as often as possible.

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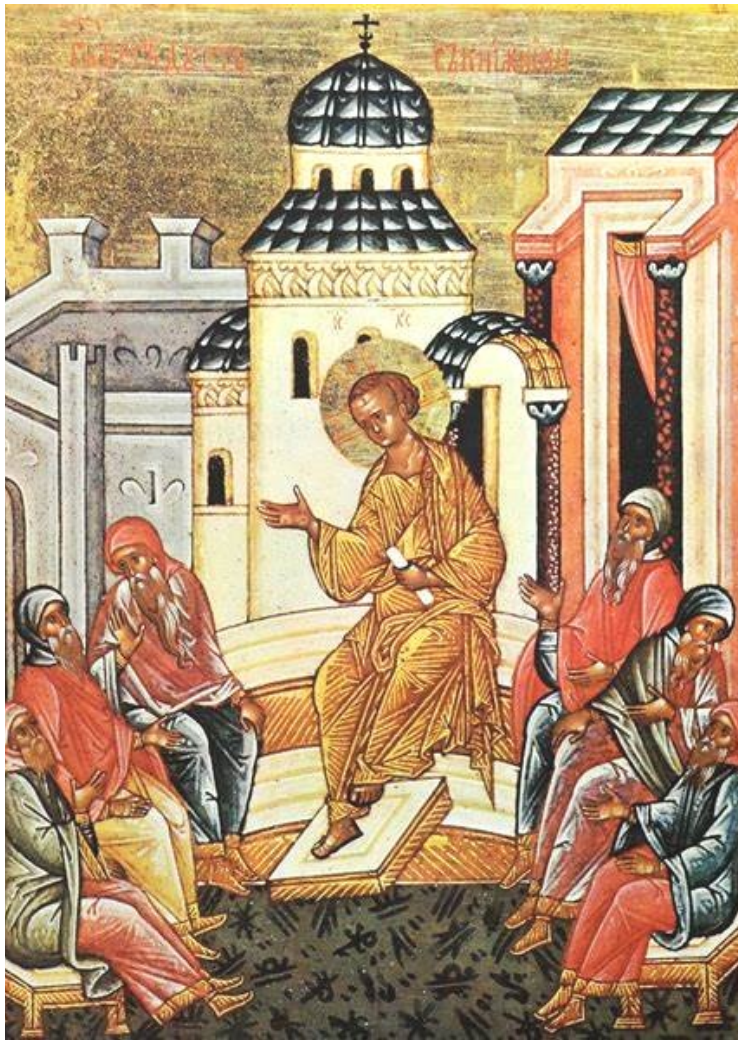
Homily on the Kingdom, continued from p.3)

This way of life is for our healing; it is for our good. It is what is necessary for us to open our darkened souls to the brilliant light of Christ as we learn to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. It is how we may gain the clarity and strength to serve our one true Master as we come to place our problems, fears, and worries in the context of trust in a Lord Who has conquered even death itself for our salvation purely out of love for His sons and daughters.

Regardless of the form that darkness takes in our lives, we must not despair. Instead, we must use our weakness and pain as reminders to open ourselves to the light of Christ as best we can. Stumbling around with our eyes closed is a good way to become disoriented and hurt ourselves. All of us have probably learned from experience that nothing but brokenness, pain, and worry come from embracing spiritual blindness. Since God created us in His image and likeness, we will never find ultimate satisfaction by looking for fulfillment in the passing things of this world. Doing so will only make us miserable and weak.

Let us, then, open ourselves to the healing light of Christ, trusting that He will respond graciously to even our small, faltering steps to put our lives in the context of His Kingdom. That is the ultimate cure for our worries. If we trust primarily in ourselves and what we can get by using worldly things according to our own designs, we will inevitably be consumed by anxiety and fear.

But if we gain the spiritual clarity to behold all things in the light of His glory, we will know peace from the depths of our souls. The One Who dwells in our hearts has conquered even death itself and made us participants in His eternal life. He delivers us from slavery to the fears that are rooted in our blindness. He makes it possible for us to experience already the joy of heaven even as we live and breathe in this world with all of its and our problems. As the Lord said, "Seek first His kingdom and righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."



Spiritual Enlightenment by Fr. Chrysostomos

My brothers and sisters, you should know that: There is something bigger than the earth. And this is the sea. There is something bigger than the sea. And this is heaven. There is something bigger than heaven. And this is the soul of a man. The soul of a man, how great it is. We could say that the human soul is the breath of God, it is what came out of God and entered man. God breathed into the hog man and gave this man a living breath. The soul of man is the breath of God, it is the living, we would say, of God in the whole world, it is the presence and remembrance of God in all creation. Man was created in the image and likeness of God. Man has the ability to become God by grace. "You are gods and sons of the Most High," says the Psalmist (Ps. 81: 6).

This is the real situation that befits us, my brothers. We were born and came into the world with a purpose and a purpose: To become Saints. That is why wherever we are, whatever we do, we must work for Holiness. In this life with the help of God we can achieve Holiness. "Be ye holy, for I am holy." The apostle Peter urges us in his First Catholic Epistle (1 Peter 1:16). If we fail, we show our aversion to God and our life then becomes the joy of the demons.

This period in which we live, gives us the opportunity to at least give God our choice. And He will give us our salvation. So he who has the choice feels the Grace of God within him and throughout Creation. And he rejoices in the joy of Paradise.

Once, while visiting Mount Athos, I found myself in Katounakia. There was a man there who had reached a great height of holiness. He looked more like an angel. His face shone with the Grace of God. On my way to Katounakia I had with me two professors of Theology and a student of the Polytechnic. We reached the Elder after a long ascent. He welcomed us with infinite love and joy. "I am very happy," he said. "Papa came to my cell!" We sat down and one of the teachers asked: "Elder, can you tell us something about the fragrance of the Holy Spirit?" The Elder became serious and asked: "What do you mean;". "O Elder, the holy Relics, do not the sacred icons emit any fragrance?"

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