

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

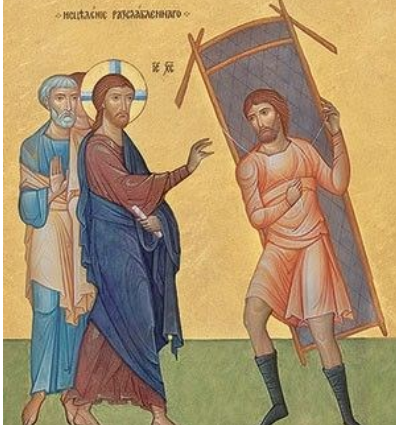
Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be Forever!



Volume 10 Issue 470

6th Sunday after Pentecost-Christ heals the Paralytic

July 4, 2021



A beautiful miracle has taken place in today's Gospel: we see a paralyzed man who cannot walk on his own, healed of his paralysis. Christ God, the Logos (Word) of God, through whom all things were made, whose very image and likeness is imprinted on the souls of every human being, knew this man and loved this man with a perfect love even before he was

presented to Him. Every life, every soul, is precious to God. Physical and spiritual brokenness is not how God created us and is, rather, a sign of mankind's choice to reject God from the beginning and the life that is only in Him.

Evidence of this desire on behalf of God to restore, to reconcile, to heal is seen in this man's healing. He who gave this man his first heart-beat in his mother's womb is the same One who has healed him of his infirmity. The paralytic was brought to His Creator and He received healing and restoration from Him. He was given a new beginning to live to the glory of God.

Every miracle is a testimony to the truth of God, the truth that is God. Each miracle points us to the restoration of the human race, the intervention of the Kingdom of God and His
(continued p. 3)

+ 6th Sunday after Pentecost +
St. Andrew, Archbishop of Crete

Epistle: Romans 12: 6-14

Gospel: Matthew 9: 1-8

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 Saints are in our midst, by Fr. Theodore

What is the main trait of a saint? We hear in St. Paul's Epistle to the Roman that the saints were above all persons of faith. The text reads like a song of faith, reciting the triumphs and hardships of the Old Testament saints—Gideon, Barak, David and the others.

These saints conquered kingdoms, became mighty in war, established justice, and stopped the mouth of lions. But they also faced severe trials. They suffered chains and imprisonment, mocking and

scourging, death and poverty. They were afflicted and ill-treated, wandering over deserts and mountains, and in caves of the earth.

What was their triumph? It was the victory of unshakeable faith in God. Their faith was such that they faced victories and trials with patience and with strength. The text states: they "won strength out of weakness." Out of tribulations, they won courage, and greater strength, through faith.

By their steadfast loyalty and assurance before

God, they held firmly to the promise of the coming of Christ and to the hope "that they might rise again to a better life." Their whole life was a song of faith.

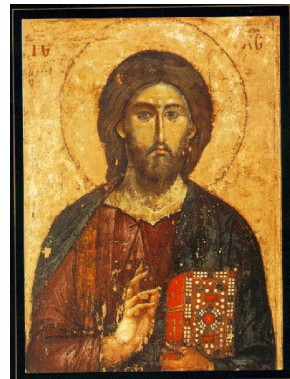
What is sainthood? What is holiness? Not necessarily the aroma of incense. Not necessarily the wearing of religious clothes and symbols. Holiness is a pure heart filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit. "The pure of heart will see God," said Jesus. Purity of heart is freedom from
(continued on p.2)

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. We are also happy to announce that coffee social has resumed out on the church lawn following the Divine Liturgy.

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

"Say not, I will repay evil! Trust in the Lord and He will help you" (Pro 20:22).

Do not be vengeful; do not return evil for evil. The evil from your neighbor is sufficient. If you return evil for evil to him, you will double the evil in the world. If you do not return evil for evil to him, he can still burn out his evil through repent-

ance. Thus, you will reduce evil in the world through patience and forgiveness.

Do not be vengeful; do not return evil for evil. "But wait on the Lord," He sees and remembers and, in your time, even you and your evil doer will know that God sees and remembers. You ask yourself: What have I done in that I have not returned evil for evil? You have done the wisest deed that you could do in the given situation, i.e.; you have relinquished your struggle to the One Stronger than yourself and the Stronger will victoriously fight for you. If you enter into battle with the evil doer you might be defeated. But God cannot be defeated.

Learn from a small child. If someone attacks a child in the presence of his parents, the child does not return the attack by attacking but rather looks at his parents and cries. The child knows that his parents will protect him. Your heavenly Parent is constantly beside you. That is why, do not be vengeful; do not return evil for evil rather look at your Parent and cry. Only in this way will you guarantee victory for yourself in conflict with evil.

Saints are in our midst, continued from p.1

inward evil: from grudges, resentments, jealousies, complaints, animosities, and all the rest. A pure heart welcomes the visitation of God's grace which alone makes for holiness.

The whole life's struggle for sainthood and holiness is fought around the cleansing of the heart from evil and its sanctification by the grace of the Holy Spirit. To the extent that the heart, the inner world of the soul, is cleansed and sanctified by God, to that extent do we have the faith and power of the saints to do whatever God requires of us to do, wherever we are, and by whatever means God has blessed us with.

Who are the saints today? The missionaries in far-away lands? The monastics on Mount Athos? Individual Christians in the Middle East facing persecution and death? The answer is yes, but also that all of us are saints, as a gift of God. No saint ever claimed that she or he sanctified themselves by their own skill or virtue.

We are sanctified because Christ died on the Cross to grant us forgiveness and sanctification. We are sanctified because on Pentecost the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Church to bestow renewal and holiness to believers. We are sanctified because we are all baptized in Christ and have been sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

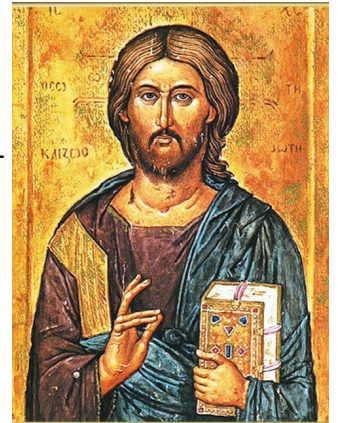
The early Christians rejoiced in calling each other saints. St. Paul wrote: "To the Church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints" (1 Cor 1:1-2). And St. Peter in his letter wrote: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." (1Pet 2:9). As St. Peter specifies, there is always a purpose, a goal to the gift of sainthood: to declare the wonderful deeds of God and to serve God by loving Him and by serving our neighbors in need.

Does not our Divine Liturgy teach us the same truth that we are all blessed saints? The Divine Liturgy is a spiritual journey into God's king-

dom, God's sanctifying presence and power here on earth. At the consecration of the Gifts, the priest prays to God: "Send down Your Holy Spirit upon us and upon the gifts here presented."

At Holy Communion the priest lifts up the Eucharistic Gifts and proclaims: "Holy Things are for the Holy." We are all saints.

We are all blessed and sanctified by faith, by baptism, by Holy Communion, by the sacrifice of Christ, by the grace of the Holy Spirit. What then remains? Just this: to honor this gift, and live worthily of Christ, with all our hearts, with all our minds, with all our strength, and with all our lives. Amen.



(Homily on Christ healing the Paralytic, cont'd from p.1)

and His redemption and salvation of this fallen world, of all that's corrupted by our sad cooperation with evil and sin.

Every miracle reminds us of God's triumphant resurrection from the dead, His harrowing of Hades, His glorious ascension, and His victorious and final Second Coming when all that Christ has assumed, will be healed and restored, when all those who've joined the new race of Adam in Christ, will be reunited with their resurrected bodies and judged.

In this way, miracles are a sign of the "*eschaton*," that is, the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God at Christ's Second Coming. The healing of the paralytic alludes to all these works and promises of God on our behalf,

where those being saved will join the ranks of heaven in God's near presence where "sighing and sorrow shall flee away," as Isaiah prophesies (Is. 51:11).

But a greater miracle than the healing from paralysis is at work here: We read that when Jesus saw the faith of those who had brought the paralytic to him, He instantly healed the man of his paralysis? No! Instead, He said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you." This wasn't what some were expecting. Christ clearly teaches us here the priority of our eternal souls over that of our decaying bodies.

This is a crude way to put it and in no way meant to belie the value of our bodies, which, together with our souls, God has made and declared as "good." No, I say this to underscore the fact that while our bodies will, like the earth, "all wear out like a garment," (Isaiah 51:6), our souls are eternal. And yet, how much time do we spend on the priorities of this world over the needs of our souls? It's in this context of understanding sin and its sad consequences, on our being enslaved to the world and all that's passing away, that Christ addresses the ultimate need of the paralytic. Yes, he needs his legs, but more importantly, the paralytic needs to be purified, forgiven—He needs God. More important than the healing of his legs is the healing of his soul.

By forgiving the sins of the man, Christ clearly declares Himself to be God for, as the scribes rightly understood, "who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mk.

2:7; Lk. 5:21) Exactly! Their sinful hearts could not comprehend that the God who spoke creation into being through His Word, would Himself enter into that human nature as Emmanuel (God with us), as the prophets foretold, to restore that nature and make a path to the Kingdom of God for His beloved children, the pinnacle of His creation, with whom He so mercifully and lovingly desires communion.

The Scribes instantly charge blasphemy, refusing to acknowledge that God would love us to such an extent that He would even condescend to become incarnate to defeat the endless cycle of sin and death enslaving the world since its beginning, blatantly ignoring the prophets. To deepen the faith of all those assembled and silence the actual blasphemers,

Christ does two things to reveal Himself as God: first, He tells them what they're thinking, saying, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk?'" Then, second, He says, "that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins..." and then and only then, Christ says to the man, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."

The man arose on his own two feet, glorifying God. Such a great miracle! Before our own baptism into Christ and the possibility of the renewal of that baptism through Sacramental Confession, we too are paralyzed



by sin. Even in the life of an Orthodox Christian who is part of the new creation, a beloved child of the *eschaton*, this world and its confusion may take hold of the unwary soul and paralyze it with addictions, habitual sins, forgetfulness of God.

In order for Christ to heal our infirmities and weaknesses, we must cease to be center focus, so that He who is Life can become our true life, our true '*reason for being*.' Then, everything else in our lives finds its true purpose and value with Christ at the center of our identity and our priorities. Those beset by sin, pride and fear, hear the words of our Lord this day, "Arise, take up your bed, and go unto your house." With the Lord there is forgiveness and newness of life. All things are possible with God! All of us can keep growing in faith if we are willing to make Christ God the priority too, growing in the knowledge and love of Him.

What happens when we sing to God? By Fr. Stephen Freeman

“God inhabits the praises of Israel.” (Psalm 22:3)

The true nature of existence is best expressed as *communion*. Though we experience much of our life as unique individuals, the experience of all that is around us remains one of communion. In no way do we actually exist as an independent entity, somehow separate from our environment. We breathe the world; we eat the world; we drink the world; every cell of our body is itself composed of elements from the world; the bacteria in our bodies outnumber our cells and make our life possible. It is only through a modern force of habit that we restrict our consciousness to a kind of individuality: an awareness and a will. But this is only a consumer’s point-of-view – life reduced to economics. The fullness of life, *inescapable even when unacknowledged*, is the life we live in union with everything and everyone around us, and most especially in union with our Creating, Sustaining, and Life-Giving God.

It is interesting to me as I grow older, how my awareness changes. The questions that marked my days in my teens and twenties bear very little resemblance to those that mark my late sixties. Walking and breathing now seem like gifts, not always given easily. I have lately been battling with a back injury, such that each morning brings a question: “Will I be able to go for a walk today?” In the same manner, my years as a Christian have served to change my awareness. My walk is also a primary time of prayer. If I cannot walk today, what will my prayer look like? Over time, my awareness has been drawn more and more to the matter of communion.

St. Paul wrote: “Whatsoever you do, in thought, word, and deed, do it as unto the Lord.” I would add to that to not only do it “as unto the Lord,” but to do it with Him, through Him, by Him, and in Him. The creation itself is the very goodness of God made manifest. If we breathe, we breathe His goodness. If we walk, we walk on His goodness. If we eat, we eat of His goodness. And these facts are not secondary – they are primary. What matters is our communion with God (and His goodness) in that it is our very life (whether acknowledged or not).

It is in light of this that I reflect on the observation of Psalm 22: “God inhabits the praises of Israel.” This is the same psalm that opens with, “My God, my God, why

have You forsaken me?” It is a strange juxtaposition. On the one hand, the Psalmist utters a cry of personal abandonment, while, two verses later, he affirms the sacramental reality of God’s presence within the sound of our songs and hymns. Of course, the contradiction is resolved when the speaker of the Psalm becomes Christ Himself on the Cross. It allows us to say without paradox that just as God inhabits the sound of our praise, so He inhabits the cry of our anguished abandonment. It echoes Psalm 139, “Lo, if I descend into Hell, You are there.”

Singing is something that (as a topic) I return to again and again. It is, I think, the most easily understood example of communion available to us. Our common voices raised in song offer a sound that is many while being one.

It is a sound that reflects the truth of our being in a manner without equal. It is consistently part of the heavenly visions recorded in the Scriptures. It also serves to explain why, traditionally, Orthodox worship is sung from beginning to end.

The Divine Liturgy is “heaven come down to earth,” and is thus an example of the truth of our existence (as heaven is our “true home”). In the writings of some of the Fathers, the Garden of Eden is understood to have been a Temple where Adam and Eve served before God. In the Liturgy, we re-enter paradise and take up again that life for which we were created. It is also true that “heaven and earth are full of Your glory,” making paradise of all creation.

St. Maximus the Confessor described five fundamental divisions: uncreated and created: intelligible and sensible; heaven and earth; paradise and the inhabited world; male and female.

All of these divisions, he says, will be reconciled and united in the age to come. In the Divine Liturgy, we stand in the age to come. The reconciliation of all things begins there. The created eats and drinks the uncreated and becomes a partaker of the uncreated grace of God. Through sensible things (wine, water, bread, oil, and such) we become partakers of the intelligible and noetic things. Heaven and earth are united as we become earthly angels and heavenly human beings. Paradise is opened in our very midst. The antipathies of male and female, as described in Genesis, are overcome in the Theotokos, in whom is fulfilled the promises given to Eve.

(continued next issue)

