

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!



Volume 10 Issue 472

8th Sunday after Pentecost-Christ Feeds the Multitudes

July 18, 2021



In the Gospel reading for today, we heard about a great and startling miracle – the multiplication of the loaves and fish to feed thousands of people. Following the news of the death of John the Baptist, our Lord Jesus Christ had retreated to a desert place, seeking solitude to pray. But the multitudes followed Him into this desert place,

and He attended to them there. As the evening approached, the disciples looked out upon the multitudes and became concerned and upset about the logistics of caring for and feeding so many. The disciples wanted to send the people away to the villages so they could get something to eat.

Our Lord instead commanded His disciples to gather up the food available there and to feed the people. But the disciples assessed what was available and said it couldn't be done... all they had were two fishes and five loaves of bread... they could not possibly fulfill the task that the Lord has asked of them. What a demonstration of the mercy and compassion of our Lord! And what a tremendous miracle was performed!

Let us ask... what is a miracle? Metropolitan Anthony of Sorouzh offers
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+ 8th Sunday after Pentecost +
+Holy Fathers of the 6 Councils+

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 1: 10-18

Gospel: Matthew 14: 13-22

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.*

What is a True Christian, by Metropolitan Nicholas

In the Gospel readings, we often come across the Apostles invoking the authenticity of their personal witness in order to be convincing: 'which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have touched' (1 Jn. 1, 1). 'We know that his witness is true' (Jn. 21, 24).

The authenticity of the experience is the most compelling argument in favor of what they're saying. So let's see what the meaning of authentic experience is in the life

of a Christian. Peter is authentic, because, even when he falls, he's spontaneous. He asks for proof and the Lord invites him to walk on the water. He falters and begins to sink (Matt. 14, 28-29).

Spontaneously he confesses that Christ's holy mouth utters 'words of life' (Jn. 6, 68). He urges the Lord to avoid the Passion, but is rebuked and is told that Satan is speaking within him (Matt. 16, 22-23). With a superior air, he refuses to let the Lord wash his

feet, but then gives way in a particularly expressive manner. (Jn. 13, 5-14). He denies the Lord just before the Passion and immediately repents (Mark 14, 72). He hears the message of the Holy Resurrection and doubts it, which is why he hastens to the tomb to confirm it (Jn. 20, 3-4). He erred and corrected himself.

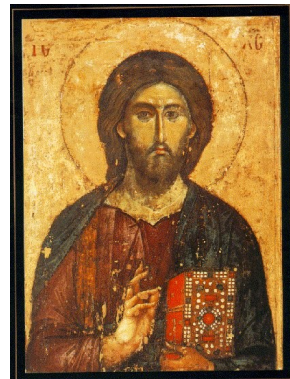
He wasn't infallible, he was real. It's not people who don't make mistakes who are authentic, but those who recognize their
(continued on p.2)

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

"Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:9).

Brethren, what is the end of faith? The salvation of a soul. What is the goal of faith? The salvation of a soul. What is the fruit of faith? The salvation of a soul. We do not adhere to faith, therefore, for the sake of faith but rather for the salvation of our souls. God gave faith to us as a road,

the end of which the travelers will receive salvation of their souls. And, as a rope, God extended faith to us who are drowning in the dark waters of sin, ignorance and vice that we, through the help of faith, save our lives.

That is the purpose of faith. Whoever knows the price of a human soul must admit that there is nothing in this world more necessary or more beneficial than faith. Our entire earthly life is like an earthen vessel in which a priceless treasure is hidden. That priceless treasure is our soul. A vessel is cheap but a treasure is valuable. First, one must have faith in the value of a human soul and second, in the future glow and life of the soul in the Kingdom of God; third, in the Living God Who waits for the return of a soul which He Himself gave us and fourth, in the possibility that a soul could be lost in this world. Whosoever has faith in these four things will know how to protect his soul and will further know that the salvation of a soul is the end of his road, the goal of his faith, the fruit of his life, the purpose of his existence on earth and the justification of his sufferings.

What is a Christian, continued from p.1

mistakes, confess them and repent.

Authentic people, however, aren't only spontaneous in their behavior, they're also pure in their faith. Faith isn't an ideology for us to support, nor a thought we need to understand, nor a view we should accept. Faith is grace and life and truth and it's offered, it wells up and is revealed. It's given by God; it's manifested by God. So let's see exactly who true, genuine Christians are. In an effort to answer the question: 'What kind of people should Christians be?'

Saint Basil the Great says: 'What is specific to Christians? That, just as Christ died to sin once and for all, so they are dead to and unmoved by all sin... That they have a wealth of righteousness in all things... That they love others as Christ loved us... That they envisage the Lord before them at all times... That they are vigilant at every hour and day and are ready to please God in perfection, knowing that the hour that the Lord has decided upon is coming'

According to Saint John Chrysostom:

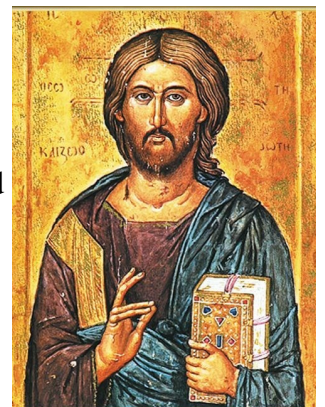
'If you're a Christian you have no home on earth. The builder and creator of our home is God. And were we to receive the whole world, we would remain strangers and wayfarers. We're registered in heaven; that's our abode.'

The Christian experience is authentic when we love the cross more than comfort, the struggle more than the victory; when we experience the kingdom of God as being more real than the events of history; when our faith is stronger than correct discourse; when we discern the truth more in the mysteries than in what we understand; when we're more prayerful in our difficulties and less concerned with thinking about them; when we realize that grace is more effective than our struggle; when our brothers are sisters are closer to us than our self; when we can distinguish the phony from the genuine, the false from the true, our will from God's will; when we desire death more than life.

Authentic Christians are comforta-

ble with tradition and dogma, but also have something new and personal, something of their own: the divergence which unites and embellishes, because it is 'the community from the nations, that which is called a plowed mountain'... 'For the soul elevated by the teaching of Christ is a mountain'.

In the end, the image of an authentic person isn't something that exists and which we must all imitate, but rather it's something that doesn't exist and which each of us is called upon to create. It's the way each one expresses what they've been called for. Authenticity is that which shows the sanctity and uniqueness of the person.



(Homily on Christ feeds the multitudes, cont'd from p.1)

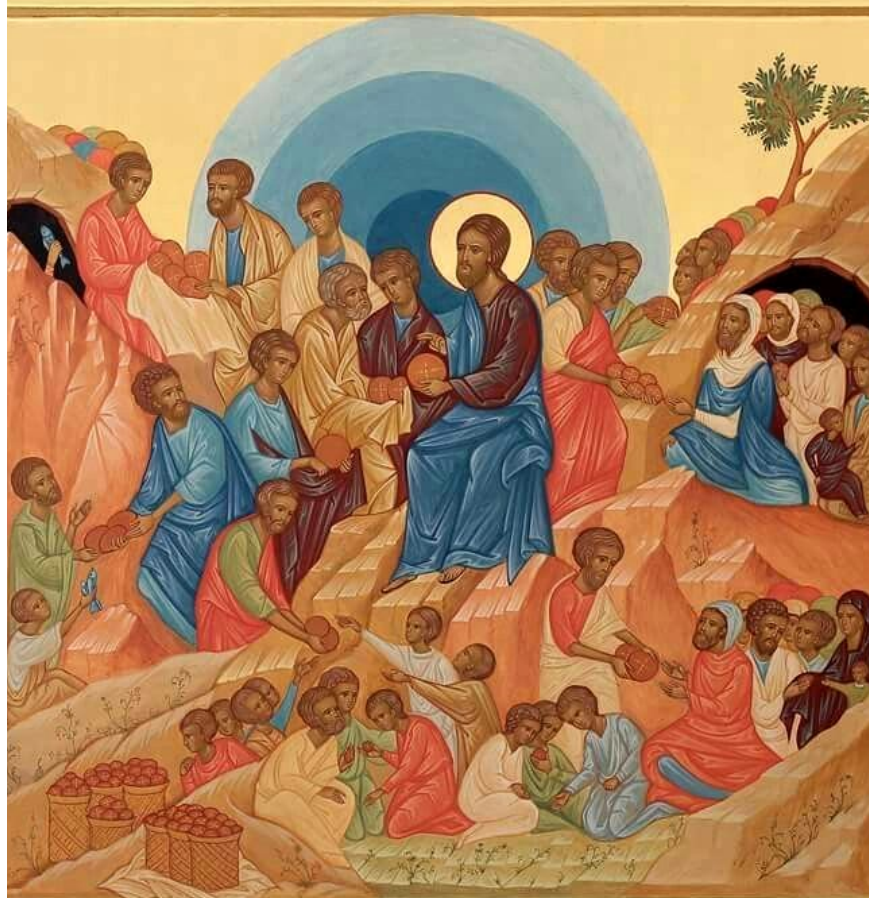
some valuable reflections upon this question. He writes: 'What is a miracle? Is it a moment when God overpowers His own creation, breaks its own laws, destroys something which He has willed Himself? That would be an act of magic, an act of overpowering whatever is unwilling to obey, of overpowering what is weak in comparison to Him Who is strong.'

A miracle is something completely different; a miracle is a moment when harmony destroyed by human sin is restored. It may be a moment, it may be the beginning of a whole life: a harmony between God and man, a harmony between the created world and its Creator. It is a restoration of what should always be; not a miracle in the sense of something unheard of, unnatural, perhaps contrary to the nature of things, but rather a moment when God enters into His creation and is received. And because He is received, He can act freely.'

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, that which we call miraculous is simply a glimpse into the proper harmony of things which God intended for creation and mankind. We break that harmony by our sinfulness, by our stubborn unwillingness to live in harmony with God. When those barriers are broken, as we see so often in the lives of saints, then that harmony is restored and things which we call miraculous become everyday occurrences.

That harmony between ourselves and God is attained through humility, through purity of heart, through acknowledgement of, and surrender to, and synergy with the mercy and love of God.

Christ invites us to bring our cares, our desires, our insufficiencies to God and allow Him to bless and provide the grace and means for their accomplishment. We can hardly conceive of the compassion and love which God extends to us. We are too often quick to allow the demon of despair to whisper to us that our situation is impossible. Let us remember and let us believe in the words of our Lord Who declares: 'With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'



Metropolitan Anthony continues his reflections on the feeding of the five thousand noting that: 'Christ had compassion, compassion which means that He looked at these people who were in need, who could do nothing to alleviate it, and He felt a pain in His Divine Heart, that these people, whose life should be fulfilment, abundance, a glorious joy — that these people should be in obvious need. This time it was hunger, another time it is illness, another time it is sin, another time it is death — it may be anything.'

But God's love may be either joy, exulting, glorious joy or crucified, sacrificial pain. And when all this meets then a mysterious harmony is established between the

Divine sorrow and the human need, between human helplessness and the power of God, the love of God that expresses itself in all ways, great and small.

Let us therefore learn to be pure enough in heart, pure enough in mind to be able to turn to God with our need without hiding our face; or if we feel unworthy of coming up to Him, let us kneel at His feet and say, Lord — I am unworthy!

Let us learn this creative helplessness that consists in surrendering all hope of human victory for the sake of the certainty that God can do what we cannot.

Let us be helpless in the sense of being transparent, and supple, and listening with all our being, and presenting our need to God — our need of eternal life, but also our needs that are human and frail: the need of support, the need of consolation, the need for mercy. And the response of God will always be the same: If you can believe, however little — everything is possible.

* * * *

The souls who enter the road of obedience, and willingly bind themselves to indiscriminate and perfect obedience, are the ones to find the way to salvation, the way to sanctification. "My God, you know everything and I am under your watchful eye. You must have a reason to allow all these things I go through. They are a blessing in disguise".

What happens when we sing to God? By Fr. Stephen Freeman (part 3)

The Incarnation of Christ teaches us not just that God became a man, but that the earth has a capacity for the heavenly. It not only has a capacity for the heavenly, but is so constructed that it cannot be rightly understood and lived in unless and until we see and regard that heavenly which is hidden within it. God has purposely hidden these “treasures” from us so that we might become the kind of persons who know how to see and find them.

So, we lost paradise and came “into this world” (St. Basil’s language for the Fall). But having come into this world, we only return to paradise when we find it hidden here (where we are). That finding is the fruit of an inward repentance and the acquisition of the Spirit. I would say, carefully, that by

“repentance,” I am describing turning away from the “not seeing, not seeking” way of life.

Christ said, “Ask and you’ll receive, knock and it will be opened, seek and you shall find.”

What we fail to understand is that the asking, knocking, and seeking are states of the heart that must be nurtured into a way of life. Christ came to us speaking in parables. In truth, He has been speaking to us in parables since the very beginning. What was once parable continues in sacrament, and in a kind of existence that is “on earth as it is in heaven.” To see the parable is to perceive heaven and to begin to find the door by which we enter.

And now, I return to the priest as he vests for the service. Those vestments, the “garment of salvation,” and the “robe of gladness,” are those vestments that we lost in paradise when we fell, and our eyes were opened and we saw ourselves as “naked” (and were ashamed). This reclothing is similar to our Baptismal garment: “As many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ [like a garment]. From the robe of the priesthood in the Old Testament to that of the newly-robed Christians in the New, the priest of the New Covenant is robed as Christ, who alone is our “Great High Priest.” And so this priest becomes the “allegory,” the “sacrament” and “parable” of Christ. This is that. This priest will stand where Christ alone can stand, and offer the “bloodless sacrifice.”

In St. Basil’s Liturgy, during the Litany of Supplication, the priest silently offers a prayer. In part he prays:

...accept us as we draw near to Your Holy Altar, so that we may be worthy to offer to You this reasonable and bloodless sacrifice for our sins and for the errors of Your people. Having received it on Your holy, heavenly and ideal altar as an offering of sweet spiritual fragrance, send down on us in turn the grace of Your Holy Spirit. Look down on us, O God, and observe this our worship. Accept it as You accepted the gifts of Abel, the sacrifices of Noah, the whole burnt offerings of Abraham, the priestly offices of Moses and Aaron, and the peace-offerings of Samuel. As You accepted this true worship from Your holy Apostles, so now, in Your goodness, accept these gifts from the hands of us sinners, O Lord, that having

been permitted to serve without offense at Your Holy Altar, we may receive the reward of wise and faithful stewards on the awesome day of Your just retribution...

This offering is gathering together all of the offerings through the ages: the gifts of Abel, the sacrifices of Noah, the whole burnt offerings of Abraham, the priestly offices of Moses and Aaron, and the peace-offerings of Samuel. These are now offered to be received, not on this earthly altar, but “on Your holy, heavenly and ideal altar.” This is that.

This is the pattern of our life (for all of us), for we were first established in paradise as priests to offer thanks to God. What we lost, Christ has restored.

This is a description of our lives offered as a continual eucharist (thanksgiving). St. Dionysius the Areopagite, in his Divine Hierarchy, uses the liturgy as an image of salvation it-

self, drawing particularly on the structures and order seen in its “hierarches” (“holy orders”). In St. Paul’s admonition, this same principle of holy order is manifest as “submitting to one another.” This is Christ’s self-emptying put into practice in our lives.

If we think of music, we can see this submission very clearly. There is a key signature, and a rhythm. There are parts for different ranges of voices. There is listening to the voices around you so that your own voice can blend. There is the direction given that allows our song to remain cohesive. In contrast to this, the “music” of modern living is cacophany (literally, an “evil sound”). It is the noise of everyone’s private song, shouting and battling to be heard within the onslaught of our fragmented lives.

