

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 473

10th Sunday after Pentecost-Christ heals the possessed boy

August 1, 2021



The possessed boy in today's Gospel is called a "lunatic" in the original Greek. This was because the devil deliberately manifested the power of possession in the boy by casting him into the water and into the fire when the moon was full. It was the intention of the devil that by this the people would blame nature, in this case, the

moon, as being the cause of the boy's infirmity. By blaming the moon, it would be the same thing as blaming God, because the moon is part of the natural order of creation made by God.

The boy's father complains in front of the crowd to our Savior that the disciples were unable to cast out the demon. The Lord protects the public reputation of His disciples by blaming instead the lack of faith of the father, as well as citing the lack of faith of "this perverse generation."

As Christians we must be very careful about reproving others. It is natural for a parent to correct their child. It is natural for a husband or wife to correct each other, always with love and humility. However, it is wrong and evil to make a public spectacle out of reproving anyone. None of us are without sin. We wouldn't like it if

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+ 10th Sunday after Pentecost +

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Epistle: 1 Corinthians 4:9-16

Gospel: Matthew 17:14-23

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

What are the characteristic features of the authentic Christian experience?

We can begin by looking at the end of the first chapter of the Gospel according to Saint John, the section regarding the call of the disciples. This passage is of particular interest, because it's an image of how Christ calls each Christian separately and what, in the end, the grace and love of God offer us in the ark of salvation, the Church. In this particular passage, three calls are made,

three invitations to three disciples. One is to the apostle Andrew, the second to Philip and the third to Nathaniel.

Initially, all three respond to the call with an abundance of spiritual enthusiasm. Andrew says: 'We've found the Messiah'; Philip ran to Nathaniel and said: 'We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote - Jesus'; while Nathaniel addressed the Lord and said: 'You are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel'.

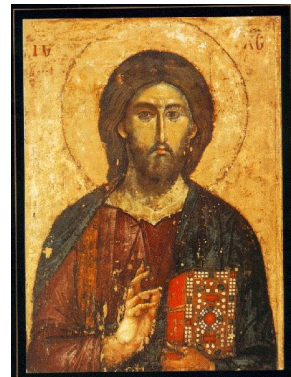
The first recognizable feature of the authentic experience is the feeling of God's call and the spontaneous response to it, which is something which resides in the guileless element of the soul. Immediately, directly, without a second thought, without hesitation and without rationalization, the soul recognizes the divine Person and responds to his call. As the Lord said: 'Behold, a good Israelite, in whom there is no guile'. There is no guile,
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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 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

"The vision of Isaiah, the son of Amos" (Isaiah 1:1).

It is possible to clearly know God from created nature and still more clearly, from the inspired men of God and most clearly from the Lord Christ. The inspired men of God before Christ were the prophets. Among the first was Isaiah, the son of Amos. The Spirit of God opened his sight

and he saw that which other men did not see. That is why he called his message to his people "a vision" [or apparition]. How the prophets saw the heavenly mysteries and the mysteries of future events cannot be described: that can only be experienced by those to whom God gives that gift.

The visions of the holy prophets are true, for those words and those heavenly appearances from these visions, have actually been confirmed later on. They are true because they served for the good of men, turning them from evil to good. Furthermore, they are true because the prophets fearlessly declared them without regard of the suffering which befell them and even without regard for the bitter death which many of them suffered.

Therefore, let us listen to the prophets of God for they are the paths that lead to the city of the Great King; they are the rays of the Sun of Righteousness Christ which on a distant sphere illumines men with the heavenly light, pointing out the Sun to them.

O Lord Christ, help us to recognize Your light and Your providence.

What is a Christian, continued from p.1

no perplexity, no confusion, complexity. The dominant features in Nathaniel's heart were purity and simplicity.

The Christian life isn't a personal discovery or choice, but a bold response to the divine call. It's not a way of life but a state of grace. It doesn't produce good people with proper criteria and good characters, but is proof of God's love for us and of our divine destiny.

According to the note on the feast of Saint Andrew, these spontaneous spiritual outbursts are the result of a soul 'in travail' and 'awaiting' 'the presence of him'. This brings us to two further characteristics: first, a painful desire, a longing for God, a feeling of needing him. The second is the expectation of the coming of the Lord and his visitation.

This pain of the soul and inner longing and anticipation, the deep, innermost expectation, what the Fathers call the 'devouring' of the soul, the continuous readiness for the coming and visitation of the Lord to alter

my own soul, to enter my own life, changes and transmutes, transforms and renews the characteristics of my own life, the specific features of my own persona. These occasions are proof of an authentic Christian experience.

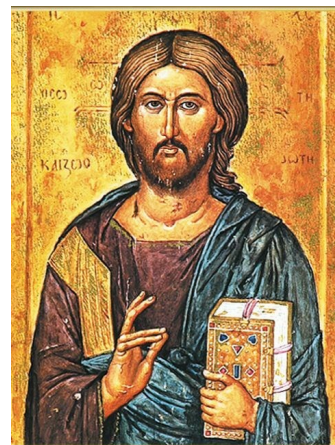
It's not the change that causes the genuine Christian experience. That could equally well give rise to pride and arrogance. Rather it's the Person who brings about the change, he who is the guarantee of the experience and the proof of its commensurate grandeur, he who is made manifest within it.

At this point it's worth noting that the excitement of the apostles was no mere expression of joy and surprise, or good will, but that it had the features of a grand confession of faith, a confession which the Church holds in its hands as a treasure. They confessed him from the very start as God: Andrew as the messiah; Philip as the one of whom Moses and the prophets wrote; and Nathaniel as the Son of the living God, as his Anoint-

ed.

And not only that. They went a step further: they shared their faith with the people in their circle. They spread the message immediately and made it public. Andrew 'brought Peter to Jesus'; Philip told Nathaniel: 'Come and see', come and taste for yourself. This feature of sharing the treasure of the love of God which wells up within us and is expressed as the most gentle and wonderful expression of our love for others and for our brothers and sisters is another recognizable characteristic of the genuine Christian experience.

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(Homily on Christ healing the possessed boy cont'd from p.1)

someone were to publicly accuse or reprove us for something. Therefore, any reprobation should be done privately and quietly and never publicly.

Our Lord gives the example today when the disciples quietly come to our Savior to discuss their inability to cure the boy. The Lord tells them that it is because they have no faith. In addition, the great power of prayer and fasting is cited by our Lord as the only thing that can drive the demon out from the possessed boy. Hence, our Savior makes it very clear that prayer and fasting should be a way of life for those of us who would follow Christ and call ourselves Christians.

Several times in the Gospel our Savior cites the example of the mustard seed when discussing faith. Faith like a mustard seed is mentioned in the life of St. Mark the Anchorite. This holy struggler spent 95 years of his life in seclusion, living in a cave in Ethiopia, waging spiritual warfare in prayer and fasting in order to conquer the passions and grow close to Christ.

In his life it is recorded that a certain monastic father named Serapion visited St. Mark. "During his conversation with Abba Serapion, Saint Mark inquired how things stood in the world. He asked about the Church of Christ, and whether persecutions against Christians still continued. Hearing that idol worship had ceased long ago, the saint rejoiced and asked, "Are there now in the world saints working miracles, as the Lord spoke of in His Gospel, 'If ye have faith even as a grain of mustard seed, ye will say to this mountain, move from that place, and it will move, and nothing shall be impossible for you' (Mt.17:20)?"

As the saint spoke these words, the mountain moved from its place 5,000 cubits (approximately 1.5 miles) and went toward the sea. When St. Mark saw that the mountain had moved, he said, "I did not order you to

move from your place, but was conversing with a brother. Go back to your place!" After this, the mountain actually returned to its place. Abba Serapion fell down in fright. St. Mark took him by the hand and asked, "Have you never seen such miracles in your lifetime?" "No, Father," Abba Serapion replied. Then St. Mark wept bitterly and said, "Alas, today there are Christians in name only, but not in deeds."

We might believe that we have faith but after hearing today's Gospel, as well as hearing the account from the life of St. Mark the Anchorite, we might become discouraged. Instead, with humility, we should actually

have hope! Our faith doesn't need to be outwardly large to have a large impact. A mustard seed is about one to two millimeters in size. Yet, the mustard tree can grow upwards of 20 to 30 feet tall and wide. Our faith doesn't need to be outwardly large to have a large impact. The tiny mustard seed holds the potential of a 30-foot tree! A seemingly inconsequential speck of faith can move mountains!

Most of us have no need to move physical mountains such as the miracle that took place in the life of Venerable Mark.

For us this is a vivid and real example that we can see and understand as an illustration of faith. The mountains that we need to move are personal for each and every one of us.

Perhaps we need to move the mountain of our heart in a different and better direction. Perhaps we are oppressed by a mountain of sin and we need to overthrow and rid ourself of this heavy burden. Perhaps there is a mountain of discord in our relationships with family or friends. The Lord gives us the prescription for how to move these mountains. Have just a little faith, and pray and fast. As a result, our life can radically change for the better — and this is the greatest miracle of all. Amen.



The Epistle to Diognetus (part 1)

The Epistle to Diognetus is a second century work that defends the doctrines of Christianity. This type of writing is also called an apologetics letter or an apology. Although neither author nor recipient is known for certain, the Letter to Diognetus purports to be written by a student of the apostles who calls himself Mathetes, which in Greek simply means "disciple." The identity of the Diognetus addressed in this letter is uncertain, although he may have been a man of some rank, as the salutation addresses him as "His Excellency."

The epistle contains 12 chapters describing the meaning and results of salvation by faith in Christ, although the name Jesus is never mentioned. References to "the Son" or "the Word" take the place of the name Jesus Christ. The oldest known manuscript of the Letter to Diognetus, dating from the thirteenth or fourteenth century, was found along with the writings of Justin Martyr; unfortunately, that manuscript was destroyed in a fire in 1870. For a time it was believed that the Letter to Diognetus was composed by Justin Martyr, but that theory has since been discarded.

In this Letter to Diognetus, the author describes the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian. He also contrasts the Jewish religion with the fulfillment of that religion in Christianity and calls the Jews "foolish" who continue to cling to the letter of the Law rather than live in the freedom purchased by the Son of God.

Chapter 1. Occasion of the epistle

Most excellent Diognetus: I can see that you deeply desire to learn how Christians worship their God. You have so carefully and earnestly asked your questions about them: What is it about the God they believe in, and the form of religion they observe, that lets them look down upon the world and despise death? Why do they reject the Greek gods and the Jewish superstitions alike? What about the affection they all have for each other? And why has this new group and their practices come to life only now, and not long ago? I cordially welcome this desire of yours, and I implore God, who enables us both to speak and to hear, to grant to me so to speak, that, above all, I may hear you have been edified, and to you so to hear, that I who speak may have no cause of regret for having done so.

Chapter 2. The vanity of idols

Come, then, after you have freed yourself from all preju-

dices possessing your mind, and laid aside what you have been accustomed to, as something apt to deceive you, and being made, as if from the beginning, a new man, inasmuch as, according to your own confession, you are to be the hearer of a new [system of] doctrine; come and contemplate, not with your eyes only, but with your understanding, the substance and the form of those whom you declare and deem to be gods.

Is not one of them a stone similar to that on which we tread? Is not a second brass, in no way superior to those vessels which are constructed for our ordinary use? Is not a third wood, and that already rotten? Is not a fourth silver, which needs a man to watch it, lest it be stolen? Is not a fifth iron, consumed by rust? Is not a sixth earthenware, in no degree more valuable than that which is formed for the humblest purposes?



Are not all these of corruptible matter? Are they not fabricated by means of iron and fire? Did not the sculptor fashion one of them, the brazier a second, the silversmith a third, and the potter a fourth? Was not every one of them, before they were formed by the arts of these [workmen] into the shape of these [gods], each in its own way subject to change? Would not those things which are now vessels, formed of the same materials, become like to such, if they met with the same artificers? Might not these, which are now worshipped by you, again be made by men vessels similar to others? Are they not all deaf? Are they not blind? Are they not with-

out life? Are they not destitute of feeling? Are they not incapable of motion? Are they not all prone to decay? Are they not all corruptible?

These things you call gods; these you serve; these you worship; and you become altogether like them. For this reason you hate the Christians, because they do not deem these to be gods. But do not you yourselves, who now think and suppose [such to be gods], much more cast contempt upon them than they [the Christians do]? Do you not much more mock and insult them, when you worship those that are made of stone and earthenware, without appointing any persons to guard them; but those made of silver and gold you shut up by night, and appoint watchers to look after them by day, lest they be stolen? And by those gifts which you mean to present to them, do you not, if they are possessed of sense, rather punish [than honor] them?

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