

# 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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8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost– Repose of St. John the Apostle

September 26, 2021



Today, the Holy Orthodox Church commemorates the repose of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist, St. John the Theologian. As we learn from the Holy Gospels, St. John, one of the sons of Zebedee, was called by Christ to abandon his fishing nets to become a fisher of men and a son of thunder.

Saint John became one of the twelve

apostles, and despite his being – according to tradition – the youngest, he was one of only three to witness the Transfiguration, the only one to rest his head on the bosom of Christ at the Mystical Supper, and the only one to follow Him to the foot of the Cross. The Gospel of John is distinctive for its theological depth and profundity.

The Holy Evangelist begins with the proclamation of Christ as the Word, the *Logos*, become flesh. The Church places the reading of this gospel only during the days after Pascha, most likely because the richness of its theology was judged to be heard only by those initiated in the Faith – hence its reading is placed after the traditional period of catechesis of converts during Lent and their baptisms on Holy Saturday.

He, of course, also authored three  
(continued p. 3)

+ 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost +  
Repose of St. John the Evangelist

Epistle: 1 John 4:12-19

Gospel: John 19:25-27; 21:24-25

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 Invisible Life of the Soul, by Fr. Andreas***

We live among people who are imperfect, with lots of passions and faults which are likely to irritate us enormously and make us upset. But we can't change the way they behave, particularly their negative attitude towards us. Nobody changes their own disposition unless they want to.

We can see this from ourselves. We might not express our anger, our discontent, our ill-will, our rejection and any other negativity we feel towards another person,

and this can be effective, even if it involves repression of these feelings. But no-one can say that we can't have them in our heart, nobody can forbid it, and no-one can make us any different, unless we wish to be so.

The notion that other people are affected only by what's expressed as actions and behavior seems not to be entirely true. Because there's the mystic world of our soul which also affects people and things and has a positive or negative impact, whether we recognize

this or not.

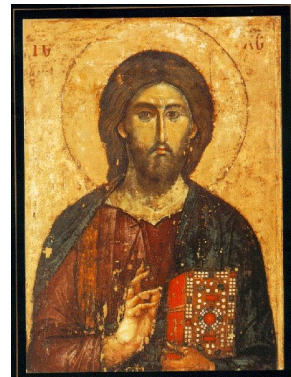
If our soul is under the sway of jealousy, envy, distrust, hatred, or sheer dislike of someone, they'll sense it in their own soul as if they're being washed over by 'negative' waves, which, naturally, upsets them and destroys their peace of mind. On the other hand, when our soul transmits love, empathy, forgiveness, accompanied by prayer, the other person is mystically on the receiving end of 'a good force proceeding  
(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 pas-

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

### ***Take up Your Cross and Follow Christ***

A Christian has his cross, his sufferings, that will be laid upon him by the Lord. Bear, though, in mind, that these aren't plain sufferings that simply fall upon him and burden him. They foreshadow God's blessings. They are the vehicles through which God's blessings will come.

Whoever takes things this way will bear his burdens joyfully no matter how heavy handed or insufferable. When man doesn't take things this way, his life is thankless, tough and intolerable. When the Lord lays upon us hardship and misfortune and we trustfully and hopefully take them in our stride, they are lighter to bear.

What man should try to do is prepare himself to receive the grace the Lord gives. Leave yourself in the hands of God and let God "walk" you on the path of preparation.

Only God knows what every one of us should go through. And not only should we get prepared for it but also look forward to it with joy. Because this is our glory. The cross is glory for Christ. Similarly, for the men of God any given suffering, any given injustice, any given pain for the love of God, is glory, too.

At the time when you are treated unfairly, you suffer. You may not be beaten up, but at the time when you are harmed, your soul is in pain. Accept this injustice against with joy and thank God because this is the way our soul is glorified.

### **The Invisible Life of the Soul, continued from p.1**

from us, going to our brother or sister, healing and reviving them', says Saint Porphyrios. In the end, we don't transmit to others what we say or do, but who we are: antipathetic or sympathetic.

Saint Porphyrios says: 'There's an invisible life, the life of the soul. It's very powerful and can affect others, even if they're thousands of miles away. This can be through a curse, which has the force to activate evil. But again, if we pray with love for someone, no matter how far away we are, goodness is transmitted. So, good and evil aren't affected by separation. We can send them over boundless distances. And we can send good or evil without even speaking, no matter how far away we are from another person. What isn't expressed often has more force than words'.

In the world of shop-windows and advertisements, the true Church of Christ (as experienced by the saints, those 'non-existent' people of God, humble and simple, no matter what their position in society), promotes

the mystic and invisible experience which consists of burning love for God. Just as making too much of human feelings of ardor leads to sexual license, so too, making public a mystical, sacramental relationship with



Christ leads to lies, hypocrisy and thence to its obliteration.

Real life is lived in the depths of our heart, as is our hell and our paradise. That is where the battle is fought between our good and wicked self. That is where we reject or accept God and

our neighbor. And that's where our journey to eternity begins.

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### ***God's Presence in Prayer***

The point is not simply to say words of prayer. The point is for the whole man to be a prayer before God. The moment you feel devoutness, contrition and the fear of God—exactly because you are aware of God's presence—it is as if you are praying, no matter where you are, no matter what you do. Your soul is attached to God. As you have the sense of God's presence, that makes you stand in piety before Him, and saves you from being led hither, thither and yon.

In order for the soul to be constantly in prayer before God, it doesn't necessarily have to utter any words, once it has a constant sense of God's presence, moves lovingly towards God and embraces God's love. In this sense, our whole life has to be and can be prayer according to the words in the gospels, "pray without ceasing".



*(Homily on The repose of St. John the Apostle, cont'd from p.1)*

Universal epistles and a book of his revelation granted on the island of Patmos – all are included in the canonical books of the New Testament.

In a homily in honor of St. John, Saint Gregory Palamas points out some beautiful parallels with which Our Lord Jesus Christ blessed the life of the saint: *Christ was the beloved Son, John was the beloved disciple. Christ was in the bosom of the Father, John leant on Jesus' breast. Christ was a virgin, and by His grace, so was John. Christ was the Son of the Virgin, and so was John. "The Lord thundered from the heavens", and John was thunder, for he, more than the others, was called thunder and the son of thunder, a most theological thunder which resounds to the ends of the earth declaring the divine truth that in the beginning was the Word from the Father, and the Word was with God, and was God, and in Him was life and the true light, which lights every man coming into the world, by whom in the beginning all things were made.*

We thus rightly honor this holy man on the day of his repose. The tradition of the Church teaches that after his burial, the disciples found his body had disappeared, leaving no earthly remains. In this way, the Lord honored him in a manner similar to His Mother, the Theotokos.

When contemplating the close and loving relationship that St. John had with Our Lord, what can we as Christians hope to emulate about his life?

We do not have the opportunity to walk side-by-side with Christ, to see the Light of Tabor, to stand at the foot of the Cross, to welcome the Holy Virgin to stay in our homes as our own mother, or to have visions of the Lamb surrounded by the saints in heaven. We do learn from the tradition of the Church, that this very same man had but one simple teaching as he neared the end of his life: "Little children, love one another." Because he repeated that phrase so often, his disciples asked him why he kept saying it. He replied simply: "This is the Lord's commandment; and if ye keep it, it is enough."

While we cannot emulate the particulars of St. John's life, we can honor him on this day by our love for God and one another. Before his repose, St. John was reminding his disciples what the Lord had taught him – that all of the Law and the Prophets hang on the two command-

ments to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. He was also reminding them of what he had taught them by his own epistles – that we cannot claim to love God if we do not love others: "for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?"

As we commemorate the repose of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John, let us celebrate the great works that God worked through His beloved disciple, but most importantly, let us remember his simple – yet most profound – teaching as he approached his repose: "Little children, love one another." In these days, which are so full of anger and judgment, unrest and discord, let us take hope that our fulfilling of this commandment of the Lord is truly all we need, truly "enough" for us.

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A fascinating story about St. John was written down by Clement of Alexandria (3<sup>rd</sup> century). St John was living in Ephesus and sometimes travelled to neighboring areas, appointing bishops and establishing order in Christian communities. In one city, a male youth caught John's attention, and John committed the youth to the care of the local bishop. The bishop raised him like his own son and baptized him. However, in spite of this godly influence, the youth got in with a bad crowd and became a criminal. Eventually, he became the notorious leader of a band of robbers.

Sometime later, John visited the city and asked about the young man. The bishop, breaking down and crying, told the apostle about how he had left the Church and become a robber. John was extremely upset and immediately demanded that someone show him the way to the robbers' outpost. Despite being elderly and vulnerable, he fearlessly approached the robbers and demanded to see their leader. The leader tried to run away from John, but John chased him and cried out, *Why do you run away from me, child—from your own father, unarmed and very old? Be sorry for me, child, not afraid of me. You still have hopes of life. I will account to Christ for you. If need be, I will gladly suffer your death, as the Lord suffered death for us; to save you I will give my own life. Stop! believe! Christ sent me.*

Upon hearing this, the hardened criminal burst into tears, dropped his weapon, and hugged John. He repented of his sin and he was fully restored to back to the Church.

## *The Life of St. John the Apostle and Evangelist*

The Holy, Glorious Apostle and Evangelist was the son of Zebedee and Salome, a daughter of Saint Joseph the Betrothed. He was called by our Lord Jesus Christ to be one of His Apostles at the same time as his elder brother James. This took place at the Sea of Galilee. Leaving behind their father, both brothers followed the Lord.

The Apostle John was especially loved by the Savior for his sacrificial love and his virginal purity. After his calling, the Apostle John did not part from the Lord, and he was one of the three apostles who were particularly close to Him. St John the Theologian was present when the Lord restored the daughter of Jairus to life, and he was a witness to the Transfiguration of the Lord on Mount Tabor.

During the Last Supper, he reclined next to the Lord, and laid his head upon His breast. The Apostle John followed after the Lord when they led Him bound from the Garden of Gethsemane to the court of the iniquitous High Priests. He was there in the courtyard of the High Priest during the interrogations of his Teacher and he resolutely followed after him on the way to Golgotha, grieving with all his heart.

At the foot of the Cross he stood with the Mother of God and heard the words of the Crucified Lord addressed to Her from the Cross: "Woman, behold Thy son." Then the Lord said to him, "Behold thy Mother" (John 19:26-27). From that moment the Apostle John watched over the Most Holy Virgin Mary, and he served Her until Her Dormition.

After the Dormition, the Apostle John went to Ephesus and other cities of Asia Minor to preach the Gospel, taking with him his own disciple Prochorus. They boarded a ship, which floundered during a terrible tempest. All the travellers were cast up upon dry ground, and only the Apostle John remained in the depths of the sea. Prochorus wept bitterly, bereft of his spiritual father and guide, and he went on towards Ephesus alone.

On the fourteenth day of his journey, he stood at the shore of the sea and saw that the waves had cast a man ashore. Going up to him, he recognized the Apostle John, whom the Lord had preserved alive for fourteen days in the sea. Teacher and disciple went to Ephesus, where the Apostle John preached incessantly to the pagans about Christ. His preaching was accompanied by such numerous and great miracles, that the number of believers increased

with each day.

During this time, there had begun a persecution of Christians under the emperor Nero (56-68). They took the Apostle John for trial at Rome. Saint John was sentenced to death for his confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but the Lord preserved His chosen one. The apostle drank a cup of deadly poison, but he remained alive. Later, he emerged unharmed from a cauldron of boiling oil into which he had been thrown on orders from the torturer.

After this, they sent the Apostle John off to imprisonment to the island of Patmos, where he spent many years. Proceeding along on his way to the place of exile, Saint John worked many miracles. On the island of Patmos, his

preaching and miracles attracted to him all the inhabitants of the island, and he enlightened them with the light of the Gospel. He cast out many devils from the pagan temples, and he healed a great multitude of the sick.

The Apostle John withdrew with Prochorus to a desolate height, where he imposed upon himself a three-day fast. As St John prayed the earth quaked and thunder rumbled. Prochorus fell to the ground in fright. The Apostle John lifted him up and told him to write down what he was about to say. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, saith the Lord, Who is

and Who was and Who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev 1:8), proclaimed the Spirit of God through the Apostle John. Thus in about the year 67 the Book of Revelation was written by the holy Apostle John. In this Book were predictions of the tribulations of the Church and of the end of the world.

After his prolonged exile, the Apostle John received his freedom and returned to Ephesus, where he continued with his activity, instructing Christians to guard against false teachers and their erroneous teachings. In the year 95, the Apostle John wrote his Gospel at Ephesus. He called for all Christians to love the Lord and one another, and by this to fulfill the commands of Christ. The Church calls Saint John the "Apostle of Love", since he constantly taught that without love man cannot come near to God. Saint John reposed when he was more than a hundred years old. He far outlived the other eyewitnesses of the Lord, and for a long time he remained the only remaining eyewitness of the earthly life of the Savior.

