

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 482

19th Sunday after Pentecost— Christ teaches to Love All

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There's a lot of confusion about the meaning of love. While everyone recognizes that love is good, what often passes for love is not necessarily what we as Orthodox Christians would define as such. The word used in the Greek New Testament to describe His love is 'agape.' It's always a selfless kind of love, which puts the needs of

others before ourselves, and which is manifest in humility, service to others, and self-emptying—the same kind of self-emptying that Christ God demonstrates to us on the cross in His willingness to lay down His life to defeat sin and death on our behalf. It's the same kind of love that He, in turn, calls us to if we are to live with Him and commune with Him, saying, "He who would come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24).

In today's Gospel, Christ shows us how we are to practice this kind of self-denying love and humility in our own lives: He admonishes us to "love our enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return," and He promises us great spiritual reward if we let our hearts put this kind of active love into practice, saying that we will be
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+ 19th Sunday after Pentecost +
St. Cyriacus-hermit of Palestine

Epistle: 2 Cor 11:31-12:9

Gospel: Luke 6: 31-36

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.*

St Silouan-Spiritual Giant of the 20th Century

Saint Siluan was born in 1866 into a peasant family in the Tambov region of Russia. From the age of four he began wondering: 'Where is this God? When I grow up, I'll travel the whole world looking for Him'.

When he was a little bit older he heard about the life of a holy recluse and the miracles that happened at his grave and thought: 'If he's a saint, that means God's with us already, so there's no need to go wandering the world to find Him'. At this thought his heart be-

came inflamed with love of God.

His mind focused on the continuous recollection of God and he prayed fervently and with tears. He noticed an internal change because of this state of Grace and this lasted for three months, during which he felt the desire to become a monk. Thereafter, this Grace left him and he returned to a worldly life. One day, in a brawl, he almost killed a fellow-villager.

Soon after this episode, after he'd fallen asleep, he dreamt about a snake

slithering into his mouth.

At the same time as the nausea he felt at this, he heard the voice of the Mother of God telling him with extraordinary sweetness: 'You swallowed a snake in your dream and you didn't like it. Well, I don't like what I see of your actions'.

He then felt deep revulsion over his sin and, overcome with fervent repentance he thought continuously of the Holy Mountain and the judgment to come.

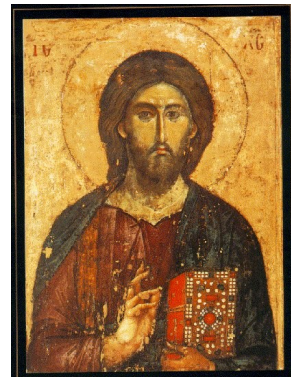
In 1892, as soon as he
(continued on p.2)

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

Blessed is the One...

Blessed is the one that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful (Psalm 1:1)

Brethren, most blessed is he who is not so hardened by sin that he can hear and fulfill this counsel of God that has come

through the prophet. The ungodly are those who, in every way, think contrary to God and His will. The sinners are those who walk the path of their own desires, and their thoughts are contrary to the will of God and His law. The scornful are those who destroy themselves and others by their evil deeds. The danger is this: first comes the ungodly counsel (either from wicked men or from sinful thoughts); then the actual committing of sin; then the unrepentant sinner becomes a scandalous example of evil to others.

Therefore, blessed is the man who neither heeds the counsel of ungodly men or thoughts, but finds sufficient counsel for his salvation in the Law of God. Blessed is the man who has not even once walked in the way of sinners, or, if he has walked on that path, he has repented and returned to the path of life that is the Lord's. Blessed is the man who has not sat in the presence of the scorner of innocent souls who, by his seductive example, corrupts such souls.

O my brethren, blessed be all of you, men and women, who cautiously avoid these.

St. Silouan of Mt. Athos continued from p.1

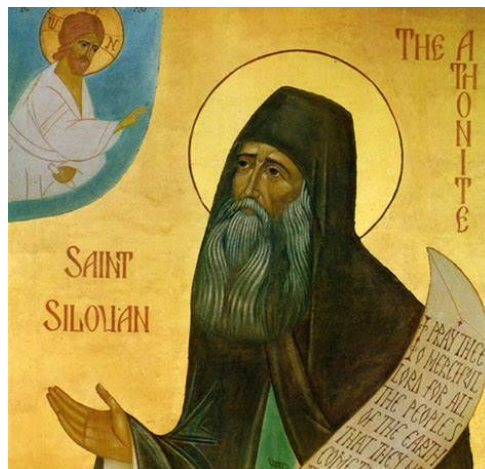
had finished his military service, having asked Saint John of Kronstadt to pray 'that the world wouldn't hold him back', he set off for the Garden of Our Lady, the Holy Mountain where he entered the Russian monastery of Saint Panteleimon as a novice.

After the general confession he made at the beginning of his new life, his spiritual father told him that all his sins were forgiven and the young novice was overjoyed. Then he began to be troubled by carnal thoughts. His spiritual father advised him to have nothing to do with bad thoughts, but to reject them immediately by invoking the name of Jesus.

From then on the blessed servant of God, in the forty-five years of his monastic life never once gave in to any inappropriate thoughts. With burning, ceaseless prayer he began to ask God to have mercy on him: during the day which he spent at the mill doing heavy and exhausting work, an obedience which he carried out with meticulous care; but particularly at night, almost the whole of which he

spent in fervent prayer, either standing or sitting on a stool. In total he'd sleep no more than two hours, and even then his rest would be broken.

Three weeks after his arrival at the monastery, one evening, as he was



praying before an icon of the Mother of God, the Jesus Prayer entered his heart and began to work by itself, unceasingly, day and night. This rare and great gift was followed by a fierce struggle against thoughts of pride and of despair over his salva-

tion, to which he was subjected by the demons.

One night, while he was praying in his cell, he was suddenly filled with an unusual light which passed right through his body. His soul was in turmoil. Even though the prayer continued to work within him it had lost its contrition and the novice realized that this was a case of Satanic delusion. He fought against these demonic attacks for six months praying as hard as he could, wherever he found himself, and he plumbed the depths of despair. Sitting in his cell, he thought: 'God's unremitting'. He felt completely abandoned and for about an hour his soul was enveloped in the darkness of indescribable dread.

At the hour of Vespers, while he was saying the Jesus prayer and gazing at the icon of Christ on the iconostas in the chapel at the mill, he was suddenly illumined by a supernatural light- joyful and sweet this time – and saw the living Christ, gazing back at him with ineffable gentleness.

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(Homily on Love for Your Enemies, cont'd from p.1)

His sons and daughters, co-heirs with Christ and fellow victors through Christ over sin and death.

In our world today, the idea of loving our enemies or being generous in our lending seem almost 'quaint,' something that surely cannot be expected of Christians today. We know how to love those who love us, but how do we love those who dislike or hate us, or oppose us? What's the obstacle to us loving with such grace-filled and humble love? Rather than putting these commands of Christ away, relegating them to a by-gone era of Church history, we have an opportunity here to wrestle with their application in our own lives today.

Our biggest impediment to loving as God loves, as God calls us, in turn, to love, is pride. It was pride that caused our first parents to reject God's love; it was pride that caused Cain to murder his brother Able; it's pride that causes us to be self-focused and indifferent to the need of others; it's pride that makes us easily offended. It's pride that keeps us from using our gifts and talents to God's glory; it's pride that keeps us from seeing the good in others. It's pride that makes us dependent on ourselves rather than on God and causes us to neglect the divine services and Sacraments God gives us to grow in His love.

Our self-examination asks us some of these questions regarding pride head-on: "Have you been dependent on yourself rather than on God, with the consequent negligence of the Sacraments and prayer? Have you been satisfied or complacent over your spiritual achievements? Have you preferred your own ideas, customs, schemes or techniques to those of the Church? Have you been unwilling to surrender to and abide in Christ, to let him act in and through you?" —just to name a few of the great many ways that pride snares us and robs us of loving and serving God and our fellow man as a Christian does.

St. John Cassian says of the prideful man, "He is not to be appeased when one admonishes him; he is weak in curtailings his own wishes, very stubborn when asked to yield to those of others... he is always more ready to trust to his own judgment than to that of the elders." Pride is a great challenge to overcome. And so, when we discover a foothold of pride in us, either through our own deducing or through the Holy Spirit working in our

hearts through confession, we have an opportunity to confess it and begin praying against it, so that step by step, we may allow God to chip away at it and bring us the healing that will free us to love and serve.

While pride is hard to defeat, humility, conversely, is hard to come by. But again, Christ shows us the way: He Himself is humble: we remember St. Paul's words, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." As we grow in communion with Christ, we grow in humility, and, therefore, in love for others.

And so, as we pray against pride, we pray for humility, assured that God hears such prayers and will work

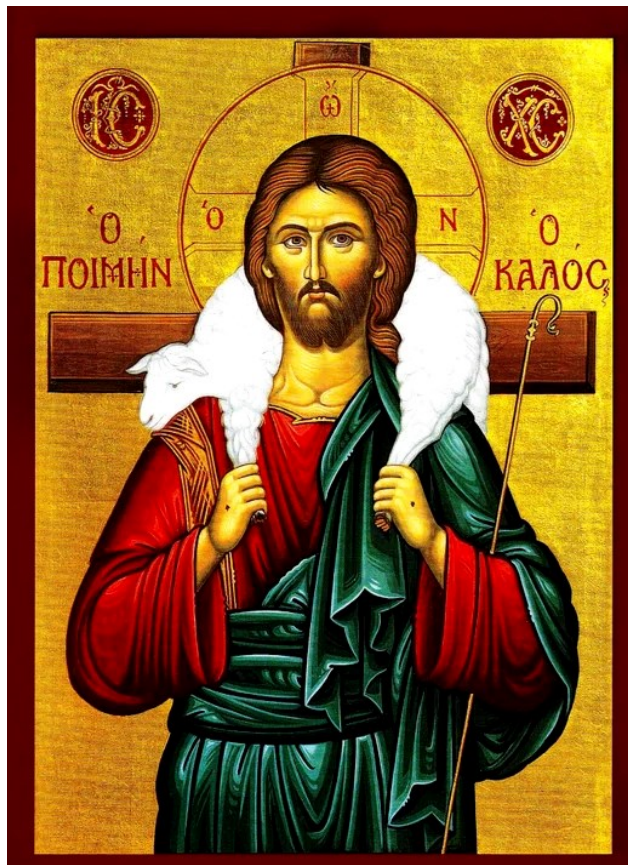
through them for our good. As we grow in humility, we grow in love and service to others, not just those whom we love, but yes, even for those who make our lives difficult, even for our enemies. As we grow in humility, we grow in our communion with God since by grace we come to share more and more of this attribute of His divine nature.

Christ asks us, "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them?" The true test of our love is whether we are willing, with and only with, God's help, to forgive those who have wronged us and this forgiveness is part of God's love and may be an ongoing and daily struggle met through prayer.

Humility exercised through love in this way is powerful, it is courageous, it is a true witness of the truth of Christ in a world of

enmity, hatred, and pride. Exercising agape love in our own lives is a uniquely Christian practice that comes by the power of the Holy Spirit working in us and through us.

With God working through us in our striving to model humility in love in our own lives, those around us will be touched, encouraged, in the life in Christ as well. It's not our circumstances, but our attitudes, our open hearts and minds toward God and the life that is only in Him, that makes the difference between our experiencing the blessings of life with God now and in the future, or living for ourselves and missing out on all that God in His goodness and love for us has promised those who put their trust in Him.



There is a crucial aspect of Orthodox theology that we, as “modern folk” need to concern ourselves with: the study and nature of demonic influence. All throughout the Scripture we see how Christ and the Apostles speak of us battling demons. We see Christ cast them out of people. We see Saint Paul insist, in Ephesians 6:12, that our battle is not against earthly things but against rulers of darkness (demons). He also warns us to avoid the “fiery darts” of the wicked one. Saint James warns us in James 3:14-16 that even bitterness is from demonic forces.

Our baptismal rite speaks of casting out demons through the baptism. The fathers spoke often of demonic activity. Saint Chrysostom mentions them in many of his sermons, and Saint Paisios Velichkovsky gives us a wonderful breakdown of demonic forces, as we have posted below.

We battle against demonic activity. As we will see from Saint Paisios Velichkovsky, the demons are standing by, waiting for an opportunity to pull the right puppet string, the string that we first raised up to them through our partaking with secularism and other demonic avenues. America is full of these avenues! Just turn on the TV or the radio and you will certainly be able to begin “shooting strings” up for the demons to grab hold of.

Demons need to be fed! They thrive on a symbolic life of paganism and other anti-Christ philosophies such as secularism, but they also fall by the symbolic. The fathers tell us that the simple sign of the cross wards them off. But certainly we cannot live an “unequally yoked” (as St. Paul says) anti-Christ life and expect our symbols to work on their own. That, I think, is a problem that we have in this modern society! Church on Sunday, and then secularism throughout every other day. Our rich symbolic Traditions are not just for Sunday worship, they should encompass our entire lives: How we decorate our houses, what we listen to and watch, and what we wear on our bodies.

Our iconic and festive avenues give us much to grasp on to! Other ways to conquer demonic force is to be closely connected to a spiritual father, confessing to him on a frequent basis, at least once a month. Confessing, fasting, prayer, worship, alms-giving, and giving your ear to a spiritual father scare the demons away due to the strong dose of humility it takes to accomplish this. St. Paisios writes: Pay heed to yourself, O monk, sensibly and diligently, with a vigilant mind, as to when the de-

mons come, by what means they catch one, and by what means they themselves are vanquished. Guard yourself with great caution, because every hour you walk in the midst of passions and nets.

Everywhere the passions surround one. Everywhere are set out their traps. Pay heed lest you be attracted by the enemy into his will through passions and traps. There is a great need for us, even essential for us men of flesh, to fight with the fleshless ones—one man with ten thousand enemies. Many tears, much patience, much suffering and caution, and a thousand eyes everywhere are required, for the evil spirits rise up maliciously against us like a lion.

They would destroy us if we did not have the Lord with us. They have been very skilled in the art of catching men

for more than seven thousand years. Without sleep, food, and rest, constantly, every hour, and by all means, they seek our perdition with every trick and with great effort. Having turned out to be powerless in one way, they think up something else. They start one thing, and contemplate yet another. And they roar about everywhere looking where they might find doors to enter and from where they might begin the battle, and, as it were, trick us into doing evil.

Do you not know with whom you battle? How legions of invisible enemies surround you, and every one of them wages his own battle? They sound numberless voices, and desire to swallow up

your soul. Should you not be cautious? Is it possible that having drunk your fill and given yourself over to sleep, lying down and constantly consoling yourself, that you can with all this receive salvation?

If you will not be attentive to this, you will not escape their traps. We have come to struggle, as it were, stepping into the fire. If we desire to be true warriors of the King of Heaven and not false participants, then let us put far away from us every passion or other. And according to our desire and fervor they tighten their traps, for the occasion to sin belongs to us ourselves, our attachment, weakness; and let us put away from ourselves every negligence and faintheartedness and effeminate weakness, and thus we shall stand against the cunningness of the demons. Let us labor in prayers and other virtues with all fervor and power, with soul, heart, and mind, just as someone might run swiftly on a road without looking around, or as a stingy man might fast, for such is the cunningness of the evil demons.

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