

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

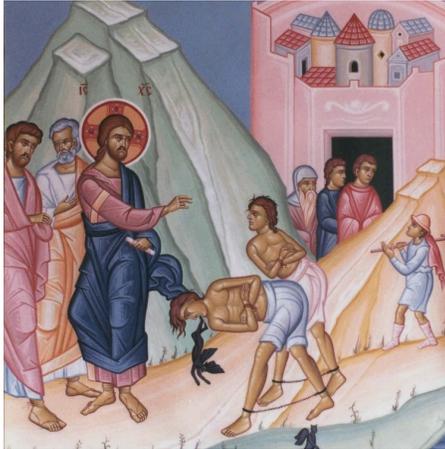
Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be Forever!



Volume 10 Issue 486

23rd Sunday after Pentecost—Christ heal the Demoniac

October 31, 2021



In today's gospel reading, we hear about a man whose situation was beyond miserable. He surely had no illusions about himself, for he was so filled with demons that he called himself "Legion." His personality had disintegrated due to the power of the forces of evil in his life. That is shown by the fact that he was naked,

stripped of his human dignity and was cast out of society. He lived among the tombs, and death is "the wages of sin" that came into the world as a consequence of our first parents' refusal to fulfill their calling to become like God in holiness.

This naked man living in the cemetery was so terrifying to others that they tried unsuccessfully to restrain him with chains. People understandably feared that he would do to them what Cain had done to Abel. But when this fellow broke free, he would run off to the desert by himself, alone with his demons. In the Gadarene demoniac we have a vivid icon of the pathetic suffering of humanity enslaved to death, naked of the divine glory, and isolated in fear from loving relationships with others.

Evil was so firmly planted in this
(continued p. 3)

+ 23rd Sunday after Pentecost +
New Martyr St. John (Kochurov)

Epistle: Ephesian 2: 4-10

Gospel: Luke 8: 26-39

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 Vision of Christ in the Life of Saint Silouan by Fr. Zacharou

c) Spiritual humility

When Saint Silouan beheld the meek, peaceful and loving gaze of Christ, he knew in his heart the 'indescribable' divine humility, to which he sang ever since a hymn in his writings and which he sought 'like a precious, lustrous pearl'. Like the rest of the holy Fathers, he distinguished two kinds of humility, ascetic humility and charismatic or spiritual humility.

Ascetic humility consists of man's struggle to diminish himself before God and his brethren.

The summit of this humility is to consider oneself worse than all. However, this humility is not perfect, as it involves comparison with other fellow-men.

True divine humility was manifested by Christ through His descent from heaven to the nethermost parts of the earth and is a gift of His grace. Christ-like humility is expressed through the paradoxical fact that the uncreated, infinite and eternal God emptied Himself and gave His life to deliver His creature from death.

In the moments when grace visits him, man becomes aware of the fearful divine Providence and Economy. He sees the history of the world as the continuous loving care of God, and then he is convinced to the core of his being that he is not only the worst of all men, but also unworthy of such a God as Christ is.

d) Universal repentance

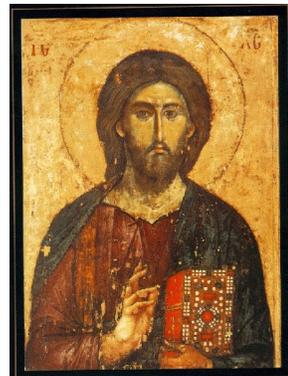
This awareness of our utter unworthiness and uselessness before the Lord Jesus, mingled with gratitude for His love to
(continued on p.2)

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

News and Notes

We welcome all who are worshipping with us today. We are also happy to announce that coffee social has resumed 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, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Laura, Elizabeth, Matthew, Corella, Ron, Daniel, Frankie, Pat, Bill, Loretta, Carol, Pam, John, Gladys, Anthony, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

Who has a Guardian Angel?

Theologians have differed on this question. Most have held the view that a Guardian Angel is given to a person only in the sacrament of baptism. However, in the Old Testament, we find multiple references to an angel messenger, (e.g. Job 33:23, Psalms 34:8).

Likewise, in the New Testament, Our

Lord Jesus Christ teaches, “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.” (Matthew 18:10).

These and other fragments from the Holy Scripture suggest that an angel protector is something that any person has. Furthermore, the Old Testament also makes a mention of several protectors given by God to whole nations. One example is the Book of the Prophet Daniel.

In the order of the Sacrament of Baptism, a priest petitions the Lord to assign to the person being baptized an Angel of light who shall deliver him (her) from every encounter with evil. On balance, we may conclude that every person has a guardian angel, but a baptized Christian benefits more from his angel’s spiritual guidance than an unbaptized man or woman. As Saint John Damascene teaches, our guardian angel exists to aid us in inheriting our salvation.



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

the end and His inconceivable Passion, lead to repentance that knows no end upon earth.

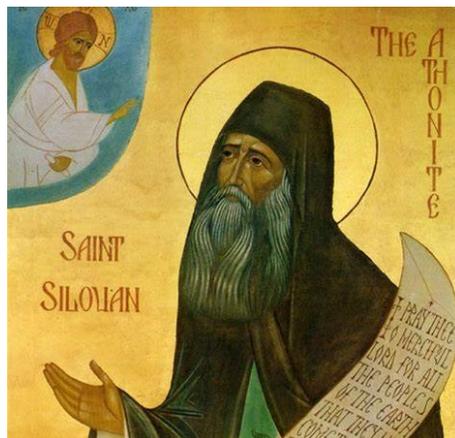
Both the beginning and the end of the Gospel of Christ speak about repentance. Without repentance man cannot have access to God. In other words, repentance is like unto a bridge that unites the two shores of the bottomless abyss.

In his personal repentance, in his striving to reconcile himself to God, Saint Silouan attained to extreme states. During his vision of the Lord Jesus, the state of the Lord was imparted to him. He received His grace which enlarges the heart to embrace all things, heaven and earth, God and man.

Christ lifted the burden of the sin of the whole world, ‘being made a curse for us’. All those who follow Him and receive His state, like Saint Silouan, take the blame and repent for the fall of all mankind. How can one acquire this universal consciousness? When the light of grace shines in the heart, it reveals the darkness man

bears within, but also his consubstantiality with the whole of mankind.

The neighbour is no longer someone else, a stranger preying on our possessions; he becomes, as the saints give witness, our brother and our life,



a member of the Body to which we also belong. Then the man of God begins to lament not only for his personal sins, but also for the cursed inheritance of the world’s apostasy from God, praying for universal salvation.

In his chapter on Adam’s Lament,

Saint Silouan describes in essence his own repentance. His strong crying with big tears echoed in the desert of a world immersed in despondency and despair, deprived of the quickening and enlightening grace of God. Adamic repentance is suitable for the man who was created in the image and likeness of Christ. When such repentance is offered to God, it attracts His blessing and spreads it all over the whole world.

e) The Great Science

The main afflictions that oppress our times are: the spirit of pride and self-love, the darkening of the mind, the general despondency and total spiritual paralysis, the numerous involuntary hardships and, finally, despair.

That which makes Saint Silouan a sign for our generation more than anything, is the word he received from Christ: ‘Keep thy mind in hell and despair not.’ This word summarises the whole tradition of the Church, but in this particular case, it is expressed in a concise and axiomatic way.

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(Homily on Christ healing the demon-possessed Man, cont'd from p.1)

man's soul that his reaction to the Lord's command for the demons to leave him was "What have you to do with me?...I ask you, do not torment me." His brokenness was such that he had no hope for healing and perceived Christ's promise of deliverance simply as pain. By telling the Lord that his name was Legion, he was acknowledging that the line between the demons and his own identity had been blurred. He was in such bad shape that it was not clear where he ended and where the demons began. The Savior then cast the demons into the herd of pigs, who ran into the lake and drowned. In the Old Testament context, pigs were unclean, and here the forces of evil lead even them into death.

Perhaps there is no clearer image of human brokenness in need of the healing of Christ than this miserable man. He represents us all in many ways. He did not ask Christ to deliver him, even as we did not take the initiative in Christ's coming to save sinners. The corrupting forces of evil were so powerful in his life that he had lost any sense of what it meant to be someone in God's image and likeness. Whenever we are driven by our distorted self-centered desires, we think, speak, and act similarly. We too are often so wedded to our favorite sins that, like him, we would rather that Christ leave us alone than that He set us free. We are often so weak and confused that we fear His healing mercy will torment us, for we have lost all hope of being set free from them. We are afraid of what life would be like without them.

After the spectacular drowning of the swine, the man in question was "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind." The one who had not been recognizably human returned to being his true self, was back in society, and was learning from the One Who had set him free. That was very disturbing, however, to the people of that region. In fact, they asked Christ to leave out of fear at what had happened. We may find their reaction hard to understand. What could be so terrifying about this man returning to a normal life? Unfortunately, we all get used to whatever we get used to. What we have experienced in ourselves or in others becomes normal to us. Even as the scary man in the tombs was afraid when Christ came

to set Him free, his neighbors were afraid when they saw that he had changed.

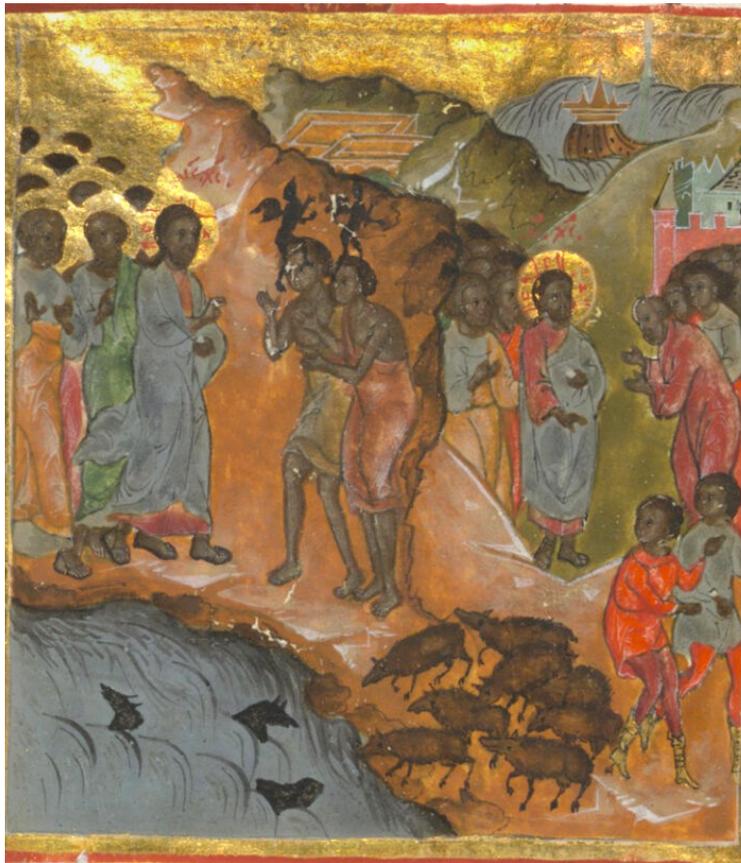
It is no surprise, then, that the man formerly possessed by demons and still feared by his neighbors did not want to stay in his hometown after the Lord restored him. He begged to go with Christ, Who responded, "Return to your home, and declare all that God has done for you." That must have been a difficult commandment for him to obey. Who would not be embarrassed and afraid to live in a town where everyone knew about the wretched and miserable existence he had experienced? It would have been much easier to have left all that behind and start over as a traveling disciple of the One who had set him free.

But that was not what Christ wanted the man to do. Perhaps that was because the Lord knew that the best witness

to His transforming power was a person who had been healed from the worst forms of depravity and corruption. Why should people believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the world? Surely, the lives of His followers must bear witness to His power in order to convince them. When someone moves from slavery to the glorious freedom of the children of God, that person has moved from death to life. Such a radical change is a sign of the truth of Christ's resurrection, for He makes us participants in His victory over death by breaking the destructive hold of the power of sin in our lives.

Our Lord makes it possible for us to become our true selves in Him, the Second Adam. That means being united with Him in holiness such that, by His gracious mercy, we become "partakers of the divine nature" who fulfill humanity's original vocation to become like God in holiness. He has overcome our nakedness by clothing us in a robe of light in baptism, filled us with the Holy Spirit in Chrismation, and nourished us with His own Body and Blood in the Eucharist. He Himself forgives and restores us through Confession and repentance. Our Lord is even more present to us than He was to the man in today's gospel lesson, for He has made us members of His own Body and dwells in our hearts.

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Homily Christ heals the demon-possessed man

Our challenge, then, is not to ask Him to go away out of fear that He will torment us. Sin only has the power in our lives that we allow it to have, and we all have a long, challenging journey to turn away from it. Nonetheless, we must take the small steps of which we are capable to turn our hearts more fully toward God through prayer, fasting, almsgiving, forgiveness, and all the basic spiritual disciplines of the Christian life. When we fail, we must use our weakness to grow in constant dependence on the Lord's mercy and strength. We cannot save ourselves by our own power any more than the man could cast out his own demons.

We may be as terrified to think about life without our favorite sins as the man's neighbors were to see him in his right mind. Sharing more fully in Christ's victory over death will always be terrifying in a sense, for we must die to sin in order to rise up with Him in holiness. His Kingdom is not of this world and we must crucify the distortions of our souls that have become so familiar to us.

When the struggle is hard and we want to give up, remember the difference between a naked and isolated person out of his mind due to the power of evil in his soul and that person "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind." That is really what is at stake in the question of whether we will do

all that we can to welcome the Lord's healing presence in our lives or run away from Him in fear. May He grant us all the wisdom and strength to choose blessedness over despair, to choose life over death. Amen.

* * * *

Saint Gregory the Theologian writes, "When they fittingly and worthily partake of the most holy Body of our Lord, this becomes a weapon for those under attack and a return for those who have abandoned God. It fortifies the weak, gladdens the healthy, heals the sick and protects our well-being. Through Holy Communion we're more easily corrected, we become more patient and resilient as regards pain and sorrows. It makes us warmer in our love, subtle in knowledge, willing in obedience and sharp and swift in the exercise of our gifts. With those who do not commune frequently, however, the opposite is true, since they aren't sealed with the Precious Blood of our Lord.

Frequent Communion by St. Nicholas of Mt. Athos

The Lamb is slaughtered and, through the Precious Blood, theory and practice are sealed, that is habit and action, the supports of my own gates, of the movements of the mind. These open freely onto contemplation and then are closed again, like gates, against the contemplation of more sublime and inconceivable matters."

Saint Cyril of Alexandria says that, through Holy Communion, the demons, the immaterial thieves, do not find our souls abandoned, so they cannot enter through the senses. You should understand the senses as being the door to your house. Through them, images of all things enter the heart and the immeasurable abundance of the desires are poured into it. The prophet Joel calls the senses 'windows' (*Joel, 2, 9*), since the thieves can enter by them, because they weren't built with the Precious Blood of Christ.

Saint Cyril also says that through Holy Communion we are cleansed of all spiritual impurity and we become more zealous and fervent for the virtues. The Precious Blood of Christ not only sets us free from all corruption, it also

cleanses us from all the impurities hidden within our soul. It does not allow us to become cold, through negligence, but makes us zealous and fervent in the Holy Spirit.

Saint Theodore the Studite observes [to the monks at the Monastery of Studium] that tears and compunction have great power. But be-

yond everything else put together, Holy Communion has great power and benefit and 'in this matter I see that you are very negligent. You do not come to Holy Communion. I'm shocked and amazed that I see you taking communion only on Sundays, but you do not do so if there is a celebration of the Liturgy on another day. I am not telling you this so that you can simply take communion as you like, without preparation. Saint Paul says we must examine our conscience before being nourished by the holy Bread and drinking from the sacred Chalice. Those who partake unworthily will be condemned because of their lack of discrimination, in that they do not venerate the holy Body and Blood of the Lord. God forbid. I am telling you to commune frequently so that we can cleanse ourselves as much as possible with our desire and love for Holy Communion. In this way we will partake purely'.

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