

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

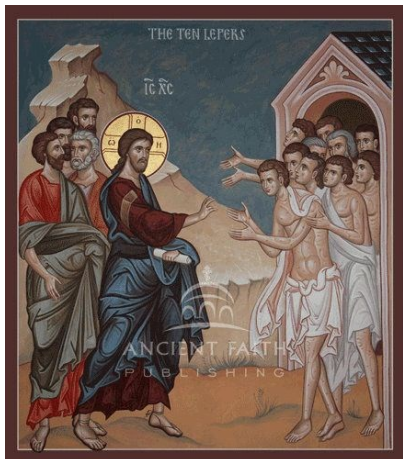
Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be Forever!



Volume 10 Issue 491

28th Sunday after Pentecost-Christ heals the infirm Woman

December 5, 2021



It is easy for people to fall prey to the passions of fear, worry, and anger in response to the great challenges that our nation and world face today, as well as to those we encounter in our families and in other areas of our lives. In such circumstances, we must not ignore the importance of one of the most basic virtues necessary for

human flourishing, namely, gratitude.

Psychologists report that writing down five things for which you are grateful each day is good for your health, both mentally and physically. Doing so is linked with lower rates of depression, anxiety, and pain, and also with a greater sense of well-being. This reflects the profound truth that to be a human person is by definition to be the recipient of God's blessings. Thanksgiving for all that God has done for us is absolutely essential for the healing of our souls, as well as for responding to the grave challenges of life in holy ways.

The word "eucharist" means thanksgiving, and in the *anaphora* of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, the priest thanks God for bringing us into being out of nothing and for raising us up from slavery to sin into the
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+ 28th Sunday after Pentecost +
+++ St. Sava of Palestine +++

Epistle: Colossians 1: 12-18

Gospel: Luke 17: 12-19

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.*

Commentary on The Our Father by Archimandrite George

Our Father, who art in heaven. The Lord's Prayer begins with this invocation. The Lord teaches us to name God, Father. Father, because He is our creator and maker, the granter of being, of life. Father, because for us Christians, He is also the granter of well being, of the adoption which He gave us through Jesus Christ.

Before Christ, due to our apostasy from our heavenly Father, we were not only separated from Him, but we were, also, His enemies. Jesus

Christ, the Son of God the Father, by nature, with His incarnation and His crucifixion, reconciled us to God the Father and made us His children by Grace.

With Holy Baptism, we received the grace of adoption. Thus we became brethren of Christ, who is the first-born amongst many brethren. Therefore He is Father because He grants us life; and not only life, but His life in Christ.

As Saint John Chrysostom writes, "He who calls God, Father, con-

fesses through this sole appellation, deliverance from sins and retraction of hell and righteousness and sanctification and redemption and adoption and heritage and brotherhood to the Only Begotten Son, as well as to the granting of the Holy Spirit."

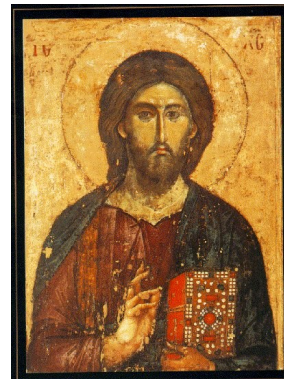
Addressing as "Father" our All-Holy God and Almighty Creator of everything, we confess what He has done for us, His unworthy children, and mostly what He has done for us through our Lord
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

If you have any questions about the church or would like to speak with our 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

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, Doug, Heidi, Laura, Elizabeth, Matthew, Corella, Ron, Daniel, Frankie, Pat, Bill, Carol, Pam, Gladys, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

Sin

How does sin develop in a person's soul? The Holy Fathers of Christian asceticism and devotion, better than all the learned psychiatrists who claim to know the sinful human soul, differentiate the following levels of sin: The first moment of sin is its introduction, when temptation has only become outlined in a person's

consciousness as a sinful impression, an impure thought, and so on.

If during this first moment a person decisively and immediately rejects sin, he will not sin, but will defeat it, and will have a plus, not a minus, for his soul. It is easiest to overcome sin in the beginning. If the beginning is not rejected, it transforms gradually into an unclear striving and then into a conscious, clear desire to sin. Here a person already begins to be drawn towards a particular kind of sin. He can at this moment, without an especially difficult struggle resist succumbing to it and not sin, in which he will be helped by the clear voice of his conscience—and with God's help if he seeks it.

It is most difficult to struggle against sin when it becomes a habit, because it recurs frequently. That means generally, when any habits acquired the habitual actions are performed almost automatically, unnoticeable by a person. The struggle with a sin that has become habitual is very difficult because it is hard not only to overcome oneself but also to watch and notice sin approaching.

Commentary on the Our Father, continued from p.1

Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Thus, the invocation "Father" brings us close to the Trinitarian God.

Saint Maximus the Confessor writes, "Justly the Lord teaches (those who pray) to promptly start from theology. He also introduces us to the mysterious way of the Cause who created all beings, He who is actually the cause of all beings. Because the words of the prayer contain the revelation of the Father, of His name and of His Kingdom, so that we learn from the very start to respect and worship the Trinity in One. Because the Only Begotten Son is the name of God the Father, with substantial hypostasis. And the Holy Spirit, with substantial hypostasis, is the Kingdom of God the Father.

His infinite love and charity allow and impel us to name Him our Father. The mind of the pious man is amazed. "Who will give me wings like the doves, according to the psalm?", Saint Gregory of Nyssa writes, "so that I am able to ascend over all things perceptible by the

senses, over those that are changed and altered, to ascend over to the Unchangeable and Unalterable, and with an unmoved and unwavering state of soul to dwell in Him first with my will and afterwards to invoke Him, with the very familiar invocation and say "Father"! What soul must have he who has spoken to God? What boldness? What conscience?"

Great and priceless is the gift. As many times as we want, we can address God and call Him our Father. Still, when the Christian is rendered worthy and perceptibly receives the Grace of the Holy Spirit, then he feels in his heart the paternity of God and his own sonship. He feels filial and tender love towards God the Father. He feels like an affectionate son of a loving Father.

The Holy Spirit Himself cries out in our heart, "Abba, Father", creating this tender love towards God.

"Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His son to our hearts, shouting, Abba, Father". In accordance to the image of our heavenly Father, we

men can also become true spiritual fathers or fathers of the flesh. Saint Gregory Palamas teaches that we do not name God the Father in accordance to earthly fathers, but we name men 'fathers' in accordance to the image of God the Father, "...after whom, according to the great Paul, all fathers in heaven and earth are named."

If the earthly fathers reflect the Grace and the blessing of the heavenly

Father, they are true fathers as well. Without this Grace, they are not true and genuine fathers and they can not offer anything essential to their children. When men are estranged from the heavenly Father, they can not become genuine and proper fathers.



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(Homily on the Jesus healing 10 Lepers, cont'd from p.1)

blessed life of the heavenly Kingdom. When we realize that our very existence, as well as that of the universe itself and of all our blessings, is completely dependent upon the unfathomable love of God, we simply must give thanks. God's blessings are so overwhelming that we surely cannot name or count them fully: "For all these things, we give thanks unto Thee and to Thine only-begotten Son and Thy Holy Spirit: for all things we know and of which we know not, for all the benefits bestowed upon us, both manifest and unseen."

How tragic it is, then, for our spiritual vision to be so out of focus that we become blind to the beauty all around us and lose faith in the abiding presence of our Lord, Who has conquered even the grave itself and promised to be with us always even to the end of the world. Those who believe that there is no truth or hope beyond this life and trust in no one other than themselves will inevitably be captive to fear, worry, anger, ingratitude, and a host of other spiritual diseases. The hard truth is that this is not a temptation only for atheists, for there is often a great contrast between what we say we believe and the actual state of our souls.

That was the case for the nine lepers who did not return to give thanks for their healing from leprosy in today's gospel reading. They were Jews who had called out for Christ's healing and had obeyed His command to go to the Temple in Jerusalem to show themselves to the priests. Since they were cleansed of leprosy as they went, they got what they wanted from the Lord and moved on with their lives from there. They took the tremendous blessing they had received, which had transformed their lives completely, for granted. Like Adam and Eve eating the fruit in disobedience to God's command, they were concerned only with fulfilling their own desires. Their spiritual blindness was such that they saw no further than getting what they wanted for their own bodies.

It is easy for us to become just like them when we fail to appreciate the great profundity of God's blessings in our lives. His gracious divine energies permeate all reality, and we are guilty of self-centered ingratitude whenever we do not offer any dimension of our life back to Him. The Samaritan leper provides an example of what that looks like. He could have simply gone on his way without giving Christ a second thought.

That is precisely what would have been expected in that time and place, for Jews and Samaritans had nothing to do with each other. Indeed, the great shock of this story is that the only one of the ten lepers who returned to give thanks for healing from the most dreaded disease of that time was a Samaritan, who was considered a foreigner and a heretic by the Jews. Leprosy separated its victims from anyone who did not have it. The men had stood at a distance from Christ when they called out for healing, for they were considered dangerously unclean. After being delivered from such a terrible malady, only the Samaritan fell down before Him in gratitude. Then the Lord said, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

If we want to cultivate the kind of faith that makes us well and gives us the spiritual clarity to be grateful for

our blessings regardless of what is going on in our lives or in the world around us, we must become like the Samaritan. Unfortunately, doing so is not easy. The Samaritan's entire encounter with Christ was not easy, for he knew what the Jews thought of people like him. Nonetheless, he obeyed the Lord's command to head toward Jerusalem, which was the location of the Jewish, not the Samaritan, Temple. The priests surely would not have welcomed him there. Nonetheless, he had the humble faith to obey Christ. And when he realized that he had been healed, he alone returned to thank the Savior for this life-changing miracle.

Perhaps the Samaritan did so because, more than the others,

he knew that his healing had been completely dependent upon the mercy of Christ, a blessing that he in no way deserved or could expect. At least the Jewish lepers could have reasonably expected the Messiah to heal them and to direct them to obey the Mosaic law by showing themselves to the priests. The Samaritan had no such expectations; indeed, his very existence as a Samaritan normally would have excluded him from the entire scene. In the midst of such a shocking miracle, the eye of his soul was opened such that he knew he had encountered God. He was able to see that this astounding healing was not simply a restoration of physical health, but an epiphany of overwhelming divine love and grace. How else could cleansing from leprosy have come to someone like him in this way?

(continued p. 4, column 1)



Homily on 10 Leper, cont'd p.3

Unlike the Samaritan, we often lack the spiritual vision to see our blessings or ourselves so clearly. We may think that God has simply given us our due as those who are righteous. Recall, however, how Christ taught that it is simply the human condition to be the recipient of God's blessings, "For He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matt. 5:45) The Bible is full of warnings against the temptations faced by those who seem to have the most in life. Contrary to popular opinion then and now, there is no reason to believe that those who are successful by worldly standards are being especially rewarded by God.

Throughout the Lord's ministry, those who responded to Him with humble gratitude were not those who were full of the pride of life. Instead, they were typically people who had been broken by life's trials and disappointments, such as incurable disease, demonic possession, the loss of loved ones, falling into a disreputable occupation, or being on the wrong side of a religious or ethnic divide. They had learned through bitter experience that they could not rely on their accomplishments in this world for their salvation. That is how, like the Samaritan, they were able to develop the gratitude to appreciate how dependent they were upon the mercy of Christ.

Our temptations to fear, worry, and anger today are surely no greater than those experienced by people like the Samaritan leper. Following the example of that righteous man, we must cultivate an abiding awareness of our dependence on the grace of God, not only for the good things of life, but for life itself. We must name and give thanks for our blessings each day as we offer them and ourselves to the Lord for the fulfillment of His purposes for us, our neighbors, and our world. The more we fill our minds with thanksgiving, the less room there will be for the distractions of dark thoughts that serve only to fuel our passions. That is how we will gain the spiritual clarity to see that the Lord Who has conquered death is always with us and will never abandon us. How, then, can we not give thanks?

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Teachings of St. Nectarios (part 3)

Prayer

Our main task, as people, is to pray. We were made in order to glorify God. That's the task we're best suited to

Teachings of St. Nectarios (part 3)

and it's the only one which explains our spiritual mode of existence. It's the only thing which justifies our pre-eminent position within creation. We were made to worship God and to share in his goodness and blessedness.

As the images of God which we are, we long for him and hasten with desire to be lifted up to him. We're made glad by prayers and hymns. The spirit rejoices and the heart skips. The more we pray, the more the soul is stripped of worldly desires and is filled with the good things of heaven. The more it withdraws from earthly things and the pleasures of life, the more it rejoices in the delight of heaven. Our experience and acquired knowledge are proof of this truth.

God is pleased with those prayers which are offered to



him in the appropriate manner, that is, in full cognizance of our imperfection and unworthiness. But such awareness requires rejection of our wicked self and submission to God's commandments; it demands humility and constant spiritual effort. Put all your cares into God's hands and he will provide for you. Don't be faint-hearted or upset. He who examines the hidden depths of our soul knows your wishes and has the power to fulfil them as he knows best. Just ask of him and don't lose heart. Don't think that, because your desire is devoutly to be wished, you therefore have to right to complain if your prayers aren't heeded. God takes care of your needs in a way that you don't understand. Stay calm, then, and call upon God.

Prayers and intercessions don't, of themselves, lead us to perfection. The Lord does that when he comes and resides in us, when we observe his commandments. And one of the first of these is that the will of God should be done in our lives, not our own will. And it should be done with the same punctiliousness as is shown by the angels in heaven. So that we, too, can say: 'Lord, not as I want, but as you wish'; and 'Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'. Unless Christ is within us, prayers and intercessions lead us into delusion. Peace

Peace is a divine gift which is granted lavishly to those who are reconciled with God and carry out his divine commands. Peace is light and flees from sin, which is darkness. Sinners are never peaceful. Struggle against sin and don't let any flaring of passion disturb you. If, in your struggle, you defeat them, the upsurge of the passions is a source of new joy and peace.

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