

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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29th Sunday after Pentecost-Sunday of the Forefathers

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Today is the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers of Christ. The Lord calls on us this day to recall His earthly forefathers through whom God the Father prepares the way for the holy Incarnation of His Word, the Logos of God. It is through His Word that God creates all that was made and through whom the whole creation will be made

anew, including, and especially us, His beloved human creation, alone created in His holy image and likeness.

On this day, we begin to ponder in advance of the Feast of His holy Nativity what it means that God took on human flesh and human nature to become one of His own creation. Remarkably, in doing so, He adds Himself to the genealogy of that created human order He Himself established by the proceeding of His own Word.

Think about that for one moment! This act, called kenosis in the Greek, or “self-emptying,” is God’s ultimate “condescension,” toward us, that is, it demonstrates to us the humility of God, manifested in no greater wise than through His holy Incarnation. God, who is outside the universe He created, wills to become incarnate, one
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+ 29th Sunday after Pentecost +
+ St. Spyridon Wonderworker +

Epistle: Colossians 3: 4-11

Gospel: Luke 14: 16-24

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 (part 2)

When we address God, “Father”, we acknowledge His paternal concern for us. We are not orphans. We are not alive because of some fate or blind destiny. We are creatures of His love and we are constantly under His paternal attendance and care. His guiding and remedying love can be seen even behind life’s hardships.

Saint Cosmas of Aitolia reminds us of God’s paternal love: “And first of all our duty is to love our God because He granted us such spacious land to

temporarily dwell in, so many thousands-myrriads herbs, plants, fountains, rivers, wells, the sea, fish, air, day, night, fire, the sky, stars, the sun, the moon. For whom did He do all this? For us. What did He owe us? Nothing. All these are gifts. He made us human beings and not animals. He made us pious and Orthodox Christians.

Even though we continually sin, He feels compassion for us like a father does and He does not put us to death in order to place us in Hell, but He

awaits with open arms for our repentance. He waits for the time when we will repent and stop doing evil deeds and do good, confess, amend ourselves, so that He will embrace us, kiss us and place us in Paradise where we will rejoice forever.

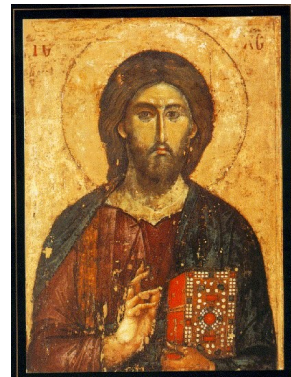
Such a loving God and such a long lord and master should we not also love and if need be shed our blood a thousand times for His love, as He shed it for our love?” Therefore, a feeling of
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy 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

Forgiveness

According to the holy fathers, forgiveness is the virtue that makes us similar to God, Who is Love. When the apostles asked the Savior if they were to forgive those sinning against them "as many as seven times", He answered, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times" (Matthew 18: 21-22). This means

that one must always forgive, because without forgiveness, our heart, according to St Ephraim the Syrian, turns into barren soil in which the grain of the Christian faith can never sprout.

Forgiveness means seeing in a person not a sinner, but the image and likeness of God. This aspect of forgiveness can serve as a reminder for us when we are facing the choice between forgiving or condemning a person. Yes, from a human perspective, it is sometimes very difficult to forgive someone who has betrayed you, and continue to befriend such a person, as if nothing has happened. At the same time, we must remember the One Whose name we bear as a common noun. We are Christians, which means that we are followers of Christ. Let's remember what Christ did when someone betrayed him. Peter betrayed his Teacher, but later repented and became the supreme apostle. Remembering Peter's example, and, more importantly, the words and deeds of Christ Himself, we must also forgive and hope that those who sin against us will be corrected.

Commentary on the Our Father, continued from p.1

security that banishes every feeling of insecurity and anxiety, emanates from the faithful invocation of our God as our Father. It is a great honor for us to call God, our Father, but also great is the responsibility for us who must become worthy of our heavenly Father. Let us recall our Lord's words, "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Luke 6, 36). "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5, 48).

Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite writes on this subject, "For this reason our Lord instructs us how to pray to our Father by Grace, so that we are always protected under the grace of adoption until the end, that is to say, to be God's children not only by the rebirth and the baptism, but by our labors and deeds, as well. Because he who does not perform spiritual acts, but performs satanic ones, is not worthy to call God his Father, but instead the Devil, according to the word of our Lord, "Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father ye

do" (John, 8, 44), that is to say, in relation with evil you are born from your father, the Devil, and you love to act according to the evil desires of your father. The Lord orders us to name Him our Father. To inform us firstly, that we were truly born children of God with the rebirth of the Holy Baptism and secondly, that we must preserve the signs, that is to say, the virtues of our Father and not be ashamed somehow of the relationship we have with Him."

It is characteristic that our Lord teaches us to address God not only Father, but as our Father, not my Father. Thus, he deters us from a selfish relationship with God. There is God and we, not God and I. Thus our heart 'embraces' all our fellow men who are by nature our brethren, due to our common origin from God, the Father. Our heart also embraces all Orthodox Christians who, due to our common faith and common birth from the same spiritual 'womb' of the Church, the Holy Font, are in addition our brethren by Grace and by Spirit.

How can God be your Father, if you do not accept your fellow men as your brethren, especially those of the same faith? "The Lord teaches us", writes St. John Chrysostom, "to pray for all people, to mention in our supplication about the common body and not to pursue at all our personal interests, but on every occasion to pursue the interests of our fellow man. Thus, man avoids hate, he bridle imprudence, he emits envy, he brings about love, the mother of all goods, and he exiles abnormality of human things and shows that the equality of rank between the king and the poor is very great, since we all partake in the same greatest and the most necessary gifts of our God.



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(Homily on the Sunday of the Forefathers, cont'd from p.1)

of His own creation, for the sake of us sinners, who continuously reject and rebel against Him. Such is God's great love and mercy for us. Such are the attributes of the One, true God in Trinity.

The list of those ancestors of Christ—the holy forefathers—contains a list of the “who’s who” of the Old Testament—men and women, sinners and foreigners, all of whom manifested extraordinary faith, repentance, humility, willingness to be in this world but not of this world, who lived in the fear of God, an attribute in response to God's mercy that we see precious little of in our own day. That respect, holy fear, was enough to motivate them to have faith and truly live for God without excuse.

The women among these ancestors, such as Rahab, a foreigner, and Ruth point to the prominent place that women will play in mankind's redemption through the Virgin Mary, the new Eve, the new model of womanhood, along with the women disciples of the Lord—the holy Myrrh-bearers, but also, being a foreigner, Ruth demonstrates that the Messiah comes to redeem all of humanity, human nature itself, in order to create a new race of Adam—one not based on or race, but in the eternal foundation that is our new identity in Christ God, a race capable of deification, participation in the life God is, conquering sin and the passions, so that we may be able to attain to the near presence of God in His eternal Kingdom.

Yes, even before He sent His disciples to preach the good news to “all nations”, Christ Himself hails, in part, from Gentile seed. The Jew of Jews, St. Paul, reminds us of this truth in today's Epistle, saying, “put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all” (Col. 3:11). Our new birth means that we ground our identity in the heavenly reality of life with Christ here and now, striving for growth in communion with God, fighting the temporal passions that are part of this temporal and passing life, so that we may inherit eternal life as fellow victors with the Saints.

We who worship here today are inheritors of this promise that God made to Abraham when He declared, “in your seed, all the nations of the earth shall be

blessed” (Gen. 26:4). Many Jews, who did not follow the prophets, saw this promise as given purely through the Abrahamic blood line, grounded in this world and, in turn, partaking of the fallen race of Adam.

But God had something greater in mind: the renewal and regeneration of the human race itself where everyone is called. No one is excluded from the calling to be born anew in Christ, the new Adam, to become a co-heir with Him. St. Paul reminds us of this truth today:

“Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry... anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth... since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created

him...” (Colossians 3)

So, we see that there's a great participation here in our salvation that you and I must muster for salvation's sake in deed but also in mind and attitude, to exercise our free will. We strive with much effort and in the fear of God to “put to death,” as St. Paul says, all those passions, sins, that otherwise pollute our souls and keep us from communion with God, living out that calling.

God's will is clear for us: He desires to give us a new name, a new identity, a new beginning, a new nature, to bring us to enlightenment, but what if we don't avail ourselves of this great gift of God's mercy? What if we keep putting off repentance out of fear, a form of pride, of over reliance on self and not on God, what if we take the Orthodox life in Christ on our terms, not making a priority of Christ and His

Church?

Any time of the year, but especially now, we can buy into the consumerism and materialism of our present world and forget God and our calling in Him to progress in our faith, to learn to cooperate more with the work of the Holy Spirit, not just for ourselves and our own salvation, but to the benefit of those around us as well. Today's Gospel is an invitation, yes; it is also a warning not to take God's mercy and love for granted. All are called to the marriage Feast (that of Christ and His bride, the Church), but not all choose to be among His chosen, that is, to deny themselves, submit themselves and their self-will to the fullness of humanity, life in Christ, to

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take up the cross that is our denial of self. God's life is never forced upon us; we can choose death, that is, apartness from God and His life. None of us, even those who attend church regularly, can assume we're already among the saved because 'being saved' is the ongoing working out of our salvation, the ongoing taking up of our cross necessary for the new life in Christ and our continued journey into greater union with Him.

The message of today's Gospel, the invitation to the marriage feast, is that those who reject the fullness of the life in Christ are not worthy of that life but to those who desire it, thirst for it, our Lord says, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). He says,

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice, I will come into him and dine with him and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20). Christ invites us to share in *koinonia* (Communion) with Him—the King of Kings, our Creator, our Savior who comes to be born, humble, lowly, in a manger in a cave among the beasts He created. To receive Him, to be in His near presence, we too must grow in humility and be grafted into the faith of those holy Fathers who've come before us, who did not withhold anything from God. It's because of their humility that the poor shepherds were the first to receive the news of Messiah's birth, for, as King David says, "a contrite and humble heart" God will never despise.

God loves us too much to hold back from warning us of the consequences of neglecting His life, our calling to new life in Him, that for which you and I have been created. He is the Life, and in that life, there is no place for resting on our "laurels," or coming before the Bridegroom unprepared. We prepare ourselves by humbling ourselves and repenting, confessing our sins, changing our priorities and way of life. We prepare by struggling harder to put off the passions, all stubbornness and pride to be obedient to Christ and His Holy Church. Advent is meant to spur us on to make our souls ready to meet Christ first, when He comes to us at Nativity in the Eucharist of the Feast, and second, as we await His glorious and awesome Second Coming. Amen.

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Peace and holiness are the two necessary conditions for those who desire, with longing, to see the face of God.

Peace is the foundation on which holiness is built. Holiness can't dwell in a turbulent and angry heart. When anger lingers in the heart, it creates enmity and hate towards your neighbor. This is why we have to be reconciled quickly towards them, lest we're deprived of the grace of God which sanctifies our soul. Those who are at peace with themselves are also at peace with their neighbor and at peace with God. Such people are full of sanctity, because God himself abides in them.

Love

Seek love. Every day, ask God for love, because with love comes the whole host of other good things and virtues. Love and you'll be loved by others. Give your whole heart to God, so that you may dwell in love. 'Those who abide in love abide in God; and God abides in them'. (1 Jn. 4, 16). You must be very careful in your interpersonal relationships and respect each other as sacred persons, as images of God. Never be swayed by the body or beauty, but only by the soul.

Beware the feeling of love, because when the heart isn't warmed by pure prayer, love is in danger of becoming carnal and unnatural; it can darken the nous and consume the heart. We must investigate on a daily basis whether or not our love flows from the conjoining of the love we have in common with Christ; whether it springs from the fullness of our love for the Lord. Those who are vigilant and keep their love pure will be safe from the snares of the evil one who

tries to gradually transform Christian love into common, emotional love.

Discretion

I urge you to show discretion and circumspection in all things. Avoid extremes. Austerity depends on virtues. Those who don't have an abundance of virtues and try to keep pace with the perfect, attempting to live in privation like the great ascetics, are in danger of becoming proud and then falling. This is why you should proceed with discretion and not exhaust your body with labors beyond your powers. Remember that bodily asceticism simply helps the soul to reach perfection, which is achieved primarily through the striving of the soul. Don't tighten the string more than it'll take. You don't have to force God to grant you his gifts. Anything we receive, we receive from divine mercy.

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