

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!



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30th Sunday after Pentecost—The Baptism of Christ

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Today's gospel provides with a look at earthly riches and spiritual reality. A young man, described as a rich ruler, comes to Jesus. It appears that he is seeking justification, or at least some reassurance that he is on the right spiritual path. In response to Jesus' questions, he asserts that he has followed the commandments all of his life. He

has not committed adultery, nor murder. He has not stolen from others, borne false witness, nor failed to honor his parents. He has, in other words, followed the rules. He has obeyed the commandments. In the eyes of the Jewish faithful, he was most certainly a righteous man.

For us, living today, his way of life would be considered praiseworthy. We are all required, at a minimum, to keep the commandments of God. What could be more simple? But the truth is that the "thou shall not's of Scripture are only, if you will, kindergarten for Christians. If we want more, if we want to follow the road of the saints and truly become the children of God, we must not think that our spiritual life stops there.

Jesus, seeing the young man with the eyes of God, knew that, and
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+ 30th Sunday after Pentecost +
+The chains of the Apostle Peter+

Epistle: Colossians 3:12-16

Gospel: Luke 18:18-27

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.*

Time-Our Great Opportunity, by Archimandrite Alexander of Essex

Time is something tragic in the life of man because every new year measures how near his life is to its end. Is finally time a friend or an enemy, a blessing or a curse? The way in which we measure time is necessary, but it is also relative, artificial.

Yet, every beginning of the year is an opportunity for us to give an account for our spiritual life and make a new beginning. From the beginning of creation, Scripture speaks about time: 'And God called the light Day, and

the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day' (Gen. 1: 5).

Certainly, man was not created in order to be imprisoned in time, he was created for eternity. The angels were created in eternity, and for this reason the fall of Lucifer is irrevocable. For man, time makes manifest God's lovingkindness because, in His good Providence, He fashioned him within time and space, so that he may make use of 'the changeability of time', about

which the philosophers speak, and have the possibility to repent.

It is impossible to take hold of the present moment: until we call it 'present', it has already become past. This changeability of time is however a blessing for man, because it gives him the opportunity to change in good and build a spiritual state within himself. Saint Paul exhorts us to redeem the time of our life because the days are evil (Eph. 5:16-17).

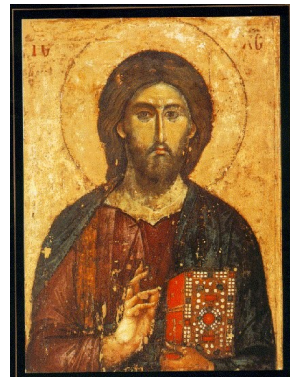
The time of our life
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

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

Does God Punish?

No matter how much you talk about God's love, it remains purely theoretical unless you've lived it at a particular time, through a specific experience. Not as unexpected aid at a difficult moment, but an enfolding embrace of the soul at a time of frigidity, abandonment and solitariness. Because if you've every felt that you're in

hell, you'll know what it means for Christ to seize hold of you and raise you to the light. Then you receive his perfect, sincere, love, which depends not on what you are and what you've done but on who he is: 'God is love'.

This is why there's no trace of vengefulness or human passion in our passionless God. Any references to parallels of human behavior, in anthropomorphic terms, are made so that weak people can understand, can be restrained from plummeting headlong into a life without Christ.

The evil one uses two will o' the wisps to befuddle us on the path towards God: he presents God as being ruthless, harsh and demanding towards us.

Any trials and tribulations we undergo certainly don't come from God. The 'punishments' which derive from our profligate and sinful life are the result of collective or personal choices. Despite this, his love transforms them into instruments of humility, repentance, and reevaluation of the course of our life; provided, of course, that's what we want.

Time our great opportunity, con't from p.1

receives value and meaning not according to the number of our years, but according to the measure in which we make good use of it in depth. If you noticed, in the readings for the feast of holy Fathers, it is said that the truly honorable old age depends on whether man lives with integrity and has a pure life. 'Being perfected in a short time, the righteous fulfilled long years' (Wis 4:13); this means that their life reached its fulness.

Very often we hear people say, 'how much time I have lost in my life!' Unfortunately, we grow up with the patterns of this world and we do not know how to make good use of the great gift called time in our life. In the darkness of ignorance, people deal with time by turning with nostalgia to the past, which no longer belongs to them. Other times, the enemy leads them to despair, by reminding them all the failures of the past.

Other people, again, transfer their mind to the future through imagination. It is tragic that man has the ten-

dency to notice more easily the marks of time on the others than on himself. He wants continually to escape the corruption of time, to be immortal on earth. Yet, time and death came as an act of the utter love of God for man, so that he may not become immortal together with evil.

The greatest event under heaven is the moment when God Himself became man. Then God's eternity entered time, intersecting the horizontal course of historical time. The Lord is called 'the Christ', that is, 'the Anointed' of God, and He Himself anoints time and the whole of created being with His divine energy. In the Old Testament, time reached its fulness when all the things God wanted to happen came to pass.

The Fathers identify 'the fulness of time' (Gal. 4:4) with the Holy Virgin. Likewise, for us, together with the redemption of time, we also need fulness of life. The means we must use for our life to reach fulness and redeem eternity, is time itself. Saint Basil says that time is an interval

which unfolds together with the creation of the world. It is an interval of time which has a beginning and an end; it began with the creation of the world and continues in parallel with the progress of the world.

Saint Sophrony says that time is the place of our encounter with God; it is the time wherein God creates gods. Liturgically, the term 'kairos' is used when we say that the priests 'take kairos', that is, they prepare with a small service before they enter the altar to celebrate the Liturgy. In the same way, the time of our life is a 'kairos' during which we prepare ourselves for the life to come.
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(Homily on the Rich Young Man, cont'd from p.1)

pierced right to the heart of the matter. The issue, as Jesus observes, is not simple obedience of rules and regulations. The issue is not whether or not we can justify ourselves, to make ourselves appear to be righteous or worthy of commendation. The true issue, the key question which every Christian must face, is whether or not a person has surrendered his entire life to God, or does he or she reserve some parts wholly for himself.

Put another way, does a person observe the more difficult commandments of the New Testament: that he truly love the Lord God with all of his heart, and all of his strength, and all of his soul, and that he love his neighbor as himself? Or has he compartmentalized his life, so that God is consigned to only one of a great number of boxes, pigeon-holed and kept separate from the rest of life?

Jesus knew that the focus of the young man was his wealth. It was what characterized his life. It was, in the end, the way in which he defined who he was and what he did. It was, in the end, the thing that kept him from God. He thus challenged his questioner to abandon the very thing that, whether or not the man knew it, separated him from God. To that end, Jesus asked the man to surrender that part of him which he kept separate and that he valued the most—his wealth. Keep in mind that in this instance, wealth was simply the symptom of the disease.

In other circumstances, with other people, it was something else. Often it was a rigid attachment to the Law itself, or to the odds and ends of daily life. The point is that in each instance, here is something separating the person from true worship, from a genuine relationship with God. St. Clement of Alexandria spoke to this very issue, when he wrote: "What then made him depart from the Master, from the entreaty, the hope, the life, previously pursued with ardor? 'Sell your possessions'. And what is this? He does not, as some conceive offhand, bid him throw away the substance he possessed and abandon his property; but bids him banish from his soul his notions about wealth, his excitement and morbid feeling about it, the anxieties, which are the thorns of existence, which choke the seed of life."

As St. Clement points out, many have disposed of their wealth to no benefit, if their underlying passions remain.

And St. John Chrysostom, who himself spoke harshly of the wealthy in his own age, noted that even the poor are lost if they have within themselves the same overwhelming attraction to riches and wealth. For that matter, it is worth remembering that there were people close to Jesus who had wealth: Matthew the tax collector turned Evangelist, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea. It is not the money. It is the heart of the one who holds it.

Looked at in this way, we see an immensely important principle that we can, and should apply to our own life. The question is not what do we have in the bank. The question instead is this: how do we define ourselves?

How do we see ourselves, and more importantly, how do we appear to God? For many of us, this is a genuine challenge. It is not uncommon to reserve some aspect of our lives as being outside of our faith. That preserve, that part of our life that is separate from God, can be anything. For some of us, it may be our desire for wealth, or what we do for a living. For others, it may be a seemingly unimportant hobby or passion. It may be the music we like, the clothes we wear, or the television and movies we like to watch. Whatever it may be, we know—if we are honest with ourselves—that this is an area that we like to keep for ourselves.

In our gospel today, Jesus knew that even though the rich young ruler kept the rules, and observed the law, that his desire for wealth, his

defining characteristic, was also the background noise that would keep him from hearing the still small voice. It was what would keep him from truly entering the Kingdom of God, because if he could not hear that whispering voice, he would never find the gate.

This is the challenge for us. We may not be rich young rulers, and we may think this gospel does not apply to us. We may lead moral lives, not breaking any of the rules, and we may think that this gospel does not apply to us. But if we are honest with ourselves, we will see something, somewhere inside of us, that we cling to tenaciously, an area of our life which we stubbornly refuse to yield to God. Whatever it may be, we find ourselves faced with the dilemma of the young man—can we surrender that which we hold dear, that we clutch to ourselves and call precious—can we abandon that, for the love of Christ?



CHRIST AND THE RICH YOUNG RULER

It is true that resentment and hostility alienate you from your brother who is a member of you, since both of you are members of Christ and therefore, members of each other. With remission of sins and reconciliation, you are reassociated and joined with your own member. How can you rest when a member of you is separated from your body? Only if you are not a member of the Body of Christ or if you are a dead member of Him, will you not feel your brother as a member of you. The Christian who lives a God-centered life, lives following the example of the heavenly Father.

Since God forgives, he also forgives. Otherwise, how could he ask God to forgive him, without forgiving the minor offences of his brethren? He would resemble the cunning servant in the well known parable who would not forgive a small debt owed to him by a fellow servant, while the Merciful Lord had made him a present of his own, tremendous debt. This petition helps us retain a humble spirit, because it reminds us not only of our personal sinfulness, but also of human nature's sinfulness.

Saint Gregory of Nyssa, in reference to human nature's sinfulness, very precisely states: "Let us count, beginning from here, the trespasses of man towards God. First of all, man was guilty of punishment by God, because he estranged himself from his Creator and went over to the enemy, by running away and revolting against his natural Lord.

Secondly, because he exchanged his independent freedom with the deadly slavery of sin and chose to be governed by the power of destruction, instead of remaining near God. Is there a greater evil than not to see the beauty of the Creator, but instead, to turn one's face to the ugliness of sin? What sort of punishment should be set for the contempt of the divine goods and preference for the lures used by the devil? Also, who can enumerate man's myriad trespasses? The destruction of the image and the ruin of the seal, we received at our initial creation. The loss of the drachma and the departure from the paternal table.

The addiction to the filthy life of the swine and the waste of the precious wealth and all the other similar trespasses we can find in the Holy Bible and think of by ourselves, who can enumerate them? Since the human race is guilty of such trespasses against God and must serve punishment, for this reason, I think the Word (Logos) edu-

cates us with the words of the prayer. He instructs us not to show any boldness in our conversation with God, as if we had a clean conscience, even if someone is, as far as possible, free of human trespasses" (St. Gregory of Nyssa, On Prayer).

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

And do not allow us, O Lord, to fall into temptation, but deliver us from evil. According to Saint Maximus, the temptations are of two kinds: those which bring pleasure and those which bring pain. The first ones are voluntary and give birth to the passions. The second ones are involuntary and banish the passions. We must avoid the

voluntary ones. We must not seek the involuntary ones and must always loathe them, because we are weak and might submit to them. When they come, though, we must bear them with courage as 'purifiers' of the soul.

In reference to the subject of the painful temptations, Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite notes, "God, acting in sympathy towards our hardships and evil tendency, allows the temptations, which can sometimes be very horrible and awful, to come to us in various ways, so that we be humbled and obtain self-awareness, even though all these temptations seem useless to us. In this way, God shows at the same time His benevolence and His wisdom because we benefit even more from what seems to us more harmful, because we are humbled, which is what our soul

needs.

By teaching us not to pursue the temptations, says Saint John Chrysostom, the Lord educates us to be aware of our weakness and in this way He bridges the self-conceit, the Pride. However, when temptations come against our will, then we must face them with bravery, "order to show our bravery and our lack of vanity". Saint John Chrysostom also notes that the Lord doesn't say 'from the evil ones', that is to say from evil people, but 'from the evil one', that is to say from the devil. The Lord does this to teach us not to lay the blame on and bear a grudge towards people who distress us, but to lay the blame on the devil who incites them. He calls the devil, evil, "Ordering us to fight against him without truce". Furthermore, he does this to show us that wickedness is not a natural condition, but the result of bad intention.

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