

# 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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32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost— Jesus heals a Woman's daughter

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We all know the saying, "pride goeth before a fall." Our first parents, Adam and Eve, suffered a fall that was at its heart a consequence of pride, of disregarding God's way for what seemed good to them at the time even as they knew it was not God's will. Their willful sin plunged all of us and the world into an environment of sin with

all its terrible consequences.

Think for a moment of the many ways pride attacks us: it manifests itself in vainglory, thinking we're better than others; but at the same time, it can also manifest itself in an inverted manner, causing us to doubt God, our identity and self-worth in Him, calling us to despair and question our self-worth. The list of prideful sins is long: Irreverence, sentimentality, presumption, distrust, over-sensitiveness, disobedience, impenitence, and only then, do we get to the more familiar manifestations of pride: vanity, arrogance, snobbery and judgment of others.

For each of these categories of pride there are a great number of spiritual consequences in our lives, our relationship with God and with others. And so, we can see why 4<sup>th</sup> century St. John Cassian says of pride, that  
*(continued p. 3)*

+ 32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost +  
+ Feast of The Three Hierarchs +

Epistle: 1 Timothy 1:15-17

Gospel: Matthew 15:21-28

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 Three Holy Hierarchs, by Metropolitan Philaret of Jordanville***

Today we celebrate the feast of the Three Hierarchs. The Church glorifies the memory of these great laborers in the harvest-fields of the Lord, whom She singled out from the uncountable host of saints, calling them Universal teachers and hierarchs.

The Church emphasizes that each one of them was in his own time a Diocesan Bishop, but that their spiritual influence spread far beyond their borders; and truly the entire flock of the Universal Orthodox Church learns

of Christian wisdom, Christian knowledge and piety from them.

The Church canonized them each individually. In early January, we celebrated the feast day of Saint Basil the Great, not too long ago, Saint Gregory the Theologian, and most recently the Translation of the Relics of St John Chrysostom.

Today, the Church established a special feast day of these Three Hierarchs, for according to Church tradition, after each of them completed their earthly path, there

had been many conflicts among believers. Each of them represented great spiritual significance—they made an impression on all who met them and for this reason each of these three great hierarchs gathered devotees.

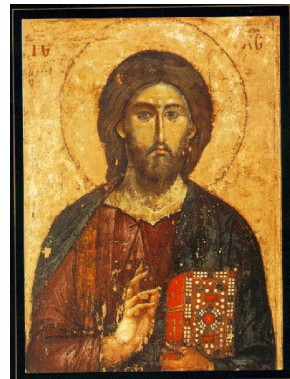
There were even groups who called themselves Basilites, Gregorians, and Johnites. There had been quarrels between them as to who among these bishops stood higher in the eyes of God. Church history teaches us that all three hierarchs appeared,  
*(continued on p.2)*

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, 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

**The Light of Christ**

From the moment the Lord came into the world as a human person ‘everything has been filled with light: the heavens, the earth and the nether world’ Christ, then, is the light, and every conscious Christian is a secondary light, if, in their existence, their soul and body, they experience this light in such a way that they become

‘completely persona, completely eyes’, with no darkness within them, in the words of Saint Makarios. It’s self-evident that the great saint was referring to ‘perfect’ Christians, to those who, through long practice of spiritual asceticism have reached the point where they are as fully cleansed spiritually as is humanly possible.

These are people who experience that which the Lord commended: ‘Blessed are they who are pure in heart, for they shall see God’. How does the saint say it in his own way? Believers become enlightened when ‘they have prepared their soul to be Christ’s throne and dwelling-place’. Preparation, as purification of the soul from every stain which impedes the reflection of Christ’s light, is the struggle to observe his holy commandments. The more we orientate ourselves and turn our existence to the word of Christ by practicing it, the more we also cleanse the mirror of our soul so that the light and glory of its Lord can shine therein.

The light of Christ, which shines in creation, is his uncreated energy.

**Time our great opportunity, con’t from p.1**

once to St. John Mauropous, and said, “We are very sorrowful that there are so many quarrels among the believers because of us. We are all of equal glory before God. Speak out, let them establish one holiday for the three of us—not because we are in need of it, but in order to pacify these quarrels and unite the believers in the spirit of faith, love and concord.”

This is how the feast day of the three hierarchs was first established. St. Basil the Great is a lantern of the Church. We know of his courage, his staunch character, how he rebuffed the attacks of the heresy of Arius. His enemies themselves said that “The Church [diocese] of Basil alone is greater than all of us.”

Basil the Great adorned the Church with his written works, his pious, holy life, and he left us an abundant legacy. First of all, of course, the inspired Liturgy he composed, which is celebrated ten times a year, his inspirational writings as well. He had a profound mind and ability to reason. If Basil the Great addressed and

brought an explanation to some matter, then there was nothing left to say on the subject. How many prayers were penned by Basil! Remember the prayers from the hours: “Thou who at every season and every hour, in Heaven and on earth art worshipped



and glorified, O Christ God!” A remarkably profound and powerful prayer which our ears are so accustomed to hearing, but which only skims over our consciousness, as do other prayers of his. At the end of the reading of the hours, we also come across the words of Basil the Great. He left a genuine treasure to the

Church, adorning her with his works.

St. Gregory the Theologian was a great friend of his, a person of equal genius, a colossal mind, and they shared a similar outlook. He and Basil lived as though with one soul their whole lives, with the exception of a brief period when Basil the Great forced him to receive the episcopal rank. Gregory’s meek soul sorrowed from this and was frankly bitter towards his friend.

St Gregory did not leave us with a Liturgy of his own, but he adorned the Church through his works. He inspired the canon of the Nativity and the Paschal canon? One begins with the words: “Christ is born, glorify Him,” the other “Pascha of the Lord, O Pascha! It is the day of the Resurrection, let us be radiant, ye people!” The holy composers of the canons took these words from the inspired sermons of Gregory the Theologian. When you read his works, you cannot but fall in love with their meaning. A deep, holy, and inspired meaning;

*(continued p.4, column 2)*



*(Homily on the, cont'd from p.1)*

it is “a beast most savage, and fiercer than all the others.”

Ironically, the person plagued by pride may seem outwardly confident and commanding, or, just the opposite, afraid of his or her own shadow. The common denominator with pride, however, is the overt focus on self, *ego*, and a lack of confidence and understanding of one’s identity and calling in Christ, of His healing and salvation. The prideful person is overly concerned with appearance and is, therefore, insecure. This is true for the boastful as for the over-sensitive too.

St. John goes on to say about pride, “that there is no other vice which in this sort renders all the virtues of none effect, and so strips a man of every kind of justice and holiness as this disease of pride...with deadly ruin it does its best to cast down and slay in most terrible overthrow those who have already reached the heights of virtue.” For good reason, then, the Holy Scriptures warn us, “Let him who thinks he stands, take heed, lest he fall.” (I Cor. 10:12)

Pride can manifest itself as fear too—fear of change in conforming to Christ’s way; fear of giving up resentments, crutches, addictions, pet ways of thinking, opinions or new ‘doctrines’ promulgated by our culture and not in keeping with the holiness of life Christ calls us to in order to save us from what He calls, “this sinful and adulterous generation.” But ultimately, the sin of pride is the sin of one trying to control instead of letting God lead and seeing His will done.

Back to our quote, “pride goes before a fall,” the actual saying from Proverbs 16:18 is more instructive: “Pride goes *before* destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.” Not only did pride cause the Fall of our first parents; it caused mankind’s destruction—and, it will destroy our individual lives as well, if left unhealed and unchallenged by us, if we do not learn to ground our identity in Christ and take our focus off of ego and put it on Christ.

One way or other, when pride gets a hold of the unwary, it can be paralyzing—keeping us from progress in the life of Christ. But God’s desire is clear: to heal us from sin-sickness and to deify us, to further us in our communion with Him through His Body, the Church.

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The inverse of pride is the virtue we call *humility*. If we’re to live with Christ and participate in His life, we too grow in humility. This is one of our chief aims, to become more like Christ and united with Christ through participation in His divine life, that of the Holy Trinity. This means, we come out of our self-focus, our insecurities and fears, and we learn to trust God more with our identity, our purpose, our self worth, our very opinions and beliefs, our present and our future. Through humility, we learn step by step to pray, “*Thy will be done.*”

In today’s Gospel, Christ gives us an example of such ego-crushing humility, which interjects itself into fallen, prideful humanity like a soothing salve on a stinging wound: the woman from Canaan who comes seeking healing for her daughter possessed by demons, a sad consequence of the Fall, finds hope and healing from the Author of life, the Creator and Savior of the world.

There is something important we need to know about the context in which this miraculous healing occurs: the Canaanites were bitter enemies of Israel. They were, throughout their history together, always threatening to *destroy* the Israelites—both spiritually and physically. For their own safety and protection, the Law had forbid Jews from having any

dealings with Canaanites. But here comes this woman of Canaan, armed only with *faith* and *humility*, calling after the Lord of all in her humility, willingly using a *Jewish* reference for the Messiah, “*Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David!*” This foreigner knows where healing is: with the one true God. She finds Him despite the barriers between her people and Israel precisely because of her faith, her humility, and her love for her daughter. Jesus, for His part, doesn’t answer her at first. We shouldn’t, however, interpret His silence and even His response that follows, as in any way suggesting that Christ doesn’t have compassion for her or that He doesn’t love her. Rather, He draws out her faith as an example to all. Christ then responds, reminding all that before His Passion and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, He is sent first to minister healing to the

*(continued p.4)*



*(homily on the woman, cont'd from p.3)*

House of Israel and through Israel to all the world. The woman is undaunted, not because she's haughty, not because she thinks she's worthy or that God 'owes' her, that if she doesn't get her way, then she'll curse Him, as often happens these days when people don't get their way with God or find Him as they think He or His Church should be, conforming to their cultural mores or prideful opinions.

No, instead, she comes before Christ and *worships* Him, saying simply, "Lord, help me!" She does what so many have so much difficulty doing so much of the time: crying out to God in prayer, acknowledging her brokenness and utter helplessness *without*

God's mercy as the One who alone can heal and save.

In response, Christ says, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." Christ first reveals the woman's faith. Then, He reveals her love, for nothing will dissuade her from seeking healing for her daughter from the Great Physician of our souls and bodies. Finally, He reveals her humility. Was the woman insulted as so many would be, from not being recognized as she should be (as perhaps many of us would)? No, her response says it all: "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table."

She still cries to Him, "Lord" and "Master." Her focus is on God, on healing for her daughter, not on herself. Christ then reminds us of His words elsewhere, "*whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted*" (Matt. 23:11). There are no barriers to those who trust in God and humble themselves before Him, who set their egos aside and focus on Christ, becoming like Him, uniting themselves further with Him. Christ then warmly responds to the woman, saying, "Great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And we read that her daughter was healed from that very hour.

I pray that we too through the work of the Holy Spirit discover and confess any pride, anything that hinders us from growth in this kind of faith, love, and humility that characterizes our Lord and all who put their trust in Him and commune with Him. Confession is a great tool in routing out the pride that manifests itself in our souls. Likewise, we need to regularly pray for more hu-

mility. Whatever our struggle, we too can call on Christ God to have mercy on us like the Canaanite woman. We too can confess our unworthiness before Him—even if we make ourselves through our words and actions more like 'dogs' than the beloved children we truly are.

We too can throw ourselves at His feet, kneel and prostrate before Him, to beseech Him for the healing we need for our souls and furtherance of life in Him. By humbling ourselves and denying ourselves, Christ will be the One who lifts us up, exalts us, and heals us as He did the Canaanite woman and her daughter, so that we too can attain to His Heavenly Kingdom. Amen.

*(Three Holy Hierarch, cont'd p.3)*

crafted as though with a sharp blade in the hand of a master. We see this in his writings, in which he refuted heresy—the undeniable, unstoppable power of logic, the wealth of its content, the richness of thought and the utterly defeating critique of all that is in error. At the same time as he denounces heresy, when he writes about theology, his purified mind, illuminated and profound, is expressed in words of such loftiness, for which the church Praises him with the words, "Rejoice, O Father of Theology of the uppermost Mind."

He and his friend Basil were of completely different temperaments. Basil was by nature a warrior, a leader, while Gregory was as they said, a dove of the wilderness, who sought solitude, so that he could be alone with God, as he said, to be with the angels and be free from all that was earthly. But the Lord does

not keep such lanterns hidden, and despite his striving for solitude, the Lord elevated his great God-loving soul to the lofty service of a bishop. Although it was a heavy burden for him, still, when needed, he held his position with a strong hand, as did his great friend Basil.

They died different deaths—Basil amidst his weeping flock, Gregory completely alone with God and his holy Guardian Angel. How staunch they were when they needed to defend the truth of the Church! We remember when Basil the Great responded to the threat of the Emperor's officer, "You can threaten me with anything, but you won't scare me! Gregory the Theologian was threatened with being driven away from Constantinople. But the bishop replied, "If you exile me from the Jerusalem of Heaven, that I would fear. But your threats put wind in my sails and sprinkle me with refreshing water. That is how I view this exile."

*(continued next issue)*

