

# 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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Sunday after Pentecost—Forgiveness Sunday

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Today we stand right on the edge of Great Lent, for the weeks of preparation to follow our Savior to His Passion begin tomorrow. We have already been challenged to prepare with the Sundays of the Tax Collector and the Pharisee, the Prodigal Son, and the Last Judgment. Now it is the Sunday of Forgiveness, when we are reminded that we must forgive one another if we

hope to receive God's forgiveness for our sins.

Every time we pray the Our Father, we say "and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Christ teaches in today's gospel lesson that "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." It is impossible, of course, to earn God's forgiveness or put Him in our debt by anything that we do. Before His infinite holiness, we stand in constant need of mercy and grace. At the same time, it is impossible to open ourselves to receive His mercy and grace if we do not extend the forgiveness of which we are capable to those who have wronged us.

If we ask for the Lord's forgiveness  
*(continued p. 3)*

++ Forgiveness Sunday ++

Expulsion of Adam from Paradise

Epistle: Romans 13:11-14:4

Gospel: Matthew 6: 14-21

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 Small Entrance," by Metropolitan Sotirios**

In every Divine Liturgy, following the Antiphons, the Holy Gospel makes its way from the Holy Altar (where it is found at all times), and is carried through the center of the Church, being then returned to its place. The Holy Gospel symbolizes our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and is displayed in procession, passing through the faithful in a holy entrance on its way to the Sacred Altar once more.

This entrance helps us to understand the coming of Christ into the world,

with the Holy Gospel symbolizing Christ. The priest, after venerating the Holy Gospel gives it to the Deacon (if there is one), who then holds the Gospel at the height of his face. This is done to symbolize the coming of Christ with the Gospel.

The candle represents St. John the Baptist, as the Evangelist John says: "*He was a burning and shining light,*" (John 5:35). He was the one who opened the way for Christ's coming, and so the whole Church welcomes the Holy Gospel,

reminded of His entrance into the history of the world, bringing the possibility of our union with the God-man Christ in His Church.

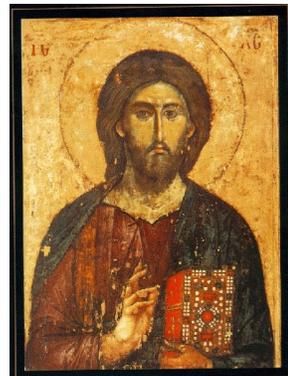
When the Priest comes to the middle of the church, he fervently prays: "grant that holy angels may enter with us". There can be no doubt that this true, for where Christ appears, He is surrounded by a multitude of His Angels. This is true in the Divine Liturgy, where Christ Himself offers the Mystery of  
*(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, Loretta, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

**Wisdom for Life**

The only way to resist fear is our faith in God and our life according to this faith. Turmoil and confusion have so much power over our lives because we lack living faith and trust in God. These enemies force out peace of mind and good faith. Live quietly, pray to God and trust Him. The Lord certainly knows how to save

His children in difficult times, as long as we remain faithful to Him in our hearts.

Prayer is best taught in difficult life situations. For example, I truly learned to pray while in prison, being on the verge of death every day.

I will never tire of repeating to you the words of the holy fathers, who went through a harsh school of sorrows and came to know peace and joy in God. Their words are the core of our fortitude, giving us strength to stand in faith: "There is nothing self-existing on earth, because the beginning of everything is God".

In such difficult moments, we should firmly know that God is ever-loving and all-good, and everything that He bestows upon us is for our benefit. However, God's ways of doing this cannot be put under scrutiny. We must not lose heart or grumble when we cannot understand what is happening. During such moments, a person manifests his faith and receives the crown of salvation.

*(Quotes from Archimandrite John Krestiankin, 1910-2006)*

**The Small Entrance, cont'd from p.1**

the Eucharist. This is the reason why hymns of angels known from the Bible are included in the Divine Liturgy and sung. With joy we sing: "Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice! / Today the Good Shepherd of angels and men has come." Indeed, we realize how high the Lord has raised us and how much He values us.

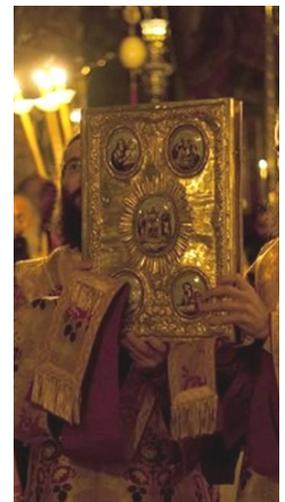
After the "Entrance Prayer," the Priest blesses the Entrance of the Clergy into the Holy Altar. And then the Deacon, raising the Holy Gospel so that everyone can see it, exclaims: "Wisdom! Arise!". The Holy Gospel is Wisdom and Wisdom is Christ, as the Apostle Paul writes: "*Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God*" (1 Corinthians 1:24). All of us, both physically as well as spiritually behold the Holy Gospel. It is just as in the cities and villages of Galilee and Judea when Christ appeared.

The Holy Evangelists speak further on this: The Lord went to a deserted place to pray, and "*when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on*

*foot from the cities*" (Matthew 14:13). We also feel that we have Christ Himself among us, when we look upon the Holy Gospel. That is why all believers spontaneously bow reverently together to the Holy Gospel, making the sign of the cross and strengthening each other with the chanting of "Come, let us worship and bow down before Christ". Immediately afterwards, addressing Christ, we sing: "Save us, O Son of God..." How many people who faithfully prayed the words "save me" (or "have mercy on me") to Jesus were actually saved by the miraculous intervention of the Lord! The Twelve Disciples who were in danger of drowning in the storm in Tiberias for example. They cried out to the Lord: "Lord save us!" At the command of the Lord, immediately "*there was a great calm*" (see Matthew 8: 23-26).

The Entrance of the Lord – in the form of the Holy Gospel's procession to the Holy Altar of the Church symbolizes the coming of the Son and

Word of God to the world. He comes as an infallible Teacher, which Jesus Himself affirmed: "*I am the way, the truth, and the life*" (John 14:6). His Disciples proclaimed the following: "*You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" (John 6: 68-69). There is also the testimony of Jesus' enemies. When guards were sent to arrest Jesus while he was preaching, they marveled at the words of the Lord, and forgot the command they had received! "*No man ever spoke like this Man.*" (John 7: 45-46).



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

and refuse to forgive others, we are in the false position of those who want something for themselves but will not give it their neighbors. That is a form of selfishness that reflects a lack of love for those in whom we encounter Him every day of our lives. It is a form of idolatry in which we imagine that we are serving a false god who simply does our bidding rather than a Lord Who calls us to die to self as we share more fully in His life.

Forgiveness is not some kind of commodity that can be hoarded greedily. It is ultimately a divine energy of the Lord in Whom we participate by grace. If we refuse to forgive others, we refuse to be healed, transformed, and illumined like an iron left in the fire of the divine glory. We refuse to be truly in communion with Christ; indeed, we refuse Him. But if we forgive, even as we acknowledge the imperfection of our efforts to control our thoughts, words, and deeds toward those who have offended us, we open ourselves in humility to become more like our Savior in holiness by the power of His grace.

Like the rest of the Christian life, forgiveness is not simply a matter of how we feel about God, our neighbors, or ourselves. It is not about whether thoughts of past wrongs or future fears pop into our heads. It is not about whether we particularly like someone else. Forgiveness occurs when our vision of those who have wronged us is clarified or restored such that we see them not in terms of past wrongs, but as those who bear the image and likeness of God. Only our inflamed passions keep us from seeing our neighbors this way, for pride tempts us to hold on to anger and judgment that quickly condemn anyone who has ever dared to cross us.

The “quarreling and jealousy” that St. Paul associates with “the works of darkness” will never end in our own souls if we do not find healing from such distorted desires. That process of healing is a way of speaking about putting “on the armor of light,” of “putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, and making no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” “Flesh” in this sense refers to our corrupt humanity, enslaved to death and the war of the passions within us.

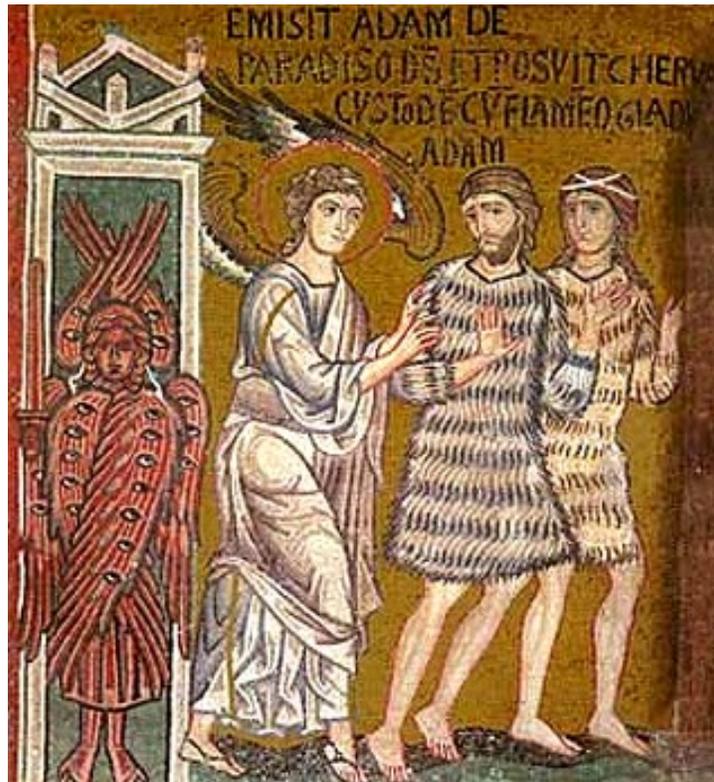
Adam and Eve were cast from Paradise when they stripped themselves naked of the divine glory by their prideful disobedience. They diminished themselves to a

life focused on “making provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

We do not have to look very closely at our world or into our own souls in order to see that we have followed our first parents on a path out of Paradise. When their son Cain murdered his brother Abel, it became abundantly clear how powerful the passions are at destroying human relationships as God intended them to be, even within our own families. If we are truly in Christ, the New Adam in Whom all the corruptions of the first Adam are set right, we must be in the process of healing from the self-centered desires that separate us from Him and one another.

The weeks of Lent provide us with profound opportunities to open even the darkest corners of our lives to His brilliant light. But no matter how strictly we fast, how fervently we pray, or how generously we give to the needy, we will be unable to receive God’s forgiveness if we do not forgive one another. That is the clear teaching of Christ in today’s gospel lesson.

What greater sign is there of our brokenness than how easily we offend, harm, and disregard one another? Indeed, we often enjoy doing so and come up with all kinds of reasons to justify hateful thoughts, words, and actions toward others. At Forgiveness Vespers this evening, we will personally bow before one another as we ask for and extend forgiveness to everyone in the



parish. We begin our journey toward the deep mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection with humility and reconciliation. Since none of us has lived as faithfully as possible, we have all weakened one another spiritually, for we are members of one Body in Christ. Now is the time to grant to one another the forgiveness that we ask from the Lord as we prepare to follow Him to the ultimate manifestation of His forgiving love in the cross and empty tomb.

Instead of wasting time and energy by judging others or holding grudges this Lent, we must focus on participating as fully as possible in the restoration of the human person that Christ has brought to the world. Since we have put Him on in baptism, we must live in a way that reflects and reveals His mercy and blessing. The Lord is very clear about what this means: If we want

*(continued p.4, column 1)*

forgiveness for our sins, we must forgive others for their offenses against us. The prodigal son had no claim to restoration as a son, and he knew that, but the overwhelming love of his father healed the deep wounds that the young man's behavior had caused.

If we want to open ourselves to the unfathomable mercy of our Heavenly Father, we must become channels of that same mercy to others, despite our unworthiness. If we are truly "partakers of the divine nature" by grace, our Lord's forgiveness will become characteristic of who we are. (2 Pet. 1:4) Like an iron left in the fire takes on the qualities of the fire and conveys heat and light to other objects, those who truly share in Christ's life will share what they have received with others, especially those they are tempted not to forgive.

Like prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, forgiveness requires a commitment of the will to do what is pleasing to God and is probably not immediately appealing to us. Like these other practices, forgiveness is a teacher of humility because it reveals our weakness. Like the healing of any passion, embracing forgiveness is a journey that begins with actions of thought, word, and deed that hardly seem sufficient to the task.

God is gracious, however, and accepts the small acts of which we are capable. We cooperate with His grace as we do what we can to turn our attention away from the remembrance of past wrongs, to hold our tongues when we are tempted to remind people of their failings, and to say "I forgive you" even when we have a long way to go in fully embracing the meaning of those words. That should not be surprising, of course, because forgiveness is our participation in God's forgiveness.

Before His infinite holiness, we cannot claim to have mastered forgiveness or to have accomplished anything simply by our own power. For us who are so accustomed to the darkness, it will be uncomfortable to open our eyes just a bit to the brilliant light. For us who are so addicted to our self-centered desires, it will seem impossible not to gratify them. But when we know our own weakness, then we will know how much we need His gracious strength, which conquers even the tomb. This Lent, let us open ourselves to the Lord's grace by showing His mercy to others, especially those who have offended us. There is no other way to follow Christ to His Passion and the brilliant glory of His Kingdom.

The word, "antimension" originates from the words

"instead of" and "altar". However, the order of consecration of an antimension actually refers to it as "the altar". It is noteworthy that in the Russian Church of the 20th century, similarly to the ancient Church, a priest's body could substitute an altar. Priest Andrey Chizhenko writes, "In the 20-30s of the 20th century, many bishops and priests were arrested, exiled to the Solovetsky camp and kept in terrible conditions. Every day they waited for death. In this continuous horror of living each day as the last, they strived to serve the Liturgy for salvation and consolation. Bishops, priests and deacons secretly gathered, despite the threat of execution. One of them undressed to the waist and lay down. A body of a priest over whom the Sacrament of Consecration had been performed during the ordination, served as an altar and an antimension. Using cranberry juice and rye bread, in the absence of wine and prosphora, they performed the Liturgy on a human body.

Many of these sufferers for the faith in Christ were then deemed worthy of martyrdom".

An antimension can only be consecrated by a bishop, who places it on the altar when consecrating a church. In cases when a bishop cannot personally consecrate a church, he sends the already consecrated antimension there. An antimension can be delivered only by a clergyman or, in extreme cases, by a minor ecclesiastical order.



However, most often an antimension is consecrated together with the church. Then, after sprinkling it with a mixture of warm rose water with red wine, a bishop anoints it with holy myrrh, together with the relics, which are then inserted in the antimension and sealed with wax mastic. An antimension receives its final consecration through the subsequent seven-day stay on the consecrated altar. During these seven days, it stays unfolded, and a liturgy is served on it every day. Another symbolic meaning of the antimension is the Body of Christ laid in the tomb. The iliton, in which an antimension is wrapped, symbolizes the funeral shroud of the Savior, covering His head during burial. The red color of the iliton is a symbol of His Blood.

Summing up the above: the antimension is a symbol of unity of the Church at all times and throughout the world. It brings into liturgical practice the continuity of tradition from the first Christians to subsequent generations. Symbolically, it represents the unity of the heavenly and the earthly Churches, and practically it is a necessary condition for offering the Bloodless Sacrifice, which unites Christians with God (John 6:56) and among themselves.