

# 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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3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Great Lent—Elevation of the Holy Cross

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Our Lord Jesus Christ says to us today, “Whosoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” And yet, the very idea of denying ourselves anything, sounds foreign to us. But here is Christ’s call standing before us, confronting us.

The death of Jesus of Nazareth is a historical fact, but many live today as

if this death and the empty tomb that followed are irrelevant, preferring instead to put off grappling with the ramifications of this truth and its calling on their lives: Out of sight, out of mind! But then, they find themselves empty, hopeless, alone, robbed of the peace only Christ can give, striving in vain to fill their lives with distraction, entertainment, addiction to stave off the hunger of their souls, which only God can fulfill.

Without the cross, this is all there is to life no hope, no rescue from ourselves, our passions. Without the victory of the cross, each person has no reason not to live for his own pleasure, to deny himself nothing. Without life with God, Nihilism, in all its despair and insanity, is the only rational recourse. God has desired better for us all along. The reality of who we are  
*(continued p. 3)*

++ 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Great Lent ++  
+ Holy Martyr Matrona +

Epistle: Hebrews 1:10-2:3

Gospel: Mark 8:34-9-1

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 Liturgy of St. Basil” by Reader John Malov

The Liturgy of St Basil the Great, currently served only 10 times a year, was once the most common. In the middle of the first millennium, it was revered as highly as the apostolic Liturgy. However, a number of questions have arisen over time, which need to be considered.

Why did St Basil need to compile a new service? Are the texts that we have today really issued from St Basil’s pen? Did the saint compose a new text or edit an existing one?

Saint Basil lived in the 4th century, but the first mention of the Liturgy composed by him dates back to the 6th century. Although the known direct references to the Liturgy of St Basil appeared only two centuries after his death, his contemporary and friend St Gregory of Nazianzus, in his funeral oration for Basil, mentioned the “liturgical rule of prayers” among his merits.

The Life of St Basil the Great, compiled around the 6th century, says that Basil asked the Lord to

give him such wisdom that he could celebrate the liturgy, invoking the Holy Spirit in his own words.

In all evidence, the reason for compiling his own anaphora was the fact that during the life of the saint there were no generally accepted written words for invoking the Holy Spirit. “Which of the saints has left us in writing the words of the invocation at the displaying of the bread of the Eucharist and the cup of blessing?”

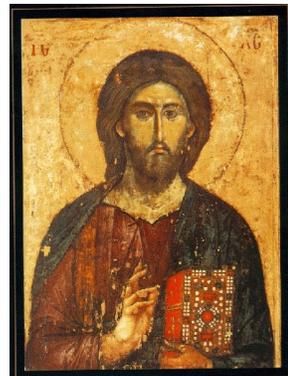
*(continued on p.2)*

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: Mother Onufria, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Dan, Bob, Doug, Heidi, 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 from St. John of Kronstadt**

Never confuse the person, formed in the image of God, with the evil that is in him: because evil is but a chance misfortune, an illness, a devilish reverie. But the very essence of the person is the image of God, and this remains in him despite every disfigurement.

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Your Lord is Love: love Him and in Him all men, as His children in Christ.

Your Lord is a fire: do not let your heart be cold, but burn with faith and love. Your Lord is light: do not walk in darkness of mind, without reasoning or understanding, or without faith. Your Lord is a God of mercy and bountifulness: be a source of mercy and bountifulness to your neighbors. If you will be such, you will find salvation yourself with everlasting glory.

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Firmly believe that the Lord is at all times everything to you. During prayer He is the power and the fulfillment in the Holy Spirit of each of your words. During pious conversation He is your living water, the ardent flow of your words at all times? He is everything to you. Be free from care in the presence of your Lord. He has enclosed you with Himself upon all sides. He penetrates you wholly and knows all your thoughts, all your needs and inclinations, and if you live in Him with faith and love, then no evil shall befall you. 'The Lord is at hand; be careful for nothing' (Phil. 4:6).

**The Liturgy of St. Basil, cont'd from p.1**

“For we are not, as is well known, content with what the apostle or the Gospel has recorded, but both in preface and conclusion we add other words as being of great importance to the validity of the ministry, and these we derive from unwritten teaching” (On the Holy Spirit).

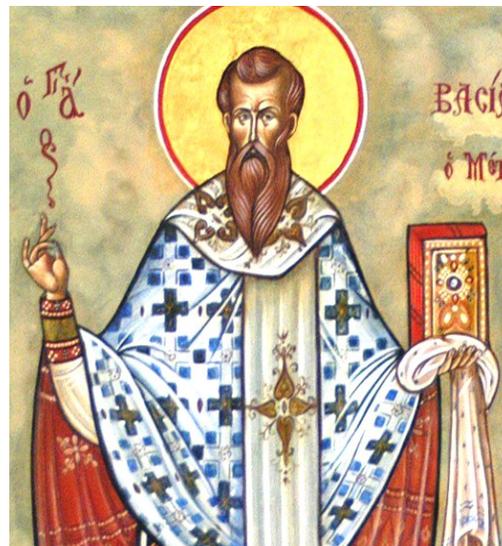
From the Life of St Basil we learn that besides compiling the anaphora, the saint also introduced external innovations corresponding to his perception of the Liturgy. For example, he hung a golden dove over the altar table as a tabernacle and erected an altar barrier.

An alternative origin theory claims that St Basil was not the compiler, but the editor of the already established order, i. e. the liturgy of St James. The Apostolic Liturgy was too long and, because of the people’s weakness, St Basil shortened it. Later, St John Chrysostom did this once again for the same reason.

A large number of existing editions of the text beg the question: are the texts that we have now really com-

plied by St Basil? The answer is yes and no.

Indeed, St Basil used already existing texts in compiling his own liturgy. Indeed, later manuscripts were



subject to editing and additions. However, all of them contain the basis, which, both in meaning and in exact formulations, echoes the works of St Basil. The characteristic literary language of the great Cappadocian is

distinguishable from later inserts.

According to the researcher, the extensive versions of the text of the liturgy go back to one common text, conventionally designated as Ω. This text was originally written by the saint, although it contained elements of an older text, conventionally referred to as Ur. Further, the researcher suggested that a short version of the anaphora of St Basil does not actually belong to the saint, but is a Coptic redaction of the text Ur. It is this theory and its subsequent interpretations that are predominant in contemporary historical liturgics.

St Basil compiled a new order of the liturgy, since before him there was no universally accepted full rite, while the existing individual prayers were recorded or transmitted verbally. St Basil used his own prayers, as well as those that already existed. The original text of the liturgy, compiled by the saint, has not survived. Of all its existing variants, the extensive rule, used in the Orthodox Churches is the closest to the original.

*(Homily on the Elevation of the Holy Cross, cont'd from p.1)*

as human beings, whom God created us to be is not fallen, depressed, lonely, slaves to the passions. God has created us to be bearers of His image and likeness, angels in the flesh, children of God.

God has created us for glory, life with Him, but how often we exchange this glory for enslavement to the temporal attachments of this world. We exchange the glory of God, the freedom to grow, heal, and work out our salvation, for that which is passing away.

Christ's death on the cross reminds us, first, that by the tree our first parents, Adam and Eve fell into sin through their disobedience and were exiled from paradise; they preferred relationship with Satan and his lies to relationship with God and His life. They introduced death into the world through sin, that is, through apartness from the life that is in God alone.

Our first parents and we, every time we sin, willingly "play with death," we choose apartness from God, Life itself. The Fall, in this sense, becomes personal for us because of our choices. But Christ descended into Hades and raised the dead who were there, who had longed to see His day—this victory over sin and death. Christ died the vilest of deaths so that He could defeat on our behalf the vilest of our sins and passions, yes, even our indifference.

St. Irenaeus, explains the Mystery in this way: "He (Christ) by His obedience on the tree renewed [and reversed] what was done by disobedience in [connection with] a tree..." Likewise, St. Paul says, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive."

Christ inaugurates a new race of Adam—a race no longer enslaved to sin and death, but one capable of healing from sin-sickness and growth into the likeness of the Holy Trinity. In Christ and His Church we've been given the tools of salvation by which we overcome our greediness, our reliance on having things 'our way,' on living for self in all its pride and loneliness.

If those who touched the hem of Christ's garment found healing, what would happen when Christ entered Hades and confronted death head on? Who would emerge the victor but the Lord of Life Himself, the only One who could offer Himself to death and emerge victorious?

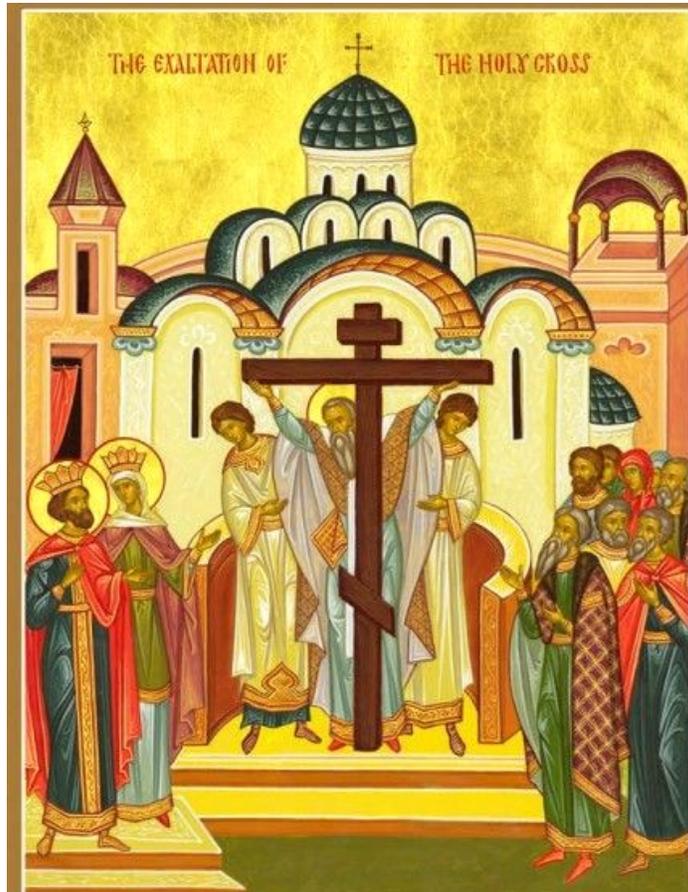
We venerate the cross of Christ then, not just as a symbol, a sign, but a reality, marking that final victory over sin and death, over our passions that have darkened our human nature and obscured the image and likeness of God in us. By Christ's death on the cross, death is transfigured into life for all those who live for and with God. Christ beckons us then to die to life apart from Him, life for and of ourselves—in all its vainglory, loneliness, and separation, and to live instead in Him, that we may also become fellow partakers of the resurrection and co-heirs with Him.

For this reason, we herald the cross in the hymnography of the Church as the "trophy invincible." We sing in the Matins, "Thy cross, O Lord all-merciful, is honored by the whole world, for Thou hast made the instrument of death into a source of life. Sanctify those who venerate it, O God of our Fathers, who alone art blessed and greatly glorified." How then do we interiorize and apply the cross to our lives? It's not enough to carry the cross around our necks; we also need to carry it on our hearts, in our souls.

Jesus says, "whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel's will save it." Christ, in denying Himself for us, gave Himself, His own life, to defeat death. So we, in order to live, in order to obtain the true life that is in His life, learn to take up Christ's call. In self-denial and love for God, we fight our vain attempts to create the mirage of temporal 'stability' in

and around us with all the creature comforts one can accumulate. We learn through our fasting that we don't live by bread alone. We learn that the pursuit of all the world has to offer, can't bring us true joy. This realization is the first step.

Because He loves us, Christ God asks us, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" In other words, Christ is saying, "What are you doing, man, living as if there's no God, no resurrection from the dead." Without Christ's victory on the cross and our participation in it, there's nothing left but emptiness, which would be all there is to life without Christ, without the cross and its victory for mankind and for each of us personally.



The doctrine of the divine energies began to be developed by the fathers of the first centuries, but it was given its final shape by St Gregory Palamas. This teaching helps us to get closer to understanding a number of important questions: how does God work in the world? Is He cognizable in His Essence? How can a person adhere to Him? The presentation of the doctrine by St Gregory and his followers is complicated, but we will try to explain it in simple words.

### **The Essence of the Doctrine**

It is impossible to understand the Essence of God. God Himself reveals certain aspects of His Essence to people. For example, Christians are aware of the three persons of God, but no one can say that he knows the essence of the Trinity. This means that even the revelations of God about His Essence do not make us capable of understanding it in any way. This means that this side of the Deity is closed to man, either forever or at least for now.

However, the invisible God, unknowable in Essence, acts visibly in the world. These actions are called divine energies, they also constitute God's grace. The divine energies permeate the entire universe.

Through these energies, any person can directly commune with God and partially cognize Him. How exactly is this possible?

### **Communion with God**

Divine energies are omnipresent, which means that divine grace acts in any place and in any circumstances: "The wind blows where it chooses" (John 3:8). Why then do we not see God's grace and why do we not always feel it?

The Lord does not reveal His every action to everyone. Indeed, in some cases, the Power of God was manifested visibly to every person. There are many such examples in Scripture, for example, the giving of the manna from heaven (see Exodus 16), the fall of the walls of Jericho (see Joshua 6), the resurrection of the dead and the earthquake after the Crucifixion (see Matt. 27).

There are however also many examples of the opposite, when God revealed His actions only to specific people, including cases when a miracle happened in the middle of a crowd, but only a few saw it. For example, only Protomartyr Stephen saw "the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). The Lord chose only a few people as his prophets. Only a few apostles were honored to see the Light of Tabor during the Transfiguration of the Lord (see Mk. 9).

In a number of his works, St Gregory Palamas teaches that even today one can see the divine energies in the world. Yes, the time will come when the Lord will visibly reveal himself to all. But only a few ascetics are rewarded

with being able to see His Grace incessantly. The grace of God appears to them visibly in the form of light. This uncreated light of God is the same light that the apostles saw on Mount Tabor. One who sees this light joins God directly, that is, he is in the highest degree of holiness, known as theosis.

### **Knowing God by His Energies**

What does the knowledge of God by his energies mean? St Gregory of Nyssa explains it in the following way: "The Deity is completely incomprehensible, incomparable to anything and known by mere activity. It is clear that the mind cannot penetrate into the essence of God, but on the other hand, it comprehends the activity of God, on whose basis it receives a sufficient knowledge of God, in coherence with its limited capabilities. By God's activity in the world, we know about the power and wisdom of God, His goodness and justice, His infinity and many other properties that our mind grasps when searching for traces of the Divine in the phenomena of nature and life." (Contra Eunomium)

This means that, without understanding the essence of God, one can understand through His energies that He is immutable, eternal, omnipresent, unoriginate, wise, omniscient, omnipotent, holy, true and loving. This understanding is simultaneously the absolute maximum and the necessary minimum of man's understanding of God.

### **The main Provisions of the Teaching by St Gregory Palamas**

Before St Gregory Palamas, the doctrine of the divine energies was not formalized, and some related questions remained unresolved. The main provisions formulated by St Gregory can be

reduced to seven points:

The essence of God and the divine energies have a "God-worthy distinction". The essence of God exists by itself, but not His energies. The energy of God is not created by Him, but it is His eternal part. Energy is inseparable from essence. Energy may actually be called God. Essence is higher than energy because the latter comes from essence. Participation in divine energies is participation in God. God is called Light not by Essence, but by Energy. **Is it Necessary to Profess the Doctrine of Divine Energies?**

The doctrine of divine energies asserts that every person has access to the knowledge of God and direct communication with Him. A person striving for God and doing everything in his power for God, can become deified and a partaker of the Divine nature. Visions of divine energies mean that God Himself reveals to man His actions in the world. The final result of theosis was expressed by St Athanasius: "God became man so that man might become god."

