

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

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Christ is in our Midst! He is and ever shall be!



Volume 11 Issue 523

5th Sunday after Pentecost-Jesus heals the 2 Demoniacs

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The many challenges that we face today should open our eyes to uncomfortable truths about what it means to be a human person in the world as we know it. The pandemic shows that we remain subject to death and disease in ways that no one can fully control. Our social and economic crises reveal that no nation or culture em-

bodies the fulfillment of the collective life of humankind.

Such struggles display not only how weak we are before large matters beyond our control, but also our captivity to our own passions. Self-centeredness, fear, resentment, and even hatred easily fill our hearts as ways of coping with problems that challenge our proud illusions. Instead of simply accepting what our disordered desires reveal about us and embracing the truth for our humility, we typically prefer the distraction of blaming others or at least of thinking of something else that turns our attention away from reality.

If we think we have remarkable problems today, consider for a moment the plight of the demon-possessed men in our gospel. The Savior did not require them to become
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++ 5th Sunday after Pentecost ++
+ St. Antony of the Kiev Caves +

Epistle: Romans 10: 1-10

Gospel: Matthew 8: 28-9:1

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.*

Repentance and Prayer, by St. Paisios of Mt. Athos

In general terms, Saint Paisios set the greatest store in the spiritual struggle on repentance and unceasing prayer. It was through repentance that he received revelations from heaven. He used to say that the life of a monk was one of repentance and prayer.

The monks are the Church's wireless operators and the aim of their life is to get through to God in order to help people, once they've first cleansed themselves of the passions, which are like atmospheric inter-

fering with good communications with the Lord.

This is why he used to say that we should ask God only for repentance, so that we'd be washed, because repentance is divine soap in prayer. A sigh of repentance in prayer is worth more than two buckets of tears. The beginning of the work of prayer is examination of our self and knowledge of our sins. Because, if we lack an awareness of our sins, how will we ask God for divine mercy?

Pray is helped by our sense of sinfulness. But if

we're going to repent, we have to know ourselves and our weaknesses.

We need to consider what God's given us and how we've responded to His gifts. How has God behaved towards me and how have I behaved towards His love? The thoughts of a monk or nun constantly revolve around this question. They see that everything's a gift from God and that only their sins are their own. This is the reason why we should be truly contrite.

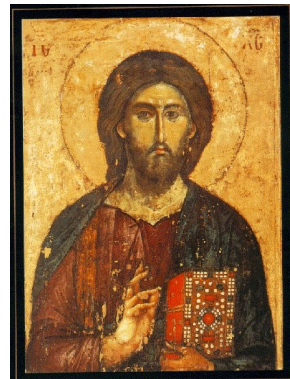
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

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: Mother Onufria, Fr. Michael, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Brittany, Maverick, Elizabeth, Matthew, Corella, Ron, Daniel, Frankie, Loretta, Mackenzie, Mike, Jessica, Patricia, Grace, Gladys, Lisa, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

Lord-the Source of all healing.

Is there anything more comforting than to know that Our Lord is able to help us in our times of need? It comforts us greatly to know that He is willing to offer us His life, and His healing. He actually can't stand to see us unhealthy, especially in our soul. He can't stand to see us in pain, especially pain of the soul. He desires to see us become whole.

Whether you are born or raised in the Church or you hear about Christ later in life doesn't matter so much as what you do with this knowledge. Do we grab hold of it and accept it like oxygen, like water? Or do we push it away? The centurion accepted Christ's power and he made bold requests. You and I as children of the living God can make requests that are even more bold on behalf of others and for ourselves. What are some of these bold requests?

Lord Jesus, heal my hardness of heart. Lord Jesus, forgive my sins. Lord Jesus, help me to become a man or woman of prayer. Lord Jesus, help me to hear your voice in my life. Lord Jesus, bless my neighbors. Lord Jesus, bless my children and make them saints. Lord Jesus, bless my husband or wife. Lord Jesus, save me from the pits of despair. Lord Jesus, remove my anxieties and sadness. Lord, strengthen me for all the difficulties of life. My Lord Jesus, allow me to grow in virtues. My Lord Jesus, make me holy. And of course, Lord Jesus heal my bodily sickness if it is for my salvation.

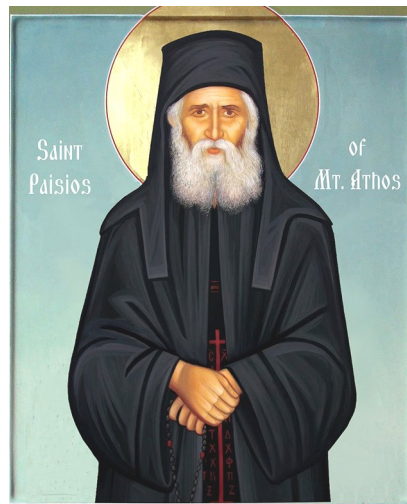
Repentance and Prayer, cont'd from p.1

Before we begin to count the knots on our prayer rope, it's a good idea to count our many sins and God's blessings. An awareness of God's blessings helps us to say the Jesus Prayer from the heart, rather than mechanically. Genuine repentance brings with it humility and it's from there that prayer starts. Before we start to pray, we should say: 'I'm to blame Christ. I'm ungrateful and I've saddened you. Forgive me'.

Prayer requires proper preparation, just as Holy Communion does. It's holy communication, because we're communing with Christ and talking to Him. We should read something inspiring from the Sayings of the Desert Fathers or other spiritual books. Study of the holy Gospels also helps a great deal; even if we don't understand the meaning of the words, the soul is sanctified and nourished spiritually.

In order to stimulate us to pray harder, he used to say that every moment of our life which passes is irrecoverable. The Jesus Prayer is a weapon

against the devil because the name of Jesus is all-powerful. The aim isn't to acquire unceasing prayer but to divest ourselves of the persons we once were. He used the Psalter a great deal in his prayers and said it was a light-



ning bolt against the devil.

Another aspect of the struggle in prayer is love for our neighbor. Christ is content when you love your neighbor and make them content. This is why the saint stressed the dignity of

our neighbor. He used to say that when people act spiritually but neglect everything else, sacrificing themselves and so on, then the spiritual deeds are also useless.

Since he loved Christ and the Mother of God so much, he also loved other people. No matter how tired he was, he sacrificed himself for others; he was completely indifferent to his own needs, his rest or his health. He said that if someone else was suffering he would willingly die to help them. If we have a problem and we worry about it, that's a sign of lack of faith. But if we worry about our brothers and sisters, that shows the pain of love. God gives great comfort to us when we feel the pain of other people, otherwise we couldn't bear it.

He advised that we pray for the dead, because the poor people can't do anything to help themselves; so we should intercede on their behalf. He prayed constantly for the glory and unity of the Church and often, during prayer, he received enlightenment on ecclesiastical problems.

(Homily on the 5th Sunday after Pentecost, cont'd from p.1)

members of the Jewish faith, obey a law, or do anything else. He simply set them free from slavery to evil and restored them to a recognizably human existence.

The Fathers of the Church see their demon-possession as symbolic of the state of our ancestors, the Gentiles who worshiped idols and false gods. As St. Paul wrote to the Romans: "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." At the very heart of our faith is not a requirement to belong to any nation, class, or race, but instead the outrageous mercy of the Lord Who restores us to the dignity of those created in the divine image and likeness. The good news of the Gospel is that the Son of God became a human being for the salvation of all people, including those as lowly and miserable as demon-possessed Gentiles living in a tomb and scaring everyone away.

Just as Christ took the initiative to deliver them, He has done the same with everyone. He has become one of us, taking upon Himself the consequences of all human corruption and sin to the point of death, burial, and descent into Hades so that He could conquer them all in His glorious third-day resurrection. He has ascended into heaven with full, complete glorified humanity and sent the Holy Spirit to empower His Body, the Church, of which we are living members. He abides within our hearts by the Holy Spirit, casting out our demons, forgiving our sins, and enabling us to share in His eternal life even now.

As St. Paul teaches, we must confess the Lord Jesus Christ with our mouths and believe in our hearts that God has raised him from the dead; if we do so, we will be saved. "For with the heart one believes unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." No, St. Paul is not giving us magic words which we say once in order to guarantee a spot in heaven. He is not giving us a new religious legalism that somehow earns salvation.

Instead, He reminds us that we must commend our entire life to Christ our God. If we trust in Him, we will offer our words, deeds, and thoughts to embody the healing that He has brought to the world. He calls and enables us to become as transformed by the divine mercy as

were the demon-possessed men who became powerful living examples of His salvation.

When those men were set free from the complete control of demons, that was only the beginning of their lives in Christ. Even though their deliverance was quite dramatic, it was only a beginning and they surely had to press on from there to resist temptation, to grow in holiness, and to learn to love and serve the Savior in their neighbors. The very same thing is true of us. The healing of our souls is a process, an ongoing journey of sharing more fully in the new life that our Savior has brought to the world. Challenges large and small require us to confess Christ faithfully each day of our lives in what we say, think, and do.

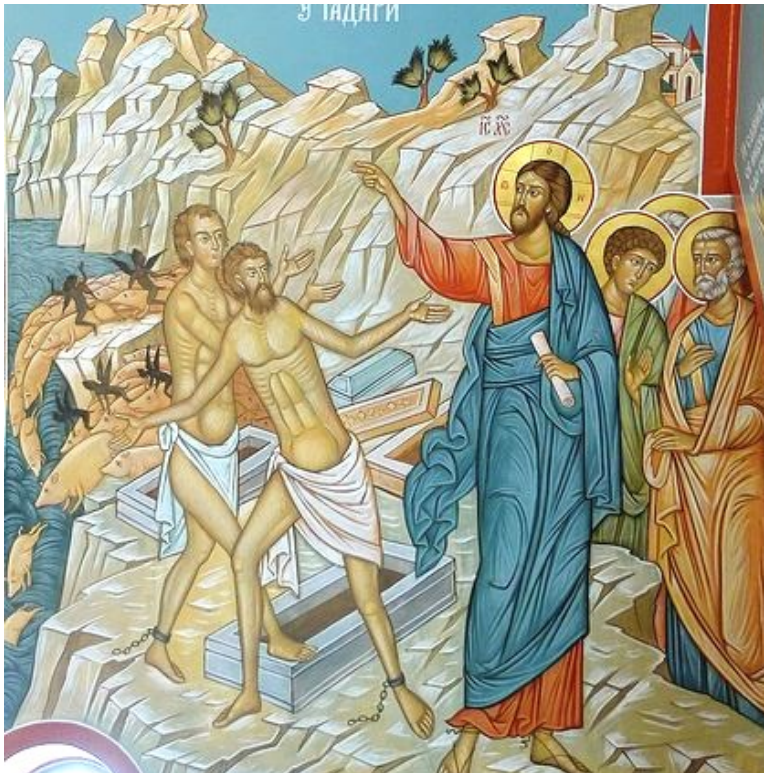
To believe in and confess Christ is never something that we should think we have accomplished or fulfilled. To be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect is an eternal goal. To become a partaker of the divine nature is truly an infinite undertaking. Believing in and confessing Christ requires that we share in His life without reservation such that His restoration of the human person in the divine likeness shines brilliantly in us. Only then we will be able to stay with St. Paul, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me."

That change will not happen in an instant, but will be as profoundly transformative as what happened to the demon-possessed men who regained their true selves by encountering the Savior. That is what will happen with us as we turn away

from slavery to our passions. That is what will occur when we rise up from the tombs of our sins and enjoy the freedom of liberation from bondage to the fear of death.

Instead of being overwhelmed by threats to our prideful illusions, we must use those challenges to help us identify and reject the lies that have taken root in our hearts and minds. We may not live in a cemetery and scare everyone away, but we certainly fail to serve Christ in our neighbors because of our spiritual corruption. We would often rather fear, blame, and even hate others than take a clear look at the state of our own souls. We would often rather accept the most ridiculous assumptions about ourselves, our neighbors, and our

(continued p. 4, column 2)



It cannot be proved whether Peter went to Corinth, where there seems to have been a group of Christians who claimed to be his supporters. From Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians and those that were written from there (Thessalonians and Romans), there's no hint of Peter being there. Nor is anything like that mentioned in Acts. In any case, it would not have been possible for there to be any such event in Acts since it ends before Peter's arrival in Rome, which also is not mentioned. So it could hardly refer to any possible visit to Corinth on the part of Peter while he was en route to Rome, as the Corinthian Dionysios mentions in his Epistle to the Church of Rome (170). In any case, the Lord's "brothers" are also referred to in the same epistle, without it being accepted that they went to Corinth at all.

Peter's preaching was largely restricted to Jews, and, in particular, to the region of Palestine, while Paul addressed the Jews of the diaspora and the Gentiles. In his first Epistle (5, 13), Peter refers to "she who is in Babylon and likewise chosen" and some have conjectured that this refers to ancient Babylon or the city of the same name in Egypt, where he may have been active. But the most likely solution is that Peter meant Rome, where he was in 64 and where he was martyred on 13 October of the same year.

The Church of Rome claims that Peter was in Rome after his miraculous escape from prison in 42 or 44, and remained in the city as its first bishop until his death. The Apostle Paul, who, because he didn't wish to build "on foreign foundations", was in the habit of preaching in places where the name of Christ had not yet been heard, confesses that he wanted to preach in Rome. This means that, until the time he writes to the Romans (56), no Apostle had yet been to Rome. There had been Christians in Rome from even before the edict of Claudius in 50.

Christianity appeared here through unidentified Christians some of whom had heard Peter in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost ("Romans staying in the city, Jews and proselytes"), and through others who had heard Paul in the various places he had preached. This explains why Paul, in chapter 16 of the Epistle to the Romans, sends greetings to the faithful in a city where he had not yet preached and yet who were known to and associated with him.

In any case, the constant movement to and from Rome

of people from the Eastern provinces with personal or commercial business there, and of Romans to the Eastern provinces, contributed to the presence of a Christian community in Rome from early on. In the spring of 64, Peter wrote his two Universal Epistles.

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(Homily-Christ healing 2 demoniacs, cont'd from p. 3)
world than simply admit we are the chief of sinners and entrust ourselves to the mercy of the Lord. In order truly to have faith in Christ, we must become humble. Humble people accept the truth without making excuses or trying to change the subject in order to make themselves look better.

We simply cannot believe in and confess the Savior without growing in humility, for His salvation is not something we can ever earn or control. To the extent that we have faith in Him, we will know that we need healing and liberation that we could never give ourselves. If obedience to a religious law or establishment of a righteous earthly kingdom could have sufficed, there would have been no need for the God-Man to fulfill our humanity through His incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension.

Those who distort the way of Christ into self-righteous legalism or a quest for earthly power over their enemies lack the humility to see and acknowledge the true state of their own souls. They do not have the spiritual clarity to recognize themselves in a situation like that of the demon-possessed Gentile men who needed much more than a bit of conventional religiosity or worldly respectability. They needed the restoration of their personhood in God, and the same is true of each of us.

Contrary to popular opinion, being true to ourselves does not mean embracing identities that reflect our corrupt desires any more than the demon-possessed men were simply being true to themselves by not living a recognizably human existence. The kind of true humility that opens us to faith in the Savior requires that we sacrifice the prideful illusions that tempt us not to conform our character to Christ's. He is the God-Man Who embodies the restoration of the human person in the image and likeness of God. Anything that would distract us from sharing more fully in His life and obeying His commandments does not reflect the truth about who He calls and enables us to become.

