

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

Christ is in our Midst!

He is and ever shall be!



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7th Sunday after Pentecost-Jesus heals two Blind Men

July 31, 2022



We're witnesses thru today's Gospel to the healing of two blind men. And through this life-changing encounter in which Christ's power is in full evidence, we're advanced in our understanding of healing and salvation. Responding to their plea for mercy, the God of mercy, the only true Lover of mankind, Jesus Christ, receives the

two blind men into His presence and He heals them. But Jesus doesn't perform this great miracle randomly. Rather, like the healing of the paralytic last week, we're taught a lesson in faith and healing that is also applicable to our own need for Christ's healing.

To paraphrase St. John Chrysostom, Christ doesn't run after those in need of healing everywhere, lest anyone think He's healing out of vainglory. No, there's more at work here: Christ's healing presupposes a participation, a cooperation, from those who are healed. Just as our relationship and communion with Him necessitates a participation on our part, by definition: a return of love, an act of repentance and an abandonment of self-will, so too our healing bespeaks a reciprocal relationship. In fact, in most of
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++ 7th Sunday after Pentecost ++
+ St. Eudocimus of Cappadocia +

Epistle: Romans 15: 1-7

Gospel: Matthew 9: 27-35

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.*

Conversations with St. Sophrony of Essex and Mt. Athos (Part 2)

What does the thought tell us: anything that is good? If it tells of good things, in harmony with the commandments of God and the Holy Gospel, we should keep it. If a thought tells us things opposite of the law of God and the Holy Gospel, we should disregard it.

How should we guide our thoughts? The holy fathers advise us to exercise ignorance. The best way to manage thoughts is to ignore them, not taking them into consideration. If you see that you

have an evil thought and it disturbs or confuses you, your mind grows dark, or it oppresses you, chase it away, don't hang on to it. Attach no importance to it. Don't pre-occupy your mind with it. Otherwise you will lose time, mood, and strength.

To guide your thoughts is truly a matter of advanced spiritual knowledge. Ignoring them is the most effective remedy. If you don't learn to ignore your thoughts, you will suffer all the time.

Pride and despair are

two sides of the same coin

I think, and this is how the holy fathers are teaching us, these two are two sides of the same coin called egoism. The egoist thinks that he, and no one else, is a saint and an angel who never gets it wrong. Whereas in reality he is imperfect and makes mistakes just like everyone else, being the most ordinary person but one who falls into despair because of his egoism.

Despair is not good. It is an expression of egoism.

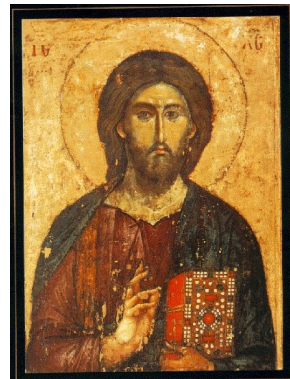
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

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 worshiping 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, Christopher, Elizabeth, Rudy, Marigold, 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

The Church in the World.

Christ taught that the Church is “salt” and “light.” For many, this is a commandment that propels us into the moral battles of every place and time. Christ noted that if salt that has lost its “saltiness,” it is only fit to be thrown away. He could equally have said that meat that has become “all salt” is inedible.

Both images suggest the nature of a right-

eous and holy presence in the world. Abraham beneath the Oaks of Mamre is the image of faith – not a vast army riding to crush its enemies and enthrone Abraham as the father of us all.

The single most important actions in the life of this world, on any given day, are found in the various places where the people of God have gathered and the Divine Liturgy is being offered “on behalf of all and for all.” Our modern sensibilities have oftentimes reduced the Liturgy to a “filling station,” providing us with energy and inspiration so that we can go out into the world and do “our real work.” These are two competing visions – and the first one – the ancient one – is increasingly ignored in its proper role.

If we understood the true nature of prayer – our communion with God – we would find every possible occasion to pray. When we enter into prayer in the presence of God, we take our place among the righteous. We become God’s salt and God’s light.

Conversation with St. Sophrony, cont’d from p.1

A humble person, even if he commits a sin, will say: Well, all right, I am a human, after all! He repents of his sin, humbling himself, confessing, struggling, and rising again. He appeals to God to help him and not to fall into despair. A humble person, even if he commits a sin, will say: come on, I’m only a human! He appeals to God to help him and not to fall into despair

Despair is a great fall and a great sin. A humble man does not lose courage, has trust in the Lord, asks Him to forgive his sin, and invokes His grace. Our salvation lies in humility. But a proud man creates a false self-image in his mind, and when it turns out that in reality everything is not as he thinks, he desponds and loses any desire to take action. That’s why despair and pride are two sides of the same coin.

How should we confess properly?

Confession is like to a spiritual bath that purges us from our sins. At confession, it is necessary that we precisely pinpoint our sins and misdeeds,

but omit the specifics. We shouldn’t describe them—especially carnal sins—in great detail, but rather call them out in concrete terms, by name, so that our father confessor can determine our spiritual sickness and offer



suitable spiritual medicine that will turn to be beneficial for us. We should confess with a contrite heart.

As for the feeling of shame, it is a matter of humility and repentance.

Humility preserves the treasure of the spirit.

The Gospel of St. Matthew tells us how Christ healed the leper and said: See that you tell no one. Why is that so? The Lord performed these miracles not only for those people, but also for many others! What the Lord did, He has done for us, wishing to show us the way of salvation. He didn’t need it Himself—He is both perfect God and perfect man. He showed us a pattern of how to act: We should live humbly, in obscurity, attributing glory not to ourselves, but to the One God and our Father.

There are cases when Christ said, go and tell everyone, and others when He said, tell no one. Everything depended on the spiritual state of the one who was healed and witnessed the miracle. We also often advise others: Never tell anyone about what you’ve just seen and what has just happened to you. For, once you share it with others, you will do yourself a disservice.

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the healings we see in the Gospels, those in need of healing personally seek out that healing from Christ. In other words, they desire their healing. They desire their healing enough to seek Christ out, to entrust themselves to Him, to acknowledge their need for Him. They desire healing enough to step forward in faith, recognizing that God alone is worthy of their trust.

The two blind men seek out Jesus; they follow Him, crying out to Him, "Son of David, have mercy on us!"

These two men know the Source of mercy; they know that God alone can give such a mercy, such a miraculous healing.

To test their faith further, Jesus asks them even after such a demonstration of faith, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" And they say to Him, "Yes, Lord." But note what Christ says in response, "According to your faith, let it be to you."

Do you see the involvement of their souls here, the relationship which Christ God develops between them and Him?

Their volition, their will, was to be healed of their physical infirmity, their blindness, but it demanded great faith from them; it demanded the 'eyes' of faith and the strength of soul.

Even still, Jesus does not heal everyone today; not everyone receives physical healing. It remains a mystery. To some, like St. Paul, who petitioned God to remove the "thorn in his flesh," God's response was, "My grace is sufficient for you for My power is made perfect in weakness" (II Cor. 12). In other words, there was something about that 'thorn' that St. Paul 'needed' if he was to trust in God for his strength, to be humble before Him, to serve God to the amazing extent he did, converting whole nations to the truth of God and His salvation. While our physical healing necessarily involves our will, our souls, the inverse is also true: the spiritual healing of our souls involves our bodies, our volition, our participation.

When it comes to healing our eternal souls, we know that God desires this above all: He calls all to salvation from sin-sickness, spiritual sickness. The truth is that all of us are to one degree or another sin-sick, that is, we're 'works in progress,' as St. Paul says, we must "work out our salvation with fear and trembling," (Phil. 2:12) if

we're to grow in our relationship and communion with God, be deified, and find spiritual healing, that is, salvation in Christ.

And God gives us a sure and prescribed path toward our healing, our growth, and salvation through His Church. He teaches us how to pray through the Church, He feeds us with the Sacrament through the Church, He teaches us the disciplines of the ascetic life: fasting and prayer through the Church, and He gives us Confession through the Church as a means to be purified, so that we may continue to learn and entrust more of ourselves to Him who is the Great Physician. And through these 'tools' we progress in the knowledge and love of God.

This progress in the knowledge and love of God is meant to be ever active, never 'static,' never status quo. To be deified, we cannot be 'couch potato' or 'arm chair' Christians. It's easy to fall into a rut, preferring

our own opinions and ways to those of the Church, listening to the culture instead of Christ, taking Orthodoxy on our terms, but that isn't Christianity and won't bring us the healing we need.

One of the foremost tools that Christ gives us through His Church to find healing from our spiritual sickness is the Sacrament of Repentance: Confession, and subsequent reception of the Eucharist. For this reason, Holy Church encourages us towards frequent confession so that we can also enjoy the benefits of frequent reception of the Eucharist, which is also called the "Medicine of Immortality" because it unites us with Christ Himself and heals



our souls, but only if we receive in faith, through preparation and purification, which is itself part of that Medicine. Confession and Reception, the Church teaches us, go hand in hand.

The prayers for reception of the Eucharist presuppose confession and its purification as a preparation for worthily receiving Christ's precious and holy Body and Blood. And so through all of this, we see that our healing in soul demands something of our material bodies, our time, our energy, our worship, our prayers, our heart-felt repentance and turning to Christ God just as the blind men did and cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us."

By the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Sacrament of Confession, we learn the root causes of the
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the sins that cause us to stumble, that cause us and others sadness, our pride and false dependence on self; we grow in confidence in our identity and self-worth in Christ, we begin to peel away the 'onion layers' of our souls to the heart of our struggles, the passions and self-will that holds us back.

Confession is truly a gift from God. But this kind of soul-searching demands humility and willingness on our part for healing from God, a willingness on our part is necessary. We have to spend time in prayer, self-examination, and worship, to make the most of the Sacrament and the healing and growth that God would offer us through it.

Our ongoing willingness to be healed, to progress in our healing, is an integral part of our salvation. We're saved through our belief (faith) that manifests itself through

our actions and deeds, the living out of that faith. Faith and works go hand in hand, St. James teaches us. We cannot afford to lay aside our struggle with sin and our obedience to what Christ teaches us through His Church. Christ asks the blind men, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" We've been shown the way if we would make use of it.

My prayer for each one here is that we would all continue to make use of the tools of our salvation, which Christ offers us through His Church for our growth, our healing, our salvation. As we grow, individually and corporately in our reflection of Christ and the Kingdom, others will find their healing and salvation in Christ as well through our example. May we each cultivate the attitude of soul and the cooperation of body to follow Christ with all that we have, all that we are, crying out to Him as did the blind men, "Lord, have mercy on us," knowing that He is the Lord who loves us and indeed has mercy on our souls.

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Universal Lack of Common Sense

It's very important for people to have common sense. Everybody says so, but how many actually possess ordinary, common sense? As psychosomatic beings, people receive stimuli and bodily and mental messages. They receive feelings through their senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell). These stimuli are passed on by centripetal nerve fibers to the respective centers in the brain. There the brain processes them, apprehends them,

and transmits them as knowledge to the mind, which is the core of our psychosomatic being. Our stimuli, sensual and mental, are empirical states allowing for critical analysis, comparison and classification and, through the coaction of all the above mental functions, we acquire knowledge.

This knowledge is used by reason, so that we react rationally, with cognitive experience. This is the basic form of cognitive reaction which comes from our experiences and constitutes common sense.

The great value of common sense lies in its simplicity. It isn't caught up in the chaos of complex reasoning. The thought process is simple, clear and precise and the search for truth, for solutions, for answers to the way we deal with problems is more likely to be simple and clear.



In common sense, the meaning of words is particular and not susceptible to confusion. Any problem that arises is formulated clearly and the answer proposed leaves no room for misinterpretation. Once we start being verbose, it's a sign that the aim is to create confusion.

For example, common sense tells us that lying is bad behavior and that therefore we should avoid lying or spreading false information. This is an unambiguous position, without any 'Yes, but...'. Excuses come when lies have been told. This is an attempt to cover them up and it's where the problems begin.

In everyday life, when common sense is applied to ordinary family relationships or to society at large, it leads to harmonious cooperation and a quiet, peaceful life.

The elementary thought that inappropriate behavior on the part of one person can have undesirable and unpleasant consequences within their family unit and their social environment leads thinking people to behave in a manner that doesn't offend or trouble others (their spouse, child, parent, sibling, other people and society as a whole).

Hankering after wealth, power, superiority, uniqueness, your own way, display, as well as greed, lasciviousness and arbitrariness are all parts of this. All these passions- which are later followed by others- are the aim and goal of the ego. If they're to be realized, any obstacles to this must be removed. Common sense, which highlights the dangers of such patterns of behavior, is rejected, or, more correctly, is considered an obstacle.