

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

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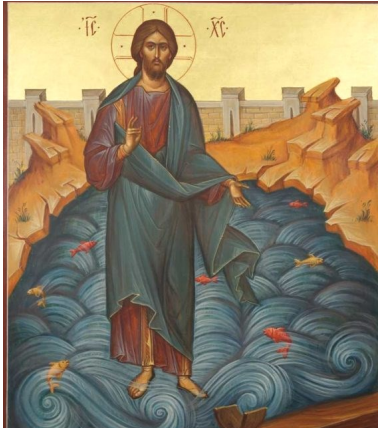
Christ is in our Midst! He is and ever shall be!



Volume 11 Issue 527

9th Sunday after Pentecost-Forefeast of the Holy Dormition

August 14, 2022



People view the church in many different ways. Some think of it as a private club for meeting the spiritual needs of its members in a way that is ultimately self-centered and insular. Contrary to popular opinion, the mission of Christ's Body is not to help us ignore or escape from the world, but to manifest a sign of its salvation. As members of the Savior's Body and of

one another, we must accept the challenge that St. Paul gave to the Corinthians to live as God's fellow workers, God's field, and God's building.

Those are all active images that require something of us. Jesus Christ is our one true foundation, but we must not simply rest content with having a foundation, any more than someone would lay the foundation for a building and then stop construction. As St. Paul writes, "You are God's temple and...God's Spirit dwells in you." Our calling is to build up the Body of Christ as a holy temple that will shine brightly in a darkened world as we journey toward the Kingdom, where the true spiritual state of our souls will be revealed.

The Apostle is not writing about a building made of wood or stone, of course, but about our common life in
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++ 9th Sunday after Pentecost ++
+ Prophet Micah +

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 3:9-17

Gospel: Matthew 14: 22-34

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.*

A Discourse on the Beatitudes by St. Gregory of Nyssa

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'.

Come, let us ascend the mountain of the Lord. Who among those of us gathered here is worthy of becoming a disciple of the Lord and, with Him, to ascend from poor and lowly thoughts to the spiritual heights of sub-

lime contemplation?

This mountain is free of any shadow cast by the looming hills of wickedness and, at the same time, basks in the splendor of the true light. And within the glow of pure truth, it makes visible everything that's invisible to those who are stranded down below. What these things are which are revealed from the heights, and how many of them there are, is explained by the Lord.

When He praises those who've ascended the

Mountain with Him, He explains, as if pointing with a finger, the kingdom of heaven on the one hand, and, on the other, the inheritance of the homeland above. He then goes on to talk about mercy, justice, comfort and their relation to the God of all. He even talks about the benefits of persecution, which are that we come to dwell with God.

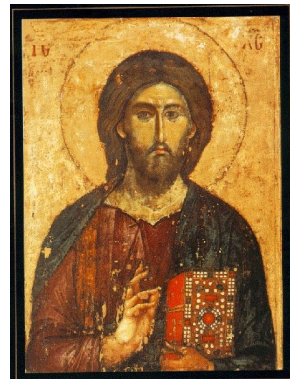
The Lord also indicates how many other, similar things can be seen from
(continued on p.2)

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 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, Christopher, Elizabeth, Rudy, Marigold, Corella, Ron, Daniel, Frankie, Loretta, Mackenzie, Mike, Jessica, Grace, Gladys, Lisa, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

St. John of Kronstadt

Today the Holy Church solemnly glorifies the honorable Dormition or translation of the Mother of God from earth to heaven. She died without serious illness, peacefully. Her soul is taken up in the divine hands of Her Son and carried up into the heavenly abode, accompanied by the sweet singing of angels. And then, her most pure body is transferred by the apos-

tles to Gethsemane where it is honorably buried, and on the third day it is resurrected and taken up to heaven. The translation of the Mother of God is a paradigm of the translation in general of the souls of every Christian to the other world.

We say that our dead have “fallen asleep” or “passed away.” What does this mean? This means that for the true Christian there is no death. Death was conquered by Christ on the cross. But there is a translation, i.e. a rearrangement of his condition, i.e. his soul is in another place, in another age, in another world beyond the grave, eternal, without end, that is what is meant by “falling asleep”. It is as if it were a temporary dream after which, by the voice of the Lord and the fearful yet wonderful trumpet of the Archangel, all the dead shall live and come forth each to his place: either to the resurrection of life or to the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:29). This is what the Christian means by translation. We should be ready for this translation, for the day of the general resurrection and judgment, for this indescribable world event.

Discourse on the Beatitudes, cont'd from p.1

from high up on the mountain, gazing with hope upon them as from a watch-tower.

Let's attend to the invitation of Isaiah who cries aloud: 'Come let us ascend the mountain of the Lord'. (Is. 2, 1) and if we're too weak, because of sin, then let's 'strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees', as the Prophet tells us (Is 35, 3). Because if we arrive at the summit, we'll meet Him Who cures every sickness and every weakness. We'll find Him Who takes upon Himself our illnesses and bears the burden of our sicknesses. So let's run up the hill to reach the peak of hope, with Isaiah, and then we'll see from above the blessings which the Lord shows to those who follow Him up the incline. But may the Word of God open His mouth to us, too, and teach us those things which it's a blessing to hear. Let's begin from where the Lord begins His teaching.

Blessedness. He says that those who are poor in spirit are blessed,

because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. Let's suppose that somebody who loves gold happens to find information in books that there's treasure in a particular place. But the



place where the treasure's hidden needs a lot of sweat and effort from those who want to acquire it. So this man will quail at the prospect of so much effort and he'll reckon that it's better not to tire himself out trying to get the treasure instead of enjoying it.

But that's not how these things

work. On the contrary, he'll call on all his friends and ask for their help, gathering lots of people to ensure he makes the hidden treasure his own.

This is ostensibly the treasure that was mentioned, but the real riches are hidden by the vagueness. If we also wish to acquire the pure gold, let's use the power of prayers, so that, for our sake, the gold will appear on the surface. We can then share it equally so that none of us has all of it. Because sharing a virtue is such that, even if it's shared among all of those people who are seeking it, it belongs entirely to each one of them and isn't reduced among those who are taking part in it.

Whereas with sharing material wealth, whoever seizes more is being unjust towards those who want a fair share. Because whoever increases his own portion inevitably reduces that of the others who are taking part in the distribution.

(Continued next issue)

Christ. Both collectively and personally, we are temples of the Holy Spirit, which gives us a great obligation to cooperate with the presence and power of God in our lives.

Today's gospel lesson provides a vivid example of what happens when we turn away from Christ as the one true foundation of our lives. St. Peter began to sink like a stone in a raging sea when he shifted his focus from entrusting His life to the Lord to being consumed with fear about the wind and the waves. By his own power, there was no way that Peter could have avoided drowning in this situation, but thankfully he retained the presence of mind to call out "Lord, save me!" That is precisely what the Savior did by reaching out to Peter and rescuing him as He said, "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?"

The stress of the storm revealed the weakness of Peter's faith, which is not surprising because he had gotten himself into this dangerous situation by putting Christ to the test, saying "Lord, if it is You, bid me come to You on the water." By his prideful lack of trust, Peter literally got himself in well over his head.

Our calling is to become faithful coworkers with God by offering our lives to Him as we become holier and more beautiful temples of the Holy Spirit. That will never happen by allowing the storms of our lives to turn our attention away from the opportunities that they present for actively cooperating with God for the healing of our souls and the strengthening of the Church.

Like Peter, we bring about many of our own struggles by our own thoughts, words, and deeds. Out of pride, we may be ashamed to acknowledge that we have put ourselves in a situation in which, left to our own devices, we will sink like stones. It is easy to lose hope for building on the one true foundation of Jesus Christ when we know that we have fallen into an abyss of sin that threatens to wound us and others in profound ways.

We become too much like Peter when we relate to God based on getting what we want, which is really a way of saying that our faith is conditional. Our trust is then not actually in the Lord, but in ourselves. We may not ask to walk on the water, but we judge the importance of faithfulness to the Lord on whether He gives us the results that we want. When things do not go as we would like,

the weakness of our faith becomes clear, for then we sink into doubt, despair, and a lack of commitment to find the healing for our souls. When that happens, we still have the choice of whether to drown spiritually or to come to our senses and call out "Lord, save me!"

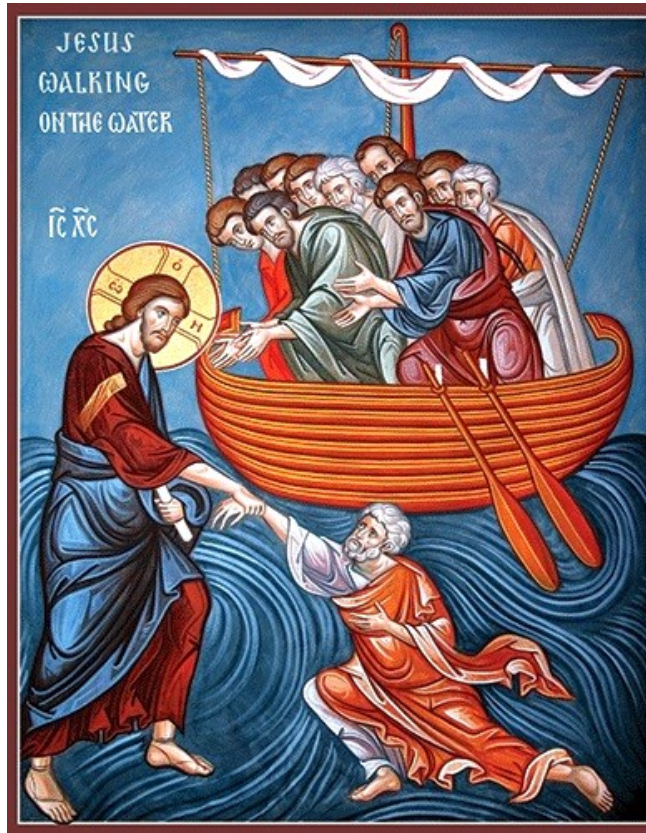
We have the choice between destroying God's temple by further weakening our faith and separating ourselves from the Body of Christ or of calling out to the Lord in humble repentance from the depths of our hearts. Remember that He had compassion on St. Peter, the thief on the cross, and the tax collector, who could only say "God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

As Orthodox Christians, we encounter the Lord as members of His Body, the Church. We have put Him on in baptism, become temples of the Holy Spirit through

chrismation, and received His Body and Blood in the Eucharist. We are members of Him and of one another. He is the vine and we are the branches. If we find ourselves spiritually weak, confused, and uninterested, we should take a clear look at our relationship with Christ in His Body, the Church. It is through conscientious participation in the full sacramental and ascetical life of the Church that we will open ourselves to receive the strength to offer ourselves to God as His fellow workers, field, and building. If we take the life of the Church for granted or separate ourselves from it, we risk destroying our integrity as God's temple. We step away from our one true foundation and put ourselves in a place where we can easily sink like stones.

Our small parish is not simply an association of people who share a common faith. We enter mystically into the Kingdom of God in every celebration of the Divine Liturgy and participate personally in the healing divine energies of the Savior through the holy mysteries. We are members of His Body and temples of the Holy Spirit, both collectively and personally.

Peter learned the hard way not to put Christ to the test, and we must not make our active participation in the Church conditional upon any preconceived notions of how the church should fit into our lives or what we want from God. The point is not that we fit God into our lives, but that we offer ourselves to participate more fully in Him. Our goal is nothing less than to become radiant with the holiness of God as a sign of the salvation of the world.



The Feast of the Dormition of Our Most Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary is celebrated on August 15 each year. The Feast commemorates the repose or "falling-asleep" of the Mother of Jesus Christ, our Lord. The Feast also commemorates the translation or assumption into heaven of the body of the Theotokos. Holy Scripture tell us that when our Lord was dying on the Cross, He saw His Mother and His Disciple John and said to the Virgin Mary, "Woman, behold your son!" and to John, "Behold your mother!" (John 19:25-27). From that hour, the Apostle took care of the Theotokos in his own home. Along with the biblical reference in Acts 1:14 that confirms that the Virgin Mary was with the Holy Apostles on the day of Pentecost, the tradition of the Church holds that she remained in the home of the Apostle John in Jerusalem, continuing a ministry in word and deed.

At the time of her death, the disciples of our Lord who were preaching throughout the world returned to Jerusalem to see the Theotokos. Except for the Apostle Thomas, all of them including the Apostle Paul were gathered together at her bedside. At the moment of her death, Jesus Christ himself descended and carried her soul into heaven. Following her repose, the body of the Theotokos was taken in procession and laid in a tomb near the Garden of Gethsemane.

When the Apostle Thomas arrived three days after her repose and desired to see her body, the tomb was found to be empty. The bodily assumption of the Theotokos was confirmed by the message of an angel and by her appearance to the Apostles.

The Icon of the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos shows her on her deathbed surrounded by the Apostles. Christ is standing in the center looking at His mother. He is holding a small child clothed in white representing the soul of the Virgin Mary. With His golden garments, the angels above His head, and the mandorla surrounding Him, Christ is depicted in His divine glory. The posture of the Apostles direct attention toward the Theotokos. On the right Saint Peter censes the body of the Theotokos. On the left Saint Paul bows low in honor of her.

Together with the Apostles are several bishops and women. The bishops traditionally represented are James, the brother of the Lord, Timothy, Heirotheus, and Dionysius the Areopagite. They are shown wearing episcopal vestments. The women are members of the church in Jerusalem.

In front of the bed of the Theotokos is a candle that helps to form a central axis in the icon. Above the candle is the body of the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary. Standing over His mother is Christ holding her most pure soul. Above Christ the gates of heaven stand open, ready to receive the Mother of God.

This great Feast of the Church and the icon celebrates a fundamental teaching of our faith—the Resurrection of the body. In the case of the Theotokos, this has been accomplished by the divine will of God. Thus, this Feast is a feast of hope, hope in Resurrection and life eternal. Like those who gathered around the body of the Virgin Mary, we gather around our departed loved ones and commend their souls into the hands of Christ. As we remember those who have reposed in the faith before us and have passed on into the communion of the Saints, we prepare ourselves to one day be received into the new life of the age to come.

We also affirm through this Feast as we journey toward our heavenly abode that the Mother of God intercedes for us. For through Christ she has become the mother of all of the children of God, embracing us with divine love.

Come, all who love to keep the feasts, come, let us form a choir! Come, let us crown the Church with songs, as the Ark of God goes to her rest!

For today heaven is opened wide, as it receives the Mother of Him Who cannot be contained. The earth, as it yields up the source of Life, is robed in blessing and majesty.

The hosts of Angels, present with the fellowship of the Apostles, gaze in great fear at her who bore the Author of life, now that she is translated from life to life.

Let us all venerate and implore her: O Lady, forget not your ties of kinship with those who keep in faith the feast of your all-holy Dormition! (from the feast)

