

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 528

10th Sunday after Pentecost-Christ heals the possessed boy

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We hear today about the man with the possessed son. This event is also recounted in the Gospels of Mark and Luke, and between all three Evangelists, a complete picture emerges, of both the factual details and the spiritual significance of this episode.

It begins immediately after the Lord's Transfiguration, as Christ descends the mountain with Peter,

James, and John to rejoin the other disciples. We learn from Mark that a dispute was taking place between the scribes and the disciples, because they were unable to cast out a demon that had possessed a certain man's young son since childhood.

Naturally, the unbelieving scribes took the opportunity of this failure to cast a shadow of doubt on the power and authority of the great Galilean Teacher, and his disciples, perplexed and embarrassed at their apparent impotence, resorted to a contest of words in His defense.

When Jesus is told by the possessed boy's father that the apostles could not expel the demon troubling his son, He lets forth a cry of exasperation: *O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?* (Mt. 17:17).
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++ 10th Sunday after Pentecost ++
+ St. Thaddeus of the 70 +

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 4:9-16

Gospel: Matthew 17: 14-23

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 (part 2)

With spiritual riches, however, the same thing happens as with the sun, which shines on all of those who see it and belongs fully to each one of them. So since we hope that the profit for each of us will be commensurate with the effort, let's all help each other equally with our prayers, so that we achieve what we're seeking.

And first, I think, we should understand what the word beatitude really means. Being blessed [fortunate], in my opin-

ion of course, is an encapsulation of everything we mean that has to do with what's good. It lacks none of the things which are related to pure wishes. But we can make the meaning clearer by comparing it with the opposite.

And the opposite of blessed [fortunate] is wretched. Wretchedness is tribulation through the lamentable and unwished-for passions. Blessedness and wretchedness are distinguishable by the opposite dispositions of

those in one state or the other. People who are blessed rejoice and are glad and enjoy whatever's before them; wretched people suffer and are pained with whatever life brings.

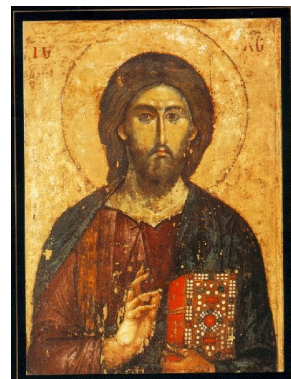
A truly blessed existence is Divine. Because we suppose the Divine to be, blessedness is that pure life, the indescribable and incomprehensible good, the inexpressible beauty, that which is all grace, wisdom and strength, the true light,
(continued on p.2)

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

The Apostle Thaddeus of the 70

Saint Thaddeus was by descent a Hebrew, and he was born in the Syrian city of Edessa. The holy Apostle Thaddeus of the Seventy must be distinguished from Saint Jude-Thaddeus, who was one of the Twelve Apostles.

When he came to Jerusalem for a feast day, he heard the preaching of St. John the Baptist. After being baptized by him

in the Jordan, he remained in Palestine. He saw the Savior, and became His follower. He was chosen by the Lord to be one of the Seventy Disciples, whom He sent by twos to preach in the cities and places where He intended to visit (Luke. 10: 1).

After the Ascension, St. Thaddeus preached the good news in Syria and Mesopotamia. He preached the Gospel in Edessa, and he converted King Abgar, the people and the pagan priests to Christ. He backed up his preaching with many miracles. He established priests there and built up the Edessa Church.

He went to the city of Beirut to preach, and he founded a church there. It was in this city that he peacefully died in the year 44. (The place of his death is indicated as Beirut in the Slavonic Menaion, but according to other sources he died in Edessa. According to an ancient Armenian tradition, Saint Thaddeus, after various tortures, was beheaded by the sword on December 21 in the Artaz region in the year 50).

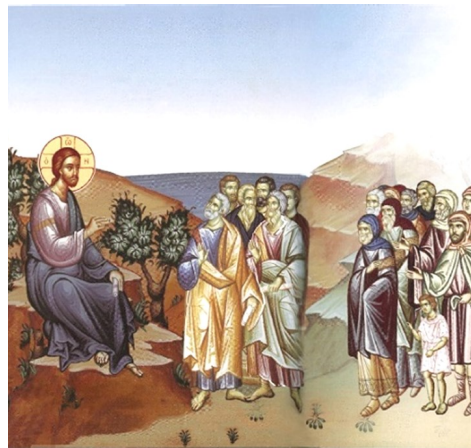
Discourse on the Beatitudes, cont'd from p.1

the source of all goodness, the supreme authority of all, the only desirable thing, that which is always the same, permanent rejoicing, about which much might be said though nothing which would be worthy of it. Because not even the intellect can approach God, but were we able to understand some of the most sublime things about Him, words would fail us in trying to make them comprehensible.

Since, however, God made us in His own image, we might also say that what was created in God's name is also blessed and partakes in true blessedness. Because bodily good looks, that is the original beauty, resides in the living, breathing person, whereas what is painted in a picture as imitation is a poor second. The same is true of overwhelming blessedness, which is human nature. This, too, is adorned with pure beauty when it bears the signs of the features of a blessed person.

But because the filth of sin had

smudged the beauty of the image, Christ came and removes it with His own water which revives us and brings eternal life. So we, too, can cast off the ugliness of sin and can be



made new, in accordance with the blessed, divine form. And just as in the art of painting a master can say to beginners that this portrait is good because it has the various features right: the hair, the circles of the eyes, the lines of the eyebrows, the cheeks and all the others separately, completing the overall beauty, so the Lord,

Who portrays our soul afresh, in simulation of the only truly Blessed One, our God, describes in words the particular features which contribute to blessedness.

And first He says is: *'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'* But what benefit will we derive from this great gift of God [the promise of the kingdom of heaven] unless we discover the deeper meaning hidden in these words? In medical science, there are many expensive and rare remedies that are unused and are of no benefit to those who don't realize their value until they learn from specialists what the application of each one is.

Now what does poverty of the spirit mean? The thing which ensures that we enter the kingdom of heaven. From Holy Scripture we've learned to identify two kinds of riches. One is admirable and the other is to be condemned.

(Continued next issue)

(Homily on Christ healing the possessed young man, cont'd from p.1)

The reproach is directed to everyone present. The unbelief of the scribes, who ever demanded to see a sign from heaven and who claimed that Christ cast out demons by the power of Satan, is not surprising. But unlike many of those who came to Christ for help and healing, this possessed boy's father had only very weak faith, which was further shaken to the point of despair by the apostles' initial failure. He turns to Jesus as though uncertain of his ability to help—if *thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us and help us* (Mk. 9:22).

What a far cry this is from the faith of the centurion or the Syro-phoenician woman! Both Jairus and the woman with an issue of blood evinced greater faith in the Lord's divine power. And as the Lord always sent these faithful ones away with the words, "Thy faith hath made thee whole," so He directs this man towards the source of his son's healing: *If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth* (Mk. 9:23). Mark alone records the man's memorably desperate response: *Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief* (Mk. 9:24). And so the Lord finally casts the demon out of his son.

Matthew's account, which we heard today, further tells us that the apostles themselves were guilty of unbelief; for when they questioned him privately about why they were unable to cast out the demon, Jesus tells them plainly, *Because of your unbelief* (Mt. 17:20). This is certainly strange. How is it that those who had, just days prior, confessed their faith in the divinity of Christ be accused by Him of unbelief?

Not so long before, He had chosen them and sent them out two by two, giving them power over unclean spirits. Freshly imbued with this spiritual authority, they went about Galilee, preaching the good news of the kingdom, casting out devils, and healing the sick. All of a sudden, simple fisherman and former publicans were roving about from town to town, performing astounding miracles the likes of which had never been seen in Israel. These ordinary men, who until recently had been living unremarkable or even sinful lives, were accomplishing feats that the scrupulous Pharisees, or even the great ascetic John the Baptist and his austere followers, were incapable of doing.

Of course, they knew that the devils were subject to them only in Christ's name. But perhaps they became a bit puffed-up by the wonders being accomplished

through them. Perhaps in their hearts, almost imperceptibly to them, some feeling of their own worth crept in. Freely they had received of the Lord... but after all, were they not somehow deserving? Did they not leave everything in order to follow Christ? Perhaps as they followed the Lord in all His travels and watched Him perform His mighty works, they felt some subtle sense of superiority, of smug satisfaction at being the close associates of such a divine and extraordinary man. Just think of James and John, who, in their false expectation of earthly glory for the Messiah, asked for a position of special preeminence in His kingdom.

That the disciples would be subject to such petty human foibles is no surprise, for the Holy Spirit had not yet been given to them as It was on Pentecost, when It perfected them spiritually and empowered them for their apostolic ministry to all nations. Without such an in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit, it seems clear that the apostles had grown complacent and proved themselves incapable of preserving the grace to cast out demons given them at the time of their election to the apostolate. They had lost that living faith which, according to the Lord's word, can accomplish all things—*If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you* (Mt. 17:20).

How can we overcome our slothfulness and negligence and allow the mustard seed of genuine faith to take root and flourish? This is indicated by the phrase: *This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting* (Mt. 17:21). These are the means to acquire and increase active, fruitful, and truly God-pleasing faith. At the outset of their ministry, the apostles received abundant gifts of grace, unmerited and unwarranted by their own past life or personal efforts. But gradually, they became complacent, they took God's grace for granted, they assumed it had become their personal possession. In order to keep them from growing proud, God took away this manifest grace, so that they would realize it was always wholly dependent on Christ. And now He shows them the path to fully assimilate the same grace, but now as a conscious and willing participant, so that their spiritual life might be founded on the solid rock of child-like faith and the doing of Christ's commandments.



"It is Truly Meet to call Thee Blessed, O Theotokos"

While all the hymns of our Church were written by holy and devout people and are divinely inspired, the hymn 'It is truly right to call you blessed who gave birth to God, ever blessed and most pure and the Mother of our God', which we sing at both the small and great supplicatory canons, wasn't written by human hand but was taught us by the Archangel Gabriel.

On the island of Mt. Athos, there lived a virtuous priest-monk and his disciple. On the evening of Saturday, 11 June 980, the devout elder set off to go to a vigil in the church of the Protaton, leaving his disciple behind in their monastic cell. A short time later, the disciple received a visit from a monk he didn't know who asked to stay in the cell overnight. When the time came for them to perform their monastic duties, they began singing matins. They reached the ninth ode of the canon, the disciple stood in front of the icon of the Mother of God and was about to sing the ancient hymn 'More honorable than the cherubim', by St. Kosmas the Melodist. His guest, however, intervened with 'It is truly right to call you blessed...', which had never been heard before. He then rounded off the hymn with 'More honorable than the cherubim...'.
Hearing it for the first time, the disciple was in awe and asked the unknown monk to write it down somewhere so that he could remember it.

Since there was no paper and ink available, the monk inscribed these holy words on a stone slab, with his finger, adding: 'From now on, this is how you and all Orthodox Christians will sing it'. When he'd said this, he disappeared.

When the disciple's elder returned from the vigil, the younger man told him the wondrous tale and he saw the inscription on the slab. They immediately hastened to make the miracle know to the other monks on the Holy Mountain. They sent the slab to Constantinople, to the patriarch and the emperor so that the hymn might be disseminated to the whole Church.

According to Saint Nikodemos the Athonite, that unknown monk who taught us the hymn was the Archangel Gabriel, because he was always 'the writer of divine hymns to the Mother of God and was her custodian,

servant and joyful Evangelist'. The icon of the Mother of God before which this hymn was sung for the first time was called 'It is Truly Meet.' It was taken from the blessed cell to the church of the Protaton, on Mt. Athos, as spiritual support for the Holy Mountain and the whole Orthodox commonwealth.

This angelic hymn to our all-praised Lady, the Mother of God, summarizes the faith of the Church regarding her person. Our Lady is 'most pure', that is, she's the chosen vessel of sanctity, the vessel of divine grace, who, as the Fathers teach, was a stranger to all defilement of the flesh and spirit. She never sinned, in word, deed or thought. This is why we don't just call her 'holy', but 'all-holy', which means that's she's the holiest of all, fully and completely virtuous, since the fulness and entirety of sanctity are made manifest in her person. She truly gave birth to God and is the Mother of our God, precisely as this angelic hymn says. Literally, not symbolically.

Given that our Lady is in truth the Mother of God, it follows that her Son, Jesus Christ is truly God who became human. This faith isn't some philosophical theory or doctrine but rather lies at the basis of our salvation and gives us the guarantee that this is assured. When, at an early age, Saint Paisios the Athonite heard from some people that Jesus was, indeed, virtuous, but not God, he was greatly troubled, because he reasoned that, if

Christ wasn't God, then all the spiritual struggles we engage in are in vain, since no mere mortal, however virtuous, can give us sanctity and salvation. Only God can. But our merciful Lord appeared to him, bathed in light and spoke to him the blessed words: 'I am the resurrection and life' (Jn. 11, 25), and in this way dispelled all his doubts. After this revelation the saint was absolutely certain in his heart that Christ is truly God and that therefore our salvation is assured.

Let us, also, work assiduously and indefatigably for the salvation granted by Jesus Christ, as God and human person, and let us adhere to the words of the Archangel Gabriel: 'It is truly right...'. It's right and proper that we should hymn the person who gave birth to our redeemer, Jesus, for she's the ever-blessed and most pure, all-holy Mother of God.

