

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 530

12th Sunday after Pentecost-Christ and the Rich Young Man

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Today's Gospel concerns the young man who asked Christ what it is necessary to do in order to have eternal life. Our Lord tells him first of all to keep the commandments: thou shalt not murder, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not bear false witness, honour thy father and mother - all the commandments given by divine inspiration to

Moses. However, our Lord, here and elsewhere in the Gospels, sums up those commandments, by giving only two commandments: Love God and love thy neighbor as thyself.

As it is said elsewhere in the Gospels, these two commandments are linked. For as we know from recent human history, from the history of dictators and tyrants, World Wars and human misery, those who do not love God, do not love God's creation. And the summit of God's creation is humanity. Those who hate humanity are those who have first hated God.

And such haters of humanity are also those who hate the rest of God's creation: those who recklessly cut down forests and pollute the air and the water and the earth, these too are haters of God, for it is clear that they hate God's Creation. So, they do the
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++ 12th Sunday after Pentecost ++

+St. Babylas Martyr of Antioch +

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11

Gospel: Matthew 19: 16-26

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.*

How to Study Scripture by St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

When you study the Gospel, don't look for pleasure, don't look for excitement, don't look for brilliant thoughts. Seek to find the infallible holy truth. Don't be satisfied with studying the Gospel to no real avail. Study it practically. Strive to carry out its commandments. Since it's the book of life, study it with your life.

Don't believe that it's by chance that the four Gospels begin with Matthew and end with John. Matthew teaches us more about how to fulfill the

divine will and the teachings which are appropriate for those beginning to make their way on the path of God. John has more to do with the manner of union with God, with people being renewed by God's commandments. This union is achieved by those who have already advanced along the path to God.

When you open the holy Gospel, remember that it'll determine your eternal state. We'll all be judged by it and will either be saved or punished eternally. 'Those who

reject me and do not receive my words have a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge them on the last day' [Jn. 12, 48].

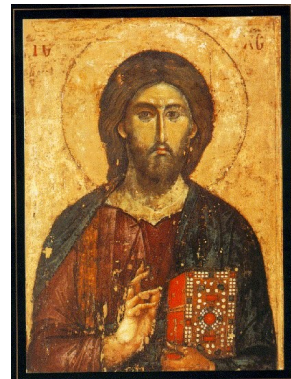
God has revealed his will to this insignificant speck of dust which is called a human being. The book in which his all-holy and redemptive will is recorded is in your hands. You can either accept or reject the will of your Maker and Savior. Your eternal life or eternal death depends on you yourself. So weigh
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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 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, Fr. Michael, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Maverick, Corella, Ron, Daniel, Frankie, Loretta, Mackenzie, Mike, Jessica, Grace, Gladys, Lisa, Jeff, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

St. Babylas of Antioch

The Holy Martyr Babylas was the Bishop of Antioch from 237 to 253. He was martyred for his faith in Christ together with the three youths Urban, Prilidian, Epolonius and their mother Christodoula, under the emperor Decius (249-251).

Little is known of the life of Babylas. He was named Bishop of Antioch in 237 and is noted for his defense of Christianity before the Roman emperor Decius that

led to his martyrdom. During a visit to Antioch by the emperor Decius as part of an arranged a festival to the pagan gods, Decius attempted to witness a Divine Liturgy served by Babylas. Babylas barred the emperor from entering the church, for which the emperor had the church burned. After Babylas declared the emperor unworthy because he desecrated God's sanctuary, Decius ordered Babylas to worship the pagan idols or face execution.

Decius ordered Babylas to be placed into heavy chains. The chains, Babylas told the emperor, that suffering for Christ was as desirable to him as imperial power was to the emperor, and death for the Immortal King was as precious to him as life to Decius.

At the trial with Bishop Babylas were three young brothers, who did not forsake him even in this most difficult moment. The emperor commanded all the martyrs be tied to a tree and burned with fire. Seeing the stoic bravery of the saints, the emperor finally condemned them to be beheaded with the sword along with their mother in the year 253.

How to Study the Bible cont'd from p.1

up how much care and wisdom you need to show. Don't play games with eternity.

Pray to the Lord with a contrite heart, so that he'll open your eyes to see the miracles concealed in his law in the Gospel. The Word of God opens the eyes of the soul and heals it from sin in a wondrous manner. The cures of the body effected by the Lord were simply illustrations and proof of the cure of the soul. They were necessary confirmation for people whose minds were blinded by pleasures of the flesh. Read the Gospel with great veneration and attention. Don't consider any passage to be of lesser importance and don't pass over any part without reading it properly. Every dot in the Gospel radiates life. Indifference to life means death.

When you read about the lepers, the cripples, the blind, the lame and the possessed that the Lord healed, recollect that your soul, which is sorely wounded by sin and is in thrall to the demons, is like those sick people.

Learn from the Gospel about their faith. The Lord will heal you, too, if you turn to him with faith, as they did, and entreat him ceaselessly to cure you.

In order to find yourself in a posi-



tion to receive divine healing, you have first to acquire the right spiritual disposition. Healing is provided to those who have an awareness of their sinfulness and who take the decision to leave it behind. The Savior's of no use to the proud righteous- in essence, the sinful- who don't see their offenses.

Being able to see the sinfulness, the fall of the whole of the human race, is a gift from God. Ask him for this gift and, when it's granted, the Gospel, the book of the heavenly Physician, will become much more comprehensible. Try to make the Gospel more familiar to your mind and your heart. Let your mind be borne upon it, let it live in it. In this way, all of your activity will be more easily inspired by the Gospel. This can be achieved by all of us if we delve more deeply into it and study it meticulously.

Saint Pachomius the Great, one of the most famous of the early Fathers, knew the Gospel by heart. Later, as a result of divine inspiration, he encouraged his disciples to do the same. In this way, the Gospel accompanied and guided them always and everywhere.

Why do modern Christian teachers don't adorn the minds of young children with the Gospel and instead stuff them with Aesop's fables and other extraneous knowledge? What on
(Continued p.4, column 1)

(Homily on Christ and the Rich Young Man, cont'd from p.1)

work of the Devil, which is hatred.

Let us also notice how our Lord tells us in this Gospel that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. What does this mean? This does not mean that we are to love ourselves in the sense that we must be selfish, self-centered, pandering to our every whim and desire. It means that we are to love ourselves as we were created by God, not to love ourselves as we are now, all sinful and sullied, but to love ourselves as God intended us to be, bright, sinless, as Adam and Eve were in Paradise.

And here we enter into the understanding of that terrible mystery of self-hatred, self-destruction through alcohol or other drugs, self-mutilation, even of suicide, that is, self-murder. Those who enter on to such paths are those who have so lost faith, being so blinded by misfortune and depression, that they have lost all faith in God to restore them to what they could be and have so lost faith in themselves, that they are ready to undertake their self-destruction. Having become blind to the Beauty of the Creator, they have become blind to the original and potential beauty of the Creation, which they are.

The young man who spoke to Christ today kept the commandments. Probably, this was fairly easy for him, he had been well brought up, he had been well instructed. However, our Lord tells him that there is a higher way to salvation, a way to become perfect. This is for him to give away all his wealth. The disciples, not yet enlightened by the Crucifixion, the Resurrection and the Descent of the Holy Spirit, were astonished at Christ's words about the rich and asked who could be saved. His words seemed to them to be hard words and that therefore none could be saved.

However, if we examine more closely Christ's words, we see that He does not say that the rich cannot be saved. Rather, He says that those who are attached to their riches cannot be saved. And this is the tragedy of the soul of the young man, For he went away sorrowful, for he had 'great possessions'. In other words, the discerning eyes of Christ saw that the young man was unlike those disciples who had abandoned their fishing-boat in order to follow the Saviour; it was not so much that the young man had many possessions, rather that he was possessed by his possessions.



And this is the secret of wealth. In the history of the Church and in the Lives of the Saints, we can often read of many people who came into great wealth, but they did not allow themselves to become possessed of their wealth. They were wealthy for a time, and then gave it away, to orphanages, to beggars, to charities, to churches, to monasteries. They understood that wealth is granted by God, only for a time and only for a purpose. God calls the wealthy not to be possessors, but rather distributors, of wealth. We are called to be channels, instruments, agents of the grace and benefactions of God. Nothing should come from ourselves, we should be like mirrors reflecting God's Will and Infinite Mercy.

Now, in this same Gospel, Christ tells us that in fact salvation is impossible with men, but that all things are possible with God. What do these words imply regarding our way of life? First of all, we should not think that we are able to do anything by ourselves and certainly we are unable to save ourselves.

Above all we should not think that what God allows us to do, we can do well, or even perfectly. Perfectionism comes from the sin of pride. Those who are perfectionist are too demanding with themselves and too demanding with others. Such people often feel frustrated, they become disillusioned, falling into discouragement and even despair. We are to avoid the spirit of self-reliance, the pride of doing things from ourselves. In any important undertaking, we are to ask for God's blessing, to ask Him for His help, for His guidance.

On the other hand, we are not simply to sit back and abandon all efforts, expecting God to do everything for us. Our Lord tells us how to live in today's Gospel. He says: Do your best, and He will look after everything else. If we do what is possible, God will do what is impossible. But if we do not first do what is possible, then He will not do for us what is impossible.

We are never to despair, to lose hope, we are never to disbelieve in the results of Faith. As we sing in the Great Prokeimenon: Our God is a great God, for He works wonders'. For it is He alone Who makes the impossible possible and the unattainable attainable. Glory to thee, O God, glory to thee!

earth would he have made of the state of education today?].

What happiness, what wealth there is in memorizing the Gospel. You see, we can't be sure to foresee the changes in our life-style that will occur or the disasters that might befall us in the course of our earthly life. But if the Gospel's committed to memory it can be studied by the blind, it accompanies inmates to prison, it converses with the farmer in the field, it counsels the judge on the bench, guides the merchant in the market-place and comforts the sick at times of tedious insomnia and profound loneliness.

Don't however, take it upon yourself to interpret the Gospel and other books of Scripture on your own.

These were written by prophets and apostles, not arbitrarily but under the illumination of the Holy Spirit. So, if they weren't written randomly, it makes no sense to interpret them irresponsibly. The word of God was written by the Holy Spirit, with the prophets and apostles as his agents, and has been interpreted by the holy Fathers. Both the ability to record the word of God and to interpret it are gifts from the Holy Spirit. This is all that the Orthodox accept. This is all that its true children accept.

Those who interpret Scripture subjectively reject the interpretation of the Fathers, which was guided by the Holy Spirit. And those who reject the interpretation of the Scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in effect reject Scripture itself. And so it comes about that the word of God, which is the word of our salvation, becomes a deadly two-edged sword for those who interpret it lightly. They themselves put to death their own souls and make them liable to eternal punishment. The Lord says: 'On whom shall I look except those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my words' [Is. 66, 2]. This should be our attitude to the Lord and the Gospel, wherein he is to be found.

Abandon your sinful life; leave behind earthly antagonism and love of pleasure. Reject your life, that is your egotism, and then you'll be able to approach and understand the Gospel. 'Those who love their soul will lose it', said the Lord, 'but those who don't take into account their life in this world, will keep their soul for eternal

life'. This is why, for those who love their self and aren't prepared to renounce it, the Gospel's closed. They read it, but the words of life and of the Holy Spirit remain an impenetrable curtain for them.

When the Lord was on earth in his most-holy human body, lots of people saw him, while others didn't. What good is it for people to see with the eyes of the body, as the animals do? How is it that people see with the eyes of the body, as do all animals, but don't see with the eyes of the soul, of the mind, of the heart. There are plenty of people today who read the Gospel, but don't know anything about it. It's as if they've never read it at all.

The Gospel can be read only with a clear mind and, as Saint Mark the Ascetic pointed out, it is understood in proportion to the rapport we have with it and the extent to which we apply the commandments contained in it. Nevertheless, any accurate and perfect knowledge of the Gospel can't be achieved through our own efforts; it's a gift from God. Once the Holy Spirit comes and abides in his true and faithful servants, he makes them perfect students and staunch observers of the Gospel. The Gospel contains a description of the new person, the Lord who comes down from heaven and is God 'by nature'. His holy kin, those who believe in him and become like him, are gods 'by grace'.

Those of you who wallow in the mire of sins and find pleasure there, raise your heads and gaze upon the clear heavens.

That's where your place is. God

places such a high value on you that he'll make you gods. Yet you reject this value and degrade yourselves to the level of the beasts- indeed, the most impure among them. Come to your senses. Get out of the filthy morass. Wash yourselves in tears of repentance.

Cleanse yourselves with confession. Adorn yourselves with contrition. Raise yourselves to heaven. 'While you have the light', that is the Gospel, wherein Christ is veiled, 'believe in the light so that you'll become children of the light'.

(St. Ignatius Brianchaninov was born in 1801, in Russia, to a wealthy family. He shunned worldly life and entered into a monastery where he was renowned for his spiritual life. He became a bishop and served the church as a theologian and prolific writer. He died in 1867).

