

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!



Volume 11 Issue 538

20th Sunday after Pentecost-Christ heals the Gergesene Demoniac

October 30, 2022



It is much easier to notice the failings of others than to see our own. When our passions are inflamed, the last thing that we want to do is to calm down and take a clear look at ourselves. The problem, however, is that when we mindlessly give ourselves to fulfilling our self-centered desires, whatever they may be, we do not live as those created in the image and like-

ness of God. If we do not embrace Christ's healing of our souls, we will be unable to bear witness in our own lives to the joy of His Kingdom.

The wretched man in today's gospel lesson identified himself to Christ as "Legion" because so many demons tormented him that he had lost any sense of his true self. He did not even live like a human person, as he had dwelt alone and naked in a cemetery for a long time. The Savior's mercy for the man was so profound that He took the initiative in giving him back his identity.

The transformation was so shocking that the people of the region asked Christ to leave, for they were profoundly disturbed to see the man "clothed and in his right mind." He understandably wanted to go away with the Lord, for it would have been
(continued p. 3)

++ 20th Sunday after Pentecost ++

+ Martyrs Zenobius & Zenobia +

Epistle: Galatians 1:11-19

Gospel: Luke 8: 26-39

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 talk on the Divine Liturgy, Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol (part 4)

Such behavior personally makes a big impression on me. I have seen this humility in contemporary ascetic saints, whom various high-ranking officials came to meet: prime ministers, presidents, people whose names are known all over the world. When dealing with such visitors, there wasn't a shadow of change in the behavior of the ascetics, nor a shadow of obsequiousness or flattery.

They received every visitor with spiritual nobility, and spoke with

them, regardless of who they were. They knew little of people-pleasing. For this very reason, God reigned in their souls, in their whole being. You could see how they were filled with grace. I remember when I observed these holy people, I saw that even their clothes exuded grace. They wore the simplest, oldest, shabbiest clothes.

But these clothes, and the cells of the ascetics, and their belongings all radiated great grace. It was the same with the ancient saints. It is said

about St. Basil the Great, for example, that he had a slight limp. The same is said about his countrymen, the Cappadocians: They all limped. Thus, they imitated the saint!

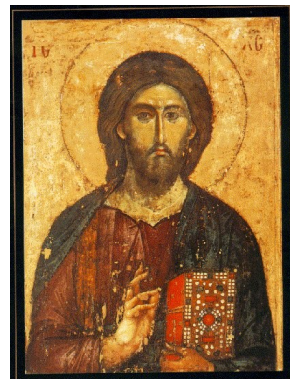
What great influence he had on them! St. Basil limped because of a problem with his feet, but the Cappadocians limped in imitation of him, because the grace hidden in his soul made such an impression upon them that they imitated even the external behavior of the saint.

(continued 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 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, Mackenzie, Mike, Jessica, Lisa, Jeff, Bonnalee, Joanne, Skip, Georgia, Chuck, Pam, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

Teachings of Elder Nikon

The cure for sadness and grief is prayer or psalmody and thanksgiving to the Lord. If you compel yourself to read the Psalter with attention and intersperse it often with the Jesus Prayer and prayers to the Mother of God and all the saints, then your grief will subside and you will receive great spiritual benefit.

When you battle with despondency or sadness then compel yourself to mentally

say: “Glory to Thee, O God, glory to Thee, O God! I thank Thee, O Lord, that Thou hast sent me this illness for the salvation of my soul. Glory to Thee, O Lord, glory to Thee.” Say these dozen words a hundred times, with conviction, from your whole heart, and in a short time you will feel relief in your heart, peace and tranquility, strength and patience. It is a sign of the visitation of the grace of God.

Seek the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, and, according to the immutable word of the Lord Himself, a word more sure than heaven and earth, all your material needs will be added to you.

The Lord tests all of His servants, and looks after them, after their spiritual and bodily needs and provides everything at the necessary time to those who trust in Him, and not in their abilities, strengths, skills, and so on.

He who seeks to please God will not be abandoned by God, as long as he doesn't abandon Him.



A talk on the Divine Liturgy, cont'd from p.1

And the modern holy ascetics have made such a great impression on their visitors that you could see how people began to imitate them in something external. The reason for this impression was the great grace that poured out not only from the holy ascetics, but from everything around them: from their clothes, or rather, the tatters they wore; from their cells; from the stumps they used instead of chairs; and everything else.

This is a witness that a man has Christ as King in his life, ruling over his entire being—his mind, heart, words, and deeds. One time someone drank a glass of water from Elder Paisios and later said that he had never drunk such delicious water anywhere. Or, for example, pilgrims often praise monastery food, how delicious it is. And how is it made? Without oil, just water. Grace is what makes everything so wonderful.

Sometimes I have to go to various events at rich homes or luxurious hotels. You see how fabulously luxurious everything is there and you think:

“All of this luxury can't even be compared with the dingy cell of Elder Paisios.” What kind of cell did he have? A small room with a dirt floor. He made the bed himself out of some



planks; it was more like a coffin than a bed. He also made the chair himself. And for writing, instead of a desk, he used a piece of a board he would put on his lap. He also had an old clock to keep track of the time, and some paper icons on the wall.

Everything was blackened by smoke from the stove and the candles that he had burning all the time.

On one of our trips to Russia, we visited the Hermitage Museum and saw Empress Catherine's chambers. My God, what luxury this woman didn't surround herself with! I can't even imagine how she could have lived in the midst of all this. Indeed, I said: “If I were shut up in such a room for a night, I'd go out of my mind!”

When the grace of God is absent, then everything is dead, everything is tiresome. Take the most beautiful palace—if God is not there, then it's not a palace, but a cemetery. Life in such a palace will kill you. Put God into a simple shack—of which there used to be many, made of one common room where they cooked, ate, and slept—put an icon there, put a lampada, start praying, and this shack will become Paradise—a Paradise so beautiful that you'll exclaim: “Oh, that all men could know the joy and blessing.

(continued p.4, column 2)

(Homily on The Gergesene Demoniac, cont'd from p.1)

very hard for people to relate to him as a neighbor and not as a dreaded monster. He must also have been embarrassed by his former state. Christ refused, however, and told him to "Return to your home, and declare all that God has done for you." The Savior knew that there could be no greater sign of His saving power than the witness of someone so visibly restored to the dignity of a beloved child of God.

We must resist the temptation to think that such an extraordinary account has little to do with us. The Lord's deliverance of the demon-possessed man provides an icon of His healing mercy for all humanity. The Son of God became a human person in our world of corruption in order to liberate us all from living naked among the tombs. Our first parents

stripped themselves of the divine glory through prideful disobedience; that is when we became enslaved to the fear of death, for which we try to compensate in the vain effort to find fulfillment in the things of this world.

Instead of embracing our calling to become more like God in holiness, we disorder ourselves and our relationships with every created thing. We look for fulfillment in what cannot satisfy us and find only misery as slaves of our self-centered desires. We misuse the powers of our souls and all the good things of this life. Instead of offering ourselves and our world for restoration in God, we become idolaters of our own corrupt wills. Our passions easily distort our sense of what it means to be truly ourselves, for it is very easy to accept whatever desires we have as indications of who we truly are.

We are not as far gone as "Legion," but our passions so easily keep us from embracing our true identity as those called to become "partakers of the divine nature" by grace. Contrary to how we often think and feel, it is not by giving our selves to pride, anger, lust, or any other passion that we will find the joy that ultimately satisfies us, but by uniting ourselves to Christ from the depths of our hearts. He alone is the New Adam Who makes it possible for human persons to become like God in holiness. He calls us to a humble love of God and neighbor that sets right our inclination to care only for ourselves. He commands us to love and forgive our ene-

mies even as we oppose evil with a purity of heart that heals our inclination to wrath, malice, and self-righteous condemnation. He blesses the union of husband and wife in marriage as a sign of His salvation that heals the corruptions of sexual desire which bring misery upon so many and root deeply within our hearts. He raises us all up from the wretchedness of "Legion" to the blessed peace of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In order to receive Christ's healing, we must reject the powerful temptation to define ourselves in terms of our passions, temptations, and habitual sins, regardless of how "natural" they may seem to us. We must turn away from making a false god in our own image in order to justify pleasing ourselves in what we think, say, and

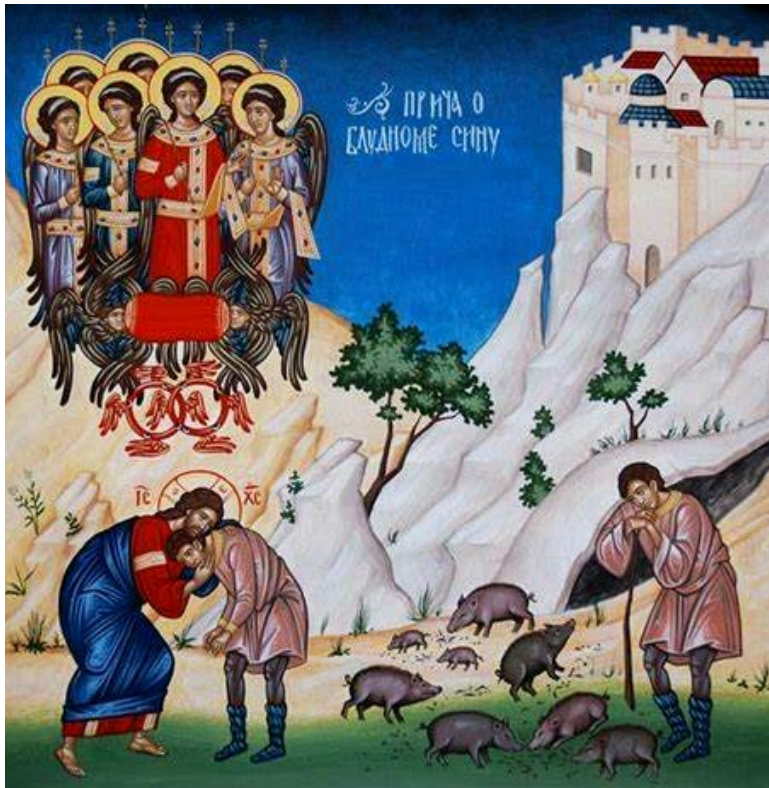
do. What may work quite well in achieving any goal in our world of corruption may well have nothing in common with what is necessary for gaining the spiritual clarity to embrace the restoration and fulfillment of our humanity in Christ. The more we unite ourselves to the Savior in His great Self-Offering, the more fully open we will be to His healing of our souls.

Doing so requires the sacrifice of taking up our crosses as we die to the distortions of self that have become second nature to us. Doing so requires a form of martyrdom in which we struggle to bear witness to the Savior's vic-

tory over the power of sin and death in our own lives. That is precisely what the formerly demon-possessed man did when, after his deliverance, he obeyed the Lord's difficult instruction to "Return to your home, and declare all that God has done for you."

Regardless of the particulars of our temptations, the Savior empowers each of us to find the healing of our souls as we bear witness to His fulfillment of the human person in the divine image and likeness. Contrary to many popular distortions of Christianity in our day, he does not call us to a vague spirituality that helps us feel better about fulfilling whatever desires we happen to have. His Kingdom remains not of this world, even when we do our worst to distort religion into a tool for advancing the self-serving agenda of any group or individual no matter how allegedly noble or necessary.

Until the coming fullness of the heavenly reign, there
(continued p.4, column 1)



will be profound tension between the way of Christ and the way of the world. Though we do not like to admit it, that tension is deeply rooted within our own souls.

Christ offers us healing from corruption in all its forms, regardless of how weak we may feel before our familiar temptations to indulge our passions and refuse to offer ourselves to Him fully. The journey to growth in holiness is never ending and goes to the very heart of us all. Instead of trying to make it less demanding as we stumble along the way, we must continue pressing on as best we can, calling out humbly for the Lord's mercy and strength as we become more truly the people He created us to be in the divine image and likeness.

The path to the healing of our souls requires reorienting all the desires of our hearts toward fulfillment in God. That is how we may all find liberation from the misery of being naked, alone, enslaved to the fear of death, and profoundly confused about who we are in relation to God and our neighbors. It is how we may stop diminishing ourselves according to the legion of our temptations and sins as we do the hard work of becoming more truly ourselves in Christ.

St. Seraphim of Sarov said, "Acquire the Holy spirit and a thousand souls around you will be saved." In other words, those who are filled with the Holy Spirit and healed of their passions will live in such a way that their example will draw others to the Lord. They will exist as human persons healed, fulfilled, and transformed. They will move from being "Legion" to being themselves in God's image and likeness. It is easy to see when other people fall short of fulfilling that high calling, but much more difficult to recognize it in ourselves.

So instead of obsessing over how we measure up, we should simply focus all our energies on finding healing for our passions as we reorient our disordered desires for fulfillment in God. If we persist in doing so and call out for the Lord's mercy whenever we stumble and fall, we will come to know the joy of those liberated from the tomb, clothed in the divine glory, and finally in our right minds. Let us patiently offer the desires of our hearts to Christ for healing, for that is the only way to become the people He created us to be. Amen.



"Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"—the Kingdom of the Holy Trinity, in Whose name we are baptized—**"both now and ever and unto the ages of ages."** We hear the last phrase often during the Divine services, including the Divine Liturgy. Why do we repeat this phrase so often?

Because everything served during the Divine Liturgy has no end, but is eternal. It's not something ordinary and earthly being celebrated in the Liturgy, but something eternal and imperishable. When I open my mouth and bless the name of God, this blessing of God is eternal and unending. The word that comes out of my mouth does not die, is not limited by anything.

A friend of mine, a hieromonk, shared one of his spiritual experiences with me. He told me about what happened to him after God granted him the great gift of the priesthood and he started serving his first Liturgy. He was standing before the altar in a small Athonite church (in the sketes on Mt. Athos the churches are usually very small, and the altars in them are also small and usually located in the altar lapse) and gave the initial exclamation: "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, both now and ever and unto the ages of ages." As soon as he pronounced this exclamation, at that very moment, by the grace of God, he was vouchsafed to see in the spirit how the roof of the church was opened and how the words he uttered reached unto the ages of ages.

He experienced a sense of eternity in this moment. Imagine that suddenly before you opened a window to eternity, which has no end, but which you can nevertheless contemplate—not as we usually see objects around us—just up to a certain point, and then everything is hidden from our eyes, because the power of vision is limited. My friend felt a sacred fear: How great it is to pronounce words that extend into the ages of ages.

The word is imperishable, immortal, infinite. The blessing of the name of God contains great grace. Let us, however, consider this: It's not only the blessing of the name of God that extends into all the ages, but all our other words (idle talk, profanity, jokes) also extend into the ages of ages. How attentive we must be to our words!

(continued next issue)