

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 542

24th Sunday after Pentecost-Christ heals the infirm Woman

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There are few things in life more difficult to bear than a prolonged illness or permanent condition. In the Gospel today, we meet a woman who probably expected a lifetime of physical pain and struggle. She had been contorted not just for a week or a month or a year, but for a full eighteen years.

There was no reason to believe her situation would change. She was bent

over at the waist – contorted, the Fathers say, by an evil spirit. She had a most abnormal crease in the middle of her body. She couldn't straighten up. The Lover of mankind looked with concern and sympathy on this miserable human creature, and saw in her not a withered and twisted animal, but a daughter of Abraham, a soul created by God and deserving of His mercy.

Bent and twisted as this lady was, we should notice that her priorities were a lot straighter than those of many who walk upright. Saint Luke tells us that her miraculous healing occurred in one of the Synagogues on the Sabbath. We may ask ourselves, "What was this lady doing in the synagogue?" Well, obviously, she was there to worship. But you know what? It couldn't have been easy for her to be there. If she had been looking for

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++ 24th Sunday after Pentecost ++
+ St James the Persian, Martyr +

Epistle: Ephesians 2: 14-22

Gospel: Luke 13: 10-17

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 8)

I remembered my class-mate the deacon and said: "Geronda, you don't have to look around. You can give me anything—a handkerchief, for example."

"No! I'm not going to give you a handkerchief." "Well, then some kind of photo..."

"Photography is a good thing, but I'm going to give you a Panagia."

I was a little shocked that he wanted to give me something only bishops wear. But I didn't think much about it at the time. The Elder kept looking

and finally pulled a Panagia- out, a simple plastic icon he got one time in memory of the consecration of the Church of St. Nikon. "I want to give you this. Take it and preach repentance."

"Geronda, where am I going to preach repentance," I asked, surprised again. "On the Holy Mountain?"

Again, I didn't think a lot about why he specifically gave me a Panagia. "After thirty..." he said. "Apparently, I'll become a priest after I'm thirty,

according to the canons. That's why the Elder said this," I decided.

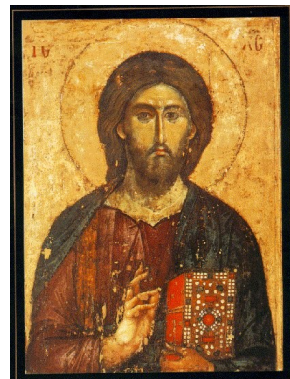
I came to Cyprus from Mt. Athos at the age of thirty-four, and I've been talking ever since. I've only now realized the meaning of Elder Philotheos' words. Over time, I recall his words more and more, and I see that the entire Gospel and the entire spiritual life has repentance as its foundation. Therefore, when Christ came to earth, He taught us to repent; He taught this great

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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.





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 that our souls
may be saved.

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, Sesu, Skip, Georgia, Chuck, Pam, Colleen, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

Christ and forgiveness

When we look at the image of our Lord Jesus Christ crucified we are granted the gift of seeing love incarnate, mercy incarnate and yet forgiveness incarnate. Forgiveness made flesh. You pray and you tell God that it is difficult to forgive others and He alone can stare back at you and agree with you. Forgiveness is difficult.

Yet the heart of Jesus Christ was filled

with divine mercy and forgiveness for all of mankind, even those who were involved with His betrayal and crucifixion, even those who stand around at the cross and mocked Him while He was in the midst of the most brutal suffering imaginable. So God understands forgiveness. He understands what He asks and demands of us as His children.

And as we focus our eyes on Him we find the strength and the courage necessary to heal and to reflect this forgiveness because we know that from the depths of our heart, we needed Christ's forgiveness. Each one of us has sinned. Each one of us has sometimes hurt others either in deed or word or thought. Each one of us has had moments when we are less than perfect. Each of us has had moments where we made enemies of others.

Christ died for us and God forgave us all. May we focus our lives on this and allow it to change us and to make us holy men and women. St. Mark the Ascetic wrote, "The sign of sincere love is to forgive wrongs done to us. It was with such love that the Lord loved the world."

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

great Mystery. Repentance isn't simply regret for what we've done. It implies true repentance, contrition, and sorrow for the mistakes made and the sins committed.

Weeping and grieving over your departure from God, you gradually find peace, rest of soul, and you calm down. What happens at this time? Your mind, your being acquires a different perception of reality. Yesterday, money or health was important for you, but today these things no longer interest you; they stop being the goal of your life. Your way of thinking changes. This is the essence of repentance. If you don't change your way of thinking and remain the same, it means you're just doing good deeds outwardly.

Sometimes we do a little good just to stifle the voice of our conscience within ourselves. For example, I have many opportunities to help people or devote my time to prayer, but I do hardly anything, just enough so I have the right to declare: "I did something too."

We don't want to go all the way and don't allow Christ to change our being. That's why when some people wanted to follow Him while He was preaching, wanting to show that



meeting Him means a radical change in our whole existence, our whole being, Christ would say things that would make them freeze in bewilderment.

"Lord, what can I do to follow Thee?"

"Do you want to follow Me? Good. Go sell your possessions and follow Me."

The man simply froze. "Go and sell everything?!..." Just as surgeons make an incision to see what's inside the body, so the Lord, by His word, cut into this man, so to speak, to show that His presence in our life and our relationship with Him consists not in performing some kind of external good works, but in the complete change of our entire being. This is the only way peace comes to the soul of man—by cultivating repentance in our souls.

Repentance begins with regret, when we begin to condemn ourselves. Then we move on to weeping over ourselves. We behold the abyss that separates us from God—where God is and where I am. What a wealth of gifts and opportunities God has given me, and how I have squandered all the riches I received from Him in the debauchery of my life.

(continued next issue)

an excuse not to be there, she had a pretty good one! You can imagine her saying, "Rabbi, I just prefer to stay home. It's hard for me to walk to synagogue, my back hurts terribly by the time I get there. When I'm there, people stare at me and I feel so uncomfortable. It's just better for me to stay home!"

The truth is that she was there because it was a priority for her to be there. Her body may have been bent, but her priorities were straight. God came first. She did not let the obstacles of life get in the way; she didn't let it stop her. She was there and that is the point. She made herself available so that God in His time and through His means could heal her. All she did was to show up and be present.

The example of the woman healed today is a good lesson for all of us. If we take our life in Christ seriously, and believe that the church through her sacraments offers us grace and healing, as long as we are physically able, it is important for us to be present in the life of the church. If we are honest: most people usually figure out a way to do the things they really want to do. This crippled women struggled to put God first. She, in her own feeble way, was saying yes to the Master.

It should be stressed that in today's gospel the women's healing was the result of her presence in the synagogue that day, not the cause of it.

There is no indication in the text that she came looking for healing. She just came to the assembly where God's people were gathered, as was probably her custom. Jesus saw her and called out to her. She didn't see Him and call to Him; she was not even near Him. So we can see that because she was there, she was available. She was available to receiving the healing grace that Jesus offered that day. Had she just stayed home that Saturday, her back would have remained just as bent as it was on Friday.

Here's the point for us: A most basic condition for the grace of the Holy Spirit to be present in our lives is that we be avail-able to God. Sounds simple... So how do we practically make ourselves available? We try, with God's help, to continually say Yes to God in all that we

do throughout our day and we practice patience in our infirmities, no matter what they are. We also have many gifts of grace available to us.

In addition to the rich services of the church and the holy sacraments, a consistency in a rule of prayer, accountability and an ongoing relationship with a Priest. Sometimes we forget that what attracts the grace of God is just being quiet and still, saying the Jesus prayer. Also visiting monasteries, and making pilgrimages to holy sites, and the observances of fasts and feasts are aids for us in reminding us of what is important on this earth. All these, and much more, have the purpose of rendering us available to God.

We all should realize that the bent over woman in the

Gospel had no special claim to the mercy and grace of God. God simply was a priority in her life; so much so, that she was willing to endure pain, suffering, and discomfort to be faithful to him, and wait on Him with patience. But in that process of putting God first, she found the solution to the thing she struggled most with. When the mercy and salvation of God entered that synagogue on that day, she was there. She didn't have to plead for anything from God; but she was available. And so the abundance of God's goodness was poured out on her.

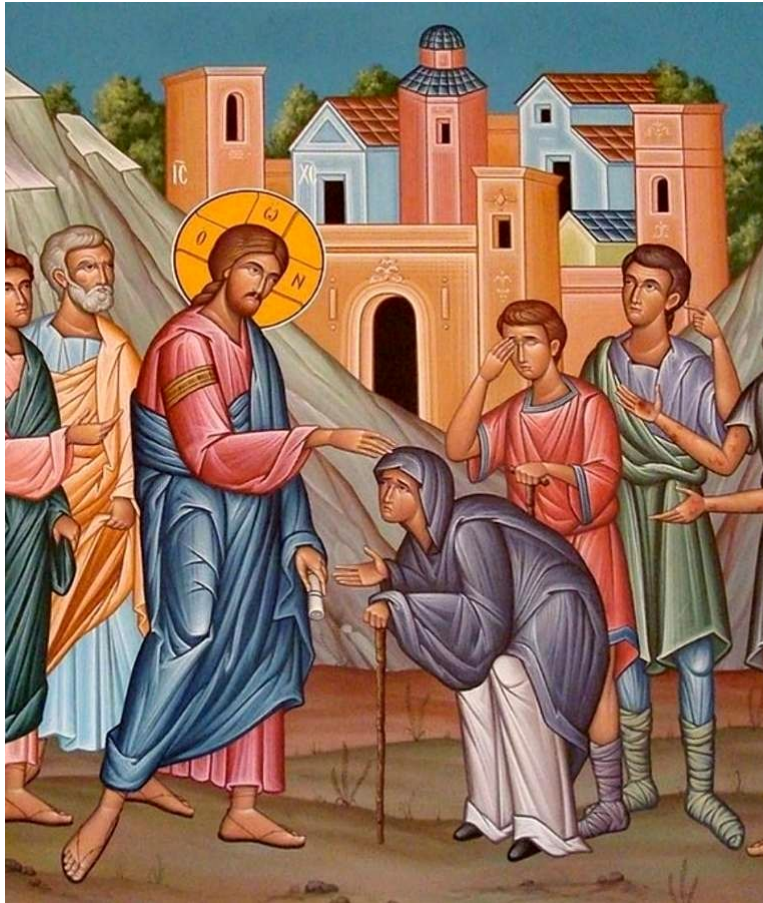
Let us be reminded of Jesus' words: "...seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you." Let us take those words to heart. Seek

first the kingdom of God; be present; make yourself available; and may His great mercy and grace be poured out on you now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

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Sunday's Troparion Tone 7

By Your Cross You destroyed death.
To the thief You opened Paradise.
For the Myrrhbearers You changed weeping into joy.
And You commanded Your disciples, O Christ God,
To proclaim that You are risen,
Granting the world great mercy.



At our birth, we set out on two journeys in life: the biological, here on earth, and the one which leads to heaven. The first journey has a specific end at some moment in time which we don't know, but God alone, our Maker, does. The second is everlasting and leads to eternity.

From childhood we're provided for the first path by our parents and teachers, in order that we may tread it as painlessly as possible, with increased knowledge and goods, so that we may enjoy the changes, the adventures and the experiences with which this life fills us. The second, the everlasting, should be our priority in terms of provisions, but, alas, we're only very little interested in it, if at all. But success on the first path presupposes concern for the second.

The most basic supply we need is water. We can't live without water. Thirst is an imperative need. So all wayfarers carry a flask of water with them, because the sweat expended on the path of life makes them thirsty. The journeys we take are never straight and level. There are ups and downs, rugged mountains, gullies and ravines and dry, sandy deserts.

At every stop, we raise our flask and drink water to slake our thirst. But the contents are soon drained and we must perforce find other sources of water if we're to continue on our way. We proceed and look for pure, clean water, water to resupply us, water of life, since again and again we'll thirst and won't stop drinking until we reach the end of our path.

For our first journey, that of life on earth, we try to ensure that we always have water, or that we find sources along the way. What do we do about the second journey, though? Why are we so indifferent? Don't we concern ourselves with it? Some do, some don't. Yet when we seek the water of eternity we'll never be thirsty again. With it, the path of life will be more pleasant, we won't feel alone on the journey and we'll enjoy each unique moment, looking at it from the eternal path rather than from this fleeting one. Who can provide us with this water? Only Christ, who tells us in the dismissal hymn for mid-Pentecost: 'Let those who thirst come to me and drink'. Only he, who says: 'Those who drink of this water will never thirst again' (*John 4, 14*).

What does Christ require of us wayfarers? He asks that, like the Samaritan woman, we should say to him: 'Give me this water' (*John 4, 15*). It might be asked whether we'll find Christ on our path. But he's with us all the time. It's we who don't see him, don't seek him. In order to save the woman, he made the long trek from Jerusalem to Samaria, caring nothing for the heat, the effort and the sweat.

If only today's leaders, governors and tycoons, the rich with their shiny limousines could see him. They don't walk the path nor seek the poor Nazarene who's there with them. They don't try to match the simplicity of his life. He didn't have a chariot drawn by proud

horses, but said that: 'The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head' (*Matth. 8, 20; Luke 9, 58*).

We see him walking like the poorest of the poor, trudging scores of miles, crossing plains and mountains to get to Sychar to give water to the thirsty Samaritan woman. For the sake of a single soul the Lord arose with his disciples and left Jerusalem to go to Samaria. Yes, for a single soul he walked such a long distance, though it was short in comparison to the other he'd already made: from heaven to earth, in order to become a human person, when he bent the heavens and descended (*2 Kings 22, 10; Ps. 17, 10*). Christ became human, suffered and was crucified, in order to save one sinful soul. In other words, if

there had been only one thirsty, sinful soul on earth, for their sake alone he'd willingly have suffered everything, such as the spitting, the scourging, the crown of thorns, the purple cloak, and above all, death on the cross.

The water we require for our second journey isn't material. It's immaterial. And Christ gives it to us freely out of the well-spring of his kindness, his love for us. When we seek him, he willingly traverses thousands upon thousands of miles to come and slake our thirst. We should ask it of him, as did the Samaritan woman, when she said: 'Give me this water, Lord'. Then we'll gladly resume our journey, both this transitory one and that towards eternity, in the certain knowledge that we're not walking alone but with him who told us: 'Without me you can do nothing' (*Jn. 15, 5*).

