

# 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 543

25<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost-Christ heals 10 Lepers

December 4, 2022



This Sunday is the twelfth Sunday of Luke; the Gospel reading recounts the healing of the ten Lepers (Luke 17:12-19). As the Lord Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem (towards His Passion) he passed through a village where he was greeted by ten men with leprosy; a serious and contagious skin disease common in that time. From a religious perspective, the infected person was considered “unclean”, and according

to the Law, this “uncleanliness” was grounds for isolation; socially and religiously.

The Jewish people considered this disease as retribution from God towards sinners, lepers were seen as the ultimate sinners, punished for their disobedience. They were forbidden to socialise with others and turned away at the gates of the temple when they tried to visit for prayers and religious rites. The affected were prevented from mixing with others and were further humiliated in their distinguishment from the non-affected; they were forced to call out “unclean, unclean” to warn others of their approach.

Anyone who came close to them or touched them would be considered unclean. Naturally, this caused those afflicted to suffer not only physically, but psychologically and spiritually as  
*(continued p.3)*

++ 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost ++  
+Great Martyr Barbara & Juliana+  
+++ St. John of Damascus +++

Epistle: Ephesians 4: 1-6

Gospel: Luke 17: 12-19

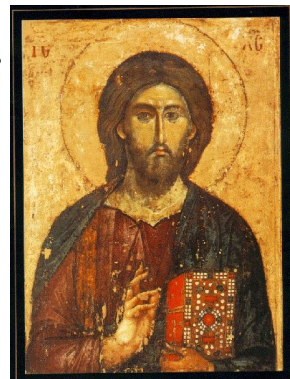
St. George Orthodox Christian Church is a community of believers who strive to live a life according to the Gospel of Christ and teachings of the Church.

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.*

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



## *A talk on the Divine Liturgy, Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol (part 9)*

And so we begin to cultivate tears, to weep, and with their help—find repentance. Let us learn to cry, so as to acquire spiritual balance. Weeping—especially in solitude before God—is a whole art. If we learn it, then we will begin to succeed spiritually. Weeping attracts Christ to our hearts. Christ comes to our humble, penitent hearts, and a great change begins.

We become different, and then we can truly pray to the Lord in peace. With this begins the Divine Liturgy. This is the

condition for our dialogue with God in prayer. If we have no peace, we can communicate neither with God nor man.

We continue to analyze the text of the Divine Liturgy. Last time, we examined the first petition: “In peace, let us pray to the Lord,” and spoke about how Christ is the peace of our souls. The presence of Christ in our lives is the only thing that is truly necessary for us, inasmuch as we can only pray, labor, and generally live with the help of the grace of Christ.

In response to the deacon’s petition, the people (or the choir) respond: **“Lord, have mercy”** When we say, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,” or “Lord, have mercy,” we mean: “Lord, give me that which I need,” that is, “help me,” “save me,” “take pity upon me,” “be merciful to me,” “enlighten me,” “guide me,” “heal me.” All of our needs and requirements are contained in one phrase: “Lord, have mercy.”

These three words  
*(continued p.2)*



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

### The Soul of a Christian

The soul of a Christian should be delicate, sensitive and emotional. It should take wings, live dreams, fly into infinity, into the stars, into God's majesty, into silence. If it wants to be Christian, it must become a creator. That's it. It has to feel pain. To love and to feel pain. To feel pain for the person it loves. Love makes an effort for the beloved. All night it runs, it keeps a look out, it bloodies its feet in

an effort to meet its beloved. It makes sacrifices, brooks no opposition, is unconcerned by threats or difficulties, because of love. Love for Christ is another matter, infinitely more sublime.

So when we say love, it's not the virtues that we'll acquire, but a heart that's loving towards Christ and other people. That's where we should pay the whole of our attention. We see a mother holding her child in her arms, kissing it with longing in her soul. We see her face lit up when she's holding her little angel. When people of God see this, it makes an impression and they say yearningly: 'If only I had this desire for God, for Christ, for our Lady, for our Saints'. Yes, this is how we should love Christ, God. You long for it, you want it and you gain it by God's grace.

When you love Christ, you make an effort, but it's a blessed effort. You suffer, but all's well. You do prostrations, you pray because that's desire, desire for God. Labor, desire, passion, longing, exultation, joy and love. Effort, in order to experience Christ.

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

encompass everything. Remember, the Old Testament tells how the Jewish people, wandering through the desert, fed upon manna—which became for each what his body needed. Similarly, the prayer, "Lord, have mercy," becomes for every person an expression of what he needs.

It's much more beneficial for us to say: "Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me," than to tell God: "Listen, give me this, give me that." We have to fully commit ourselves to God both in daily life and in our relationship with Him. Of course, we can ask God for something specific (such a desire is quite understandable in human terms), but it's much better to have confidence in God's providence and invoke His mercy. God knows what we need, what we lack, and when and how to give it to us.

Further, the deacon proclaims: **"For the peace from above, and the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord."** In other words, "Let's ask the Lord to give us Heavenly peace and salvation for our souls." As you

can see, the second petition of the litany continues the first, and they both speak to us about how the Lord Himself is the peace for the human soul.



Partaking of Divine grace, this energy of Divinity coming directly from God, a man immediately finds peace. After all, the first thing grace brings to our soul is peace. Therefore, when the fathers of the Church want to de-

termine whether a man is under the influence of Divine grace or the influence of Satan, they look first of all at whether he has peace in his soul or whether he's in turmoil. Peace of soul is one of the first signs that what is happening to a man is from grace. If the soul is full of turmoil and anxiety, you can immediately understand that the evil one is acting there.

It's impossible for God to dwell in a man who is full of turmoil and a troubling uneasiness. God will never find rest for Himself in the heart of such a man. When a man is in turmoil, when everything is upside down in his soul, grace leaves him. God has nothing to do with turmoil, anxiety, and commotion. "The peace from above" comes down from God the Father Himself and isn't dependent upon circumstances and events of this world. The peace of God doesn't depend on what's happening around us, in our family, in society, in the entire world—wherever.

*(continued next issue)*



well.

Of the ten lepers in this Gospel reading; nine were Jews and one a Samaritan. In that time, there was religious and ideological disagreement between the Jews and the Samaritans, causing a huge rift between the two groups, so the Book says: *"The Jews did not mix with the Samaritans"* (John 4:9) as the Samaritans were considered impure by the Jews. But we can see that within this particular group of lepers, the Jews lived with a Samaritan, as pain and suffering united them and their differences were cast aside, gathering as one set of outcasts in support of each other.

We read from the evangelist Luke; "they stood from afar" as the Law ordered them, and raised their collective voice in prayer to Christ, saying "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" They were seeking mercy from the Master, something which they lacked from their own people and society. In response, Jesus ordered them saying "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And that they did, immediately believing in the word of the Lord, without objection or doubt of their cleanliness, even before they were cured. Their faith manifested the miracle.

After they had set off, only one of the ten lepers returned to Jesus "to glorify God with a loud voice". Of all the ten, the only one to return in gratitude and thanksgiving at the feet of Christ was the Samaritan, called "foreigner" by Jesus, and considered a stranger within the Jewish community. We can see that this healed Samaritan, through his faith, realized that Jesus was not only a teacher or a miracle maker but the Lord himself. In fact, the first commandment for the Samaritans is not to worship and prostrate to anyone but "God", so the very act of prostration at the feet of Jesus made by the returning Samaritan was a clear and public acknowledgement that God and Jesus are the same person.

The healing of leprosy, along with other miracles, was considered an act of virtue by the expected Messiah, and a sign of the approaching Kingdom of Heaven. The

Evangelist Luke makes mention of this (7:19); John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to Jesus, saying: *"Are you the Coming One, or do we look for another?"* And in that very hour,

He cured many infirmities, afflictions and evil spirits. Then He answered the two disciples, saying: *"Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind can see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them, and blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."*

The ten lepers all believed in the word of the Lord Jesus, and because of this all of them were healed, but only

one came back and thanked Him, receiving salvation, *"Go thy way; thy faith has made thee whole."* Faith leads to the healing of the flesh. But thankfulness, gratitude and worship lead to the healing and salvation of the soul.

We all are sick with the leprosy of sin which makes us unclean and far away from God.

We should realize just how far away from God our sinful actions make us and dare to approach the Master of Glory shouting aloud "O Jesus Have Mercy on me! Kyrie Eleison, Lord Have Mercy." He will listen and cleanse our souls from the Leprosy of sin, but it is important that we return to Him and thank Him as the apostle Paul says: *"Giving thanks always for all things unto*



*God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,"* (Ephesians 5:20). We often forget, in our ungratefulness, to return to God in thanksgiving, for His mercy.

Christ does not need our thanks; it is for our own acknowledgment and recognition that He is the origin and source of all blessings, healing and good things. We must continually thank God when our prayers are answered, in whichever capacity they are, for He knows what is best for us and what is useful for our salvation. "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Amen!



## *St. Barbara the Great Martyr*

The Holy Great Martyr Barbara lived and suffered during the reign of the emperor Maximian (305-311). Her father, the pagan Dioscorus, was a rich and illustrious man in the Syrian city of Heliopolis. After the death of his wife, he devoted himself to his only daughter. Seeing Barbara's extraordinary beauty, Dioscorus decided to hide her from the eyes of strangers. Therefore, he built a tower for Barbara, where only her pagan teachers were allowed to see her. From the tower there was a view of hills stretching into the distance. By day she was able to gaze upon the wooded hills, the swiftly flowing rivers, and the meadows covered with a mottled blanket of flowers; by night the harmonious and majestic vault of the heavens twinkled and provided a spectacle of inexpressible beauty. Soon the virgin began to ask herself questions about the First Cause and Creator of so harmonious and splendid a world.

Gradually, she became convinced that the soulless idols were merely the work of human hands. Although her father and teachers offered them worship, she realized that the idols could not have made the surrounding world. The desire to know the true God so consumed her soul that Barbara decided to devote all her life to this goal, and to spend her life in virginity.

Barbara met young Christian maidens in the city, and they taught her about the Creator of the world, about the Trinity, and about the Divine Logos. Through the Providence of God, a priest arrived in Heliopolis from Alexandria disguised as a merchant. After instructing her in the mysteries of the Christian Faith, he baptized Barbara, then returned to his own country.

During this time a luxurious bathhouse was being built at the house of Dioscorus. On one of the walls of the bath-house Barbara traced a cross with her finger. The cross was deeply etched into the marble, as if by an iron instrument. Later, her footprints were imprinted on the stone steps of the bathhouse. The water of the bathhouse had great healing power. When Dioscorus returned and expressed dissatisfaction about the change in his building plans, his daughter told him about how she had come to know the Triune God, about the saving

power of the Son of God, and about the futility of worshipping idols. Dioscorus went into a rage, grabbed a sword and was on the point of striking her with it. The holy virgin fled from her father, and he rushed after her in pursuit. Saint Barbara fled and managed then to conceal herself in a cave on the opposite slope of the hill.

After a long and fruitless search for his daughter, Dioscorus saw two shepherds on the hill. One of them showed him the cave where the saint had hidden. Dioscorus beat his daughter terribly, and then placed her under guard and tried to wear her down with hunger. Finally he handed her over to the prefect of the city, named Martianus. They beat Saint Barbara fiercely: they struck her with rawhide, and rubbed her wounds

with a hair cloth to increase her pain.

By night Saint Barbara prayed fervently to her Heavenly Bridegroom, and the Savior Himself appeared and healed her wounds. Then they subjected the saint to new, and even more frightful torments. In the crowd where the martyr was tortured was the virtuous Christian woman Juliana, an inhabitant of Heliopolis. Her heart was filled with sympathy for the voluntary martyrdom of the beautiful and illustrious maiden. Juliana also wanted to suffer for Christ. She began to denounce the torturers in a loud voice, and they seized her.

Both martyrs were tortured for a long time. Their bodies were raked and wounded with hooks, and then they were led naked through the city amidst derision and jeers. Through the prayers of Saint Barbara the

Lord sent an angel who covered the nakedness of the holy martyrs with a splendid robe. Then the steadfast confessors of Christ, Saints Barbara and Juliana, were beheaded. Dioscorus himself executed Saint Barbara. The wrath of God was not slow to punish both torturers, Martianus and Dioscorus. They were killed after being struck by lightning.

In the sixth century the relics of the holy Great Martyr Barbara were transferred to Constantinople. Six hundred years later, they were transferred to Kiev (July 11) by Barbara, the daughter of the Byzantine Emperor Alexius Comnenos, wife of the Russian prince Michael. They rest even now at Kiev's Saint Vladimir cathedral, where an Akathist to the saint is served each Tuesday.

