

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

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Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be Forever!



Volume 12 Issue 547

29th Sunday after Pentecost-The Circumcision of the Lord

January 1, 2023



Today we celebrate the Circumcision of the Lord. It might seem strange to us to commemorate this event; after all, the old covenant has been abrogated, and St. Paul and the New Testament Church took great pains to eradicate the belief that circumcision was required of Christian people of the new covenant. If anything, we might think that the significance of this feast is essentially the fulfillment by Jesus

Christ of the Old Testament law. And of course, this is true.

But it is all too easy to lapse into the unspoken idea that once something has been fulfilled, it is therefore meaningless. This is a grievous error. Every single moment, every word and every act of our Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly life was absolutely filled with meaning, purpose and significance. And this particular act was so great and contained so much meaning that today's feast is accounted among the great feasts of the Church.

It is also all too easy to believe that those things which were done for us by Christ were done so that we ourselves need not do them. This is no less a terrible mistake and misunderstanding. Everything that the Lord Jesus Christ did on earth, He did so that we also might do it. "Truly, Truly I
(continued p.3)

++ 29th Sunday after Pentecost ++
+ Feast of St. Basil the Great +

Epistle: 2 Timothy: 4: 5-8

Gospel: Mark 1: 1-8

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 12)

When the church is finally built, it'll be seen as a miracle, but while it's still being built, the problems and temptations will wrench your soul right out of you.

How many things work out so easily in the world—new houses grow up like mushrooms! How many magnificent secular publications come off the printing press without the slightest problem! But in the Church, whatever you undertake, your plans are fulfilled with the shedding of much sweat and blood, overcoming many

difficulties; a great struggle, great resistance—from the devil himself, and from people with weak souls. It requires a great feat and great prayer for the Church of God for it to have strength, fortitude, well-being, for it to fulfill its mission and proclaim the word of God throughout the world.

Then the deacon prays for unity, or "**the union of all.**" In modern society, the word "unity" has been used quite a lot recently. But society means one thing by unity, and

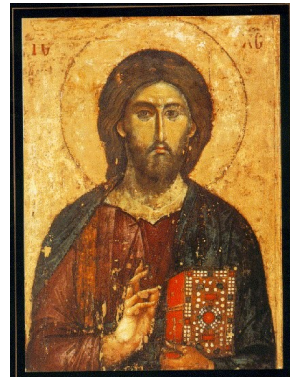
the Church another. "The union of all" is not some kind of salad where all the ingredients are mixed up in the same bowl. "The union of all" means the conversion of all people to Christ and union with Him in the true faith.

This is true unity. This is the unity we beseech in the Liturgy: the conversion of all people to Christ. But in society, unity is often understood as, let's say, boiling everything down in the same pot. However, that's not
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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)

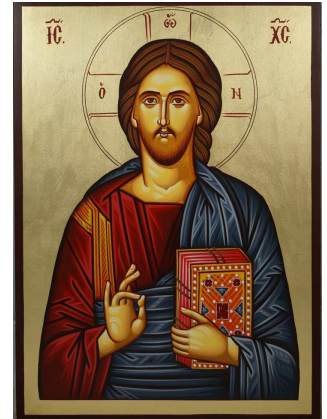
Please keep the following in your prayers: Mother Onufria, Fr. Michael, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Mackenzie, Mike, Jessica, Lisa, Jeff, Bonnalee, Joanne, Sesu, Skip, Georgia, Chuck, Pam, Colleen, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

God's infinite love for us

It may be the greatest failure of our life that we don't feel God's love for us and don't love Him in return. And so, our life as Christians is moribund, it's not an intermingling with God, nor an admixture of our created being with Him Who is uncreated. When we experience the mystery of God's love, we can be deeply joyful even in the most adverse circumstances of life and can face death itself with hope.

Holy people throughout the ages have felt, in the depths of their being, how much God loves us and they themselves loved Him completely. This is why they patiently endured every kind of pain, deprivation, torture, ascetic effort and trial: for the love of God.

The prayer of Saint Paul to the Ephesians is a prayer of all the saints: that all Christians should know, in Grace, the love of Christ, which transcends all human knowledge: 'For this reason I kneel before the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ... and pray that he will give you of his glorious riches, and strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.'



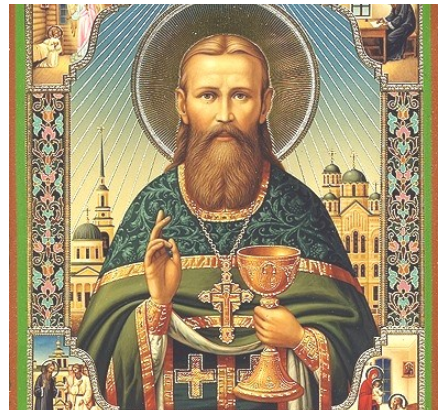
A Talk on the Divine Liturgy, cont'd from p.1

unity but a mixture, where people and entire nations lose their individuality. Take, for example, the notorious multiculturalism. Those who admired multiculturalism eventually realized that that there's something wrong with this policy, that everyone should care for their cultural individuality a little bit.

Nowadays, there's a lot of talk about the ecumenical character of the unity of the Church. But what does the unity of the Churches mean? First of all, it must be said that there is no unity of churches, because the Church of Christ is one, and that is the Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. There is no other church. So how should we understand unity then?—the return to the bosom of the Church of those who have fallen away from it. They must all return to the Church and unite with it—this is the unity of all that the Church prays for—certainly not that we be thrown together into one "salad."

There's a beautiful prayer in the text of the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great:

"Lead back those who are in error and join them to Thy Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church." The Church prays for its children who have fallen away, who have separated from it,



who have strayed from the straight path, that the Lord might return them and that they might be reunited with the holy Church of God. This is what St. Basil is talking about—not that the Church would lose its identity and become part of some impersonal gathering, coming to a state that's disastrous for its children and the Church itself.

Fortunately, the Lord has assured us that the gates of hades won't overcome the Church. With God's help, we continue to analyze the text of the Divine Liturgy, as we will consider this petition from the Litany of Peace: **"For this holy house, and for them that with faith, reverence, and fear of God enter herein, let us pray to the Lord."**

Thus, we pray for this holy church, called here a holy house; after all, a church is the house of God—a place where God resides. Of course, we must understand that God isn't limited to any space. God doesn't live in man-made churches, doesn't settle in houses and buildings, no matter how large, beautiful, and magnificent they may be. There's nothing in creation that could contain God within itself. God created everything and He is beyond everything. So then why do we say that God dwells in a church? God dwells in a church by His uncreated grace, for the Holy Sacraments are celebrated in church.

(continued next issue)

say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do" (John 14:12). Circumcision, one of the greatest of all the commandments of the old covenant, was—along with the rest of the old covenant—not abolished; rather, it was established, as St. Paul himself wrote: "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law" (Romans 3:31). Indeed, not only was circumcision not abolished, not only was it also established, but it was moreover fulfilled, as the Lord Himself said: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17).

Because we Christians are also circumcised, spiritually. And this circumcision is far greater—and far more painful—than the circumcision given to Abraham, which was only a foreshadowing of the true circumcision we ourselves have been given. For Abraham and the old Israel cut off only a small portion of their flesh, while we ourselves must cut off not only our entire flesh but even our very life itself.

In the Old Testament the people of God sacrificed first fruits and tithes and offerings; in the New Testament, we offer up everything we own, our whole selves, our entire mind and heart and will, and even every single person that we love. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).

This is the true circumcision, this is the substance of the shadows given to Abraham in a figure and in a promise. This is the life that the Lord Jesus Christ led on earth, and this same life is the life that we ourselves are called to lead: nothing less than the very life of Jesus, "in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead" (Colossians 2:11-12).

To be offered to live the very life of God is a thing so

great that the human mind cannot even begin to comprehend it. But so great a gift does not come cheap. And indeed, this is the very nature and heart of sacrifice: to make an offering to God, and then to receive back that which was offered, only now utterly transfigured with divine light.

We offer now, in this Liturgy, bread and wine; we receive them back as the Body of Blood of God. We offer our bodies to God, and we receive them back deified, transfigured, vessels of divine grace. We offer our minds to God and receive back the mind of Christ. We offer our hearts to God and receive them back as temples of the Holy Spirit. But mark it well: what we do not offer to God is not transfigured. It is not healed. It is not deified, and so it will perish like dust and ashes. "He that

loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John 12:25).

In the Anaphora of St. Basil's Liturgy which we are now celebrating, the priestly prayers conclude: "for all things hast Thou given unto us." Truly the Lord has given us all things, even His very life. But we cannot receive what we have not first offered. Let us then offer Him everything that we have, holding nothing back. And if we look at our lives honestly, we see that we have and we do hold so much back from God. We cling to this dust and to these ashes as though are lives depended on them, as though they were our very life itself. We have failed to give ourselves up to God in that true circumcision of the heart to which we are called today. But let us take courage. Today is the first day of

the new year; let us resolve "to make a good beginning, though we have done nothing good in this life."

And we are given today all the weapons that we need to prevail in this life and death battle which we are waging. In this very hour we will be vouchsafed the Holy and Lifegiving Mysteries of Christ, the spiritual coal from the heavenly altar which has the power to purge away our sins. And just as Christ was given today His name, the "name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:9), so too He gives us His name today as a sword and a shield, and a fire to purify our hearts and souls and bodies.



The Life of St. Basil the Great

St Basil was born in the year 330 at Caesarea, the administrative center of Cappadocia. He was of illustrious lineage, famed for its eminence and wealth, and zealous for the Christian Faith. The saint's grandfather and grandmother on his father's side had to hide in the forests of Pontus for seven years during the persecution under Diocletian.

St Basil's mother St Emilia was the daughter of a martyr. St Basil's father was also named Basil. He was a lawyer and renowned rhetorician, and lived at Caesarea. Ten children were born to the elder Basil and Emilia: five sons and five daughters. Five of them were later numbered among the saints: Basil the Great; Macrina—was an exemplar of ascetic life, and exerted strong influence on the life and character of St Basil the Great; Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa; Peter, Bishop of Sebaste; and Theosebia, a deaconess.

St Basil spent the first years of his life on an estate belonging to his parents, where he was raised under the supervision of his mother Emilia and grandmother Macrina. They were women of great refinement, who remembered an earlier bishop of Cappadocia, St Gregory the Wonderworker. Basil received his initial education under the supervision of his father, and then he studied under the finest teachers in Caesarea of Cappadocia, and it was here that he made the acquaintance of St Gregory the Theologian. Later, Basil transferred to a school at Constantinople, where he listened to eminent orators and philosophers. To complete his education St Basil went to Athens, the center of classical enlightenment.

After a four or five year stay at Athens, Basil had mastered all the available disciplines. In the year 357, St Basil returned to Caesarea, where for a while he devoted himself to rhetoric. But soon, refusing offers from Caesarea's citizens who wanted to entrust him with the education of their offspring, St Basil entered upon the path of ascetic life. After the death of her husband, Basil's mother, her eldest daughter Macrina, and several female servants withdrew to the family estate at Iris and there began to lead an ascetic life. Basil was baptized by the Bishop of Caesarea, and was tonsured a Reader. He first read the Holy Scriptures to the people, then explained them.

Later on, "wishing to acquire a guide to the knowledge of truth", the saint undertook a journey into

Egypt, Syria and Palestine, to meet the great Christian ascetics dwelling there. On returning to Cappadocia, he decided to do as they did. He distributed his wealth to the needy, then settled on the opposite side of the river not far from his mother Emilia and sister Macrina, gathering around him monks living a cenobitic life.

During the reign of Constantius (337-361) the heretical teachings of Arius were spreading, and the Church summoned both its saints into service. St Basil returned to Caesarea. In the year 362 he was ordained deacon by Bishop Meletius of Antioch. In 364 he was ordained to the holy priesthood by Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea.

"But seeing," as Gregory the Theologian relates, "that everyone exceedingly praised and honored Basil for his wisdom and reverence, Eusebius, through human weakness, succumbed to jealousy of him, and began to show dislike for him." The monks rose up in defense of St Basil. To avoid causing Church discord, Basil withdrew to his own monastery and concerned himself with the organization of monasteries. He also wrote numerous books on theology and commentaries on Scripture.

Upon the death of Eusebius, the Bishop of Caesarea, St Basil was chosen to succeed him in the year 370. As Bishop of Caesarea, St Basil the Great was the newest of fifty bishops in eleven provinces. St Athanasius the Great (, with joy and with thanks to God welcomed the appointment to Cappadocia of such a bishop as Basil, famed for his reverence, deep

knowledge of Holy Scripture, great learning, and his efforts for the welfare of Church peace and unity.

St Basil celebrated the church services almost every day. He was particularly concerned about the strict fulfilling of the Canons of the Church, and took care that only worthy individuals should enter into the clergy. He incessantly made the rounds of his own church. For his clergy, St Basil obtained an exemption from taxation. He used all his personal wealth and the income from his church for the benefit of the destitute; in every center of his diocese he built a poor-house; and at Caesarea, a home for wanderers and the homeless.

Sickly since youth, the toil of teaching, his life of abstinence, and the concerns and sorrows of pastoral service took their toll on him. St Basil died on January 1, 379 at age 49. Today, many churches are named in his honor and life of service to Christ's Holy Church.

