

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!

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31st Sunday after Pentecost-t

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The rich man in today's gospel lesson expected to find a teacher who would praise him for his accomplishments. He had no idea Who he was speaking to, which is why Christ corrected him for saying "Good Teacher," for "No one is good but God alone." In response to his question about how to find eternal life, the Lord challenged the man to confront his

spiritual weakness. This fellow claimed to have kept all of God's commandments from his youth. In other words, he thought that he had already mastered everything that God required.

He thought that he needed no repentance or mercy, as he assumed he had achieved perfection. That is when the Lord said, "Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." This was a command that he lacked the spiritual strength to obey, for he was enslaved to the love of money, comfort, and position. The Savior then said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

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++ 31st Sunday after Pentecost ++
+ Venerable Paul of Thebes +

Epistle: 1 Timothy 1:15-17

Gospel: Luke 18:18-27

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 14)

When the time for the consecration itself comes, then after reading three preliminary prayers, the bishop picks up the diskos with the reliquary, and together with all the clergy and faithful, walks in procession thrice around the church. Besides the relics, they also carry the Gospel, a cross, fans, banners, and candles in the procession.

In performing this procession with the singing of troparia and the reading of prayers, we thereby sanctify the space of the church of God, and

this place is sanctified, beautified, and receives a grace-filled covering, and is henceforth dedicated to God.

After going around the church three times, the clergy and faithful enter inside. A special space is prepared beforehand in the center part of the altar, where the holy relics will be placed. If any of you have been at a consecration, you must have noticed that before putting relics in space in the altar, the bishop puts a list of the names of the founders of the church

there, that is, those who built this church by donating funds for its construction.

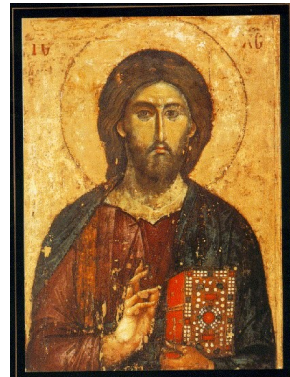
You might say: "Okay, and what about us? We don't have a lot of money. We were only able to donate a little bit for the construction. Won't our names be commemorated anywhere?" To this I say the following: God judges according to the disposition of everyone. You remember how the Gospel talks about a widow who put just two mites into the Temple treasury,

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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, Colleen, Stan, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

Time: Prelude to Eternity

What, then, is the cause and what's the cure for this arrogant and disdainful behavior? Listen to what the Lord says: 'Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls' [Matt. 11, 29]. Briefly, in a single sentence, He's shown us the root cause of all evils; and their antidote, the cause of all blessings. He's shown us that pride has overcome us and that we can't

be free of it except through its opposite, which is humility.

This is because pride begets arrogant and disdainful behavior and catastrophic disobedience, precisely as humility begets obedience and the salvation of our soul. I mean, of course, real humility, not merely an expression or an outward show but the actual humble disposition which is cultivated in our heart and in our outlook. This is what He means when He says: 'I am gentle and humble in heart'.

Those who want their soul to find true rest should learn humility and they'll see that therein lies all joy, all glory and all respite, just as the opposites are to be found in pride. How did we come to all these sorrows? Why did we fall into such wretchedness? Was it not through our pride? As I've said many times, God's goodness didn't abandon that which He Himself had created: He urges and entreats us: 'Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest'. It's as if He's saying: 'You're tired, worn out. . Come back and live in humility and find ease for your soul'.

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

about which Christ said that she put in more than everyone else, although others put in thousands. The poor woman had only two mites, and she gave them to the Temple without reservation. Others could have tens of thousands of coins, but they gave only one thousand to the Temple. Who donated all they had? She who had only two coins. Thus, the Lord judges by other standards.

Thus, the bishop places the list of the names of the benefactors of the church in the central space in the altar, and then he places the holy relics there. Immediately before placing the box with the relics in this space, the bishop pours holy Chrism on the relics three times, and three times exclaims: "Eternal memory to the benefactors of this holy church." Thus, we pray for the founders of the church.

At every service, whether Vespers, Matins, or Liturgy, the Church remembers its benefactors: ***"Again we pray for the blessed and ever memorable founders of this holy house."*** It's a great honor for someone to be-

come the founder of a holy church! This is why our ancestors built churches big and small, whatever they could, with such zeal. It was a



great blessing both for them and their families, and for all Christians.

The box with the holy relics, placed into the space in the altar, is covered over with a special paste consisting of wax, mastic, and other aromatic oils. This space is then filled with the wax-mastic and covered with a lid. Then the altar is anointed with holy

Chrism, after which icons of the four Evangelists are attached to the edges of the altar. Then we adorn the altar with cloths: a white cloth below, symbolizing the burial shroud of Christ, and red above, serving as a symbol of the Blood of Christ given to us in the Holy Eucharist. Thus an altar and church of God are consecrated.

Passing by a church, we bless ourselves with the Sign of the Cross. Why do we do this? Because we understand that the church is holy, that it's the house of God, and that there are relics of holy martyrs inside.

There are holy relics in the altar of every church. When there isn't a consecrated church, then we use the so-called antimens to celebrate the Liturgy. What is it? It's a rectangular cloth with an icon of the placing of the Lord Jesus Christ into the tomb.

Along the edges of the antimens it reads: "This Divine and sacred altar is consecrated for the celebration of the Divine and sacred rites upon it."

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(Homily on the Rich Young Ruler, cont'd from p.1)

Everyone was shocked at those words, for the common assumption then was that wealth was God's blessing for those who were righteous. As one of very few rich people in that time and place, he easily assumed that his possessions were a reward for good behavior. As a result, he had made them into a false god. The Lord did not condemn the man, however, but concluded with the statement: "What is impossible with men is possible with God." In other words, there remains hope for those who come to see the truth about where they stand before the Lord and humbly offer themselves to Him for healing.

Like the rich man in today's gospel lesson, many are inclined today to test Christ and then to walk away in sadness when they learn that He is not merely an impressive religious personality whose teachings they can interpret however suits them. Like the rich man, many are most comfortable with a religion that will never call into question how they have made the blessings of this life their false gods. Like the rich man, many want a spiritual pat on the back for continuing down whatever passion-driven path they have followed so far. Unfortunately, much of the celebration of Christ's birth in our culture reflects such sensibilities to the point that it has very little to do with entering into the joy brought to the world by the Nativity in the Flesh of the God-Man.

One sign of this problem is the prevalence of self-centered, individualistic spirituality that blinds us to the profound gravity of how our actions impact other people. The rich man thought he had fulfilled God's law, but then was crushed when Christ told him to deny himself for the sake of his poor neighbors. St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians about the Lord as "our peace" Who has united Jew and Gentile "reconciling us both to God in one body through the Cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end." Because of the reconciliation worked in Christ, we Gentiles "are no longer strangers and sojourners, but...fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the

apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in Whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in Whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

We often assume that peace means that we get our way and others stop getting in our way. In both interpersonal and political relations, what passes for peace may be little more than the stronger side beating down the other until they can no longer oppose them. The rich man in our gospel lesson surely thought that he had to keep his possessions and high status in order to be at peace. The peace that Christ brings to the world is completely different, for it has nothing to do with dominating or punishing anyone; neither is it the result of gratifying self-centered desire. For Christ is our peace as the Savior Who reconciles us to God and one another through His Cross and empty tomb. As St. Paul taught, He has abolished "in His flesh the law of commandments and ordinances," and thus removed the basis of self-righteous legalism that people so often use to justify condemning, fearing, and hating others. He has removed the basis of the rich man's superficial illusions of holiness, which could never heal his soul.

Though often overlooked and sometimes derided as a form of weakness, reconciliation between enemies is a necessary practice for those who are sharing in the life of Christ. He is the Jewish Messiah in Whom the promises to the descendants of Abraham are fulfilled and extended to the entire world. The more we unite ourselves to the Savior in holiness, the more we will display the peace of His Kingdom, especially in relation to those we consider enemies for whatever reason. If hatred, anger, resentment, and refusal to forgive remain characteristic of us, we will find it very hard to enter into the kingdom of God. Like the rich man, we must allow our eyes to be opened by a command that we presently lack the spiritual strength to obey. That is when we will begin to see ourselves and our neighbors more clearly before God as we wake up from the delusions that have blinded us to the truth. That is when we will begin to know the peace that Christ was born to bring to the world.



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The devil attempts to defeat those of a strong and mighty spiritual life through the mind, in order to master them through both the mind and heart. To this end, he usually puts high, subtle thoughts in them that amaze the man himself and those around him; witty people are more likely to succumb to this deception. And being carried away by their lofty thoughts, they forget to watch over the purity of their hearts and humble their self-satisfied minds. In order to avoid high-mindedness, truly spiritual people don't relate to the affairs and events of the world passionately, they don't attach their hearts to them, and therefore they have the appearance of underdeveloped, deficient people. As St. Basil the Great says: "May hearing worldly news be bitterness for you, but the sayings of holy men like honey from a honeycomb." Amen.

The memory and imagination preserve everything sensory that a man has seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched. Therefore, both memory and imagination should be of great importance in our lives, as forces leading our hearts along the same good or dangerous paths that our lives have followed in the past. But as the system of secular life distorts our external senses, it's not difficult to understand what great evil these powerful forces—memory and imagination—bring to people, preserving so many sinful, pernicious things in the heart and mind, while preserving so little that is bright and salvific. In view of this, man needs to fight for salvation against the memory and imagination more than against his passions and his obvious shortcomings.

The imagination is an irrational force. It acts mechanically, as the Holy Fathers say, pictorially, artificially according to the laws of the combination of images. This activity corresponds only to the kind of secular life that is itself artificial and has no freedom. The imagination distracts people from God, directing their attention to everything vain and sinful, disturbing their peaceful spirit and good mood. We suffer from the imagination not only in reality, but also in dreams. Thus, preserving everything sensory and carnal in our minds and hearts, the imagination hinders the ascent to God in the spiritual life, scatters our thoughts, and defiles them with impure thoughts and memories of past falls and pleasures.

This irritates, it takes away our peace and deprives us of grace. The imagination is a harmful and pernicious force for the spiritual life.

However, if in secular life the imagination brings not only harm, but also good, when it directs a man to the idea of the blessedness of the future life, when it helps him be transported to the Heavenly world, then why is the imagination only harmful in the spiritual life? Because the Omnipresent, Omnipotent, and All-righteous God is above all and beyond all imagination. Therefore, the imagination can't unite man with God. This was proven by the fall of the angel who dreamed of being equal with God and turned into the devil. He filled his mind with imaginary images and became the

inventor of this force that he uses to destroy men. The Holy Fathers say that through the imagination, demons enter into human souls and turn them into habitations for evil and God-defying thoughts.

The mind of the first man, writes St. Maximos, was pure and imageless, and sensory objects didn't affect him, but as the slayer of mankind—the devil—himself fell because of his dreams of equality with God, so he led Adam to the point of dreaming of the same. After man fell into such a dreamy state, all sorts of passions were born in him and he was mired in lies. According to the expression of the Holy Fathers, man "filled moral teaching with various seductions, physics with many false teachings, and theology with obscene and preposterous dogmas and fables. The highest power of the soul has to work in man—the mind—which must first of all be

cleansed of passion and imaginary images. And what's especially harmful is that people have embraced this lie and hold it tightly, as if it were truth expressing reality.

Beloved! Is it not clear that not only spiritual people who desire to be free from passions, delusions, and the machinations of the enemy must courageously fight with the imagination, but all people—the secular, leaders of science, educators, and statesmen must also conduct internal warfare with the memory and imagination of everything sensory in order to strip minds of impurity and perceive the truth, through the illumination of the Divine light! The light of Christ enlightens everyone! As the Holy Fathers teach: "Labor to preserve your mind colorless, imageless, formless, and pure, as God created it."

