

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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36th Sunday after Pentecost-Sunday of the Last Judgment

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Beloved in the Lord, my brothers and sisters! Today we have read in the Gospel of Matthew the words of our Lord Jesus Christ regarding His second, glorious, and terrible coming to earth; we read about how He will sit on the throne of His glory in order to judge the world, and how all nations shall be gathered before Him, everyone, those whose lives have passed, those who now live, and those who

have yet to be born. And He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food: I was thirsty and you gave Me drink: I was a stranger and you took Me in: I was naked and you clothed Me: I was sick and you visited Me: I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come
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++ 36th Sunday after Pentecost ++
+ Meatfare-Last Judgment +

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 8:8-9:2

Gospel: Matthew 25: 31-46

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 18)

Following this petition, the deacon proclaims the following: ***“For seasonable weather, abundance of the fruits of the earth, and peaceful times, let us pray to the Lord.”*** In other words, let's ask the Lord for favorable and moderate winds—those that don't harm human health; for the abundant harvest of the fruits of the earth, which strengthen us.

For peaceful times—so that mankind wouldn't suffer from natural disasters occurring in the world, that our planet

wouldn't be shaken by particular natural disasters.

When God created the world and everything in it, there was nothing in the nature of the first-created world that would have rebelled against man. The beasts didn't attack him. Lions, panthers, bears, and snakes behaved peacefully, without showing even the slightest aggression either to Adam or to each other.

At that time, there were neither earthquakes, nor fires, nor tsunamis, nor

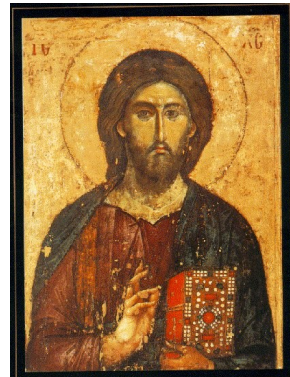
any of the other disasters that shake the modern world. Complete harmony reigned in nature. Impermanence and mutability became inherent in the world of nature after the fall of man. Having fallen away from God, man dragged nature with him into the fall.

Today, people are so far from nature that they not only don't feel the need to pray for *“seasonable weather, abundance of the fruits of the earth, and peaceful times,”* but *they even laugh and*
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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 worshiping with us today. We invite you to join us at our coffee social 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, Colleen, Stan, David, Carol, Norris, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

The Triodion-The Lenten Guide

For the Lord of mercy and love didn't come into the world to call the righteous, those 'who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt' (Luke 18, 9), like the pharisee; instead, he came to call 'sinners to repentance', which is why he justified the sinful but sincerely repentant publican, rather than the formally virtuous but hypocritical pharisee.

The message from this first, instructive extract from the Triodion is clear: if we wish to find grace and mercy from our Lord and God, all we have to do is follow the example of the publican, who, acknowledging 'the multitude of his sins', sought, with contrition, the Lord's mercy: 'Lord be merciful to me.'

Certainly the Lord knows the difficulties involved in repentance but he also respects sincere intent- provided it's really sincere- and doesn't regard the penitent with contempt. This is why he 'opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble' (James 4, 6). It's also why the Fathers consider humility the supreme virtue and call it 'elevating', because it raises us up in the eyes of the Lord- not of other people- and exalts us before him.

Let's take the first step, then, and acquire a sense of our sinfulness, and let's repair our relationship with God and other people, since these are the necessary requirements for us to continue our spiritual struggle. Then, with his grace and mercy, the Lord will supply anything that's missing.

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

sneer when they see others praying for it. Every year, when we send out our circular that Molebens for the sending of rain should be served in our parishes, many journalists sneer at us: "These priests just looked at the weather forecast a few days ahead and they saw that there'd be rain on Friday, so they scheduled a Moleben for that day."

They don't pay attention to the fact that we distributed the circular three weeks before the Moleben, while the weather forecast comes out only ten days in advance. And what about the fact that there were no such forecasts before, but after the Church served a Moleben it started raining? You've all witnessed this several times, how during a prolonged drought, after the people of God, the whole Church, prayed for rain, the weather changed.

When we pray, we ask God to give us water to drink: "... And send down good rain upon us, that we might have our fill of water." Some will say: "We have water, why pray?" Okay, we have water—we can

buy it in the store. But in our prayers for the sending of rain we're not talking just about people.

We also pray that the Lord would take pity upon the animals who have nowhere to drink from, and the birds,



and the trees, and the grass: those who trust in Thee; remember the birds; remember the cattle, and grant the spirit of dew, and may the drought come to an end, and multiply the seeds of the earth for the raising up of man and animals.

The text of these prayers makes you feel responsible for the natural world

and the necessity of praying for it. When I see during a prolonged drought how the trees suffer without moisture, how they don't bear fruit and they dry up, I can't be indifferent and just say: "I don't care whether it rains or not," or (this happens too): "I'd prefer it if it didn't rain, so the porch doesn't get dirty."

It's only when we're aware of our responsibility that we're capable of praying sincerely. Otherwise, we remain indifferent, and when we want, for example, to eat a tomato, we just go to the supermarket for it. When I don't know how much work it takes to grow a tomato, I can easily throw it away. When I don't know how much work it takes to produce olive oil, I don't care if a bottle falls and shatters on the floor. But when I work hard to collect two buckets of olives that'll be used to squeeze out a bottle of oil, then I'll cherish it down to the very last drop and I'll make sure nothing gets wasted.

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to You?’

And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’ Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food: I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink: I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’

Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’

And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal (Matt 25:32–46).

This is how the Lord concluded His words on the final, terrible judgment of mankind! How sweet and joyful these words sound to the righteous and how bitter and stern, and forever unchanging they sound to hard-hearted sinners! Thus, the merciful shall obtain mercy (Matt 5:7). Those who have stored the oil of good deeds will be able to enter the bridal chamber, for judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy (Jas 2:13). Now, brothers and sisters, it is beneficial for us to ask ourselves and to ponder: to which side shall we belong? To the right, or to the left; with the sheep, or with the goats; with the blessed, or with the cursed?

You will say: who can know such a thing, besides the Lord, Who saves the upright in heart (Ps 7:10), and Who possesses the most truthful scales of justice? To the Lord alone belongs the perfect knowledge regarding every man, only He knows who among us will stand on the right side, and who will stand on the left side; He alone knows which righteous person shall stand here in his righteousness, and which one won’t, which sinner returns sincerely and repents, and from a goat is turned into a sheep, and which one ultimately becomes hardened in sin.

But to us, brethren, is given at least to know what is our state now: who are we, sheep or goats? Our con-

science, that incorruptible judge and witness of our thoughts, words, and deeds, shows us whether we are humble and gentle sheep of the rational fold, whether we are willing to share our goods with those in need, or whether we are proud, egotistical, evil, vengeful, unmerciful sinners, who, like goats, are filled with the stench of our impurities.

This we can know about ourselves right here and now, in the continuation of our earthly lives, and therefore we can judge on which side we might stand at the terrible judgment; that is, we might stand on the left side if we remain unrepentant, uncorrected sinners, filled with our pride and malice, with sinful impurities in our hearts and bodies; yet we may hope that through faith, repentance, and good deeds, we might stand on the right side; the choice of which side to stand on depends on us.

Time was given to each of us by the merciful Savior to come to our senses, repent, correct ourselves, stock up with an excess of oil of mercy and every virtue, in order not to be ashamed at the judgment. Thus, let us take care to become lambs of meekness and gentleness, love and compassion, patience and long-suffering, humility and obedience, temperance and purity, and let us flee all the opposites of these virtues. The aforesaid virtues attain for us in this life the blessings of the Heavenly Father, and in the future life they establish us on the right side.

Therefore, I repeat, it is up to us to become worthy to stand on the right side at the dreadful

judgment, and to flee the left side; to listen to the all-blessed voice of the Savior, Who calls us into the Kingdom of Heaven, and to flee the terrible voice that casts us into the eternal fire. We write here, as it were, our deeds, eternal justification or eternal condemnation for ourselves at the terrible judgment; and in this way we say that the future judgment is written. The books of our consciences either justify us or condemn us, and all that is left to us is to listen to the just, eternal sentence of the Judge of all. Let us hasten, through sincere repentance and charity, to obliterate from our consciences all of our sins, voluntary and involuntary, and to write in our consciences every good deed. Their works follow them (Rev 14:13), says the Scripture. Amen.

(From the Lenten Homilies of St. John of Kronstadt)



Even if we concede that, so far, we have made an imperfect sketch of the relationship between sin and sickness from a theological point of view, there remain burning questions for ourselves and also for those who will inevitably address them to us: How does each of us experience, in practical terms, the relationship between sickness and sin?

How can we classify, explain and understand these twin phenomena in other people, those who are close or distant? Especially in difficult cases, such as severe ailments in young people, the sudden death of someone we love and so on. In what way can we talk about all of this to other people? Are all other people in a position to hear and understand the same things?

There is perhaps no other more appropriate prism through which to view these questions than the ascetic writings of our niptic tradition. Through its dissection of the human personality, the niptic tradition is able to penetrate the mystery of our psychosomatic entity, in a spirit of humane discretion and with the aim of sanctifying and healing us as a whole. There are many references in the texts of the early ascetic Fathers. I have chosen, however, to accompany me in my efforts here, to rely on texts by our modern saints and discerning Elders, such as Saint Paisios, Saint Sophrony in Essex, and Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetritis.

Interaction with students, for almost ten years now, at the University Ecclesiastical Academy of Thessaloniki, has shown that in sensitive issues, which touch upon the personality and depend on the way of life which our present times impose through their specific features, the words of discriminating Elders who dealt with our generation have been understood more readily. We shouldn't forget that, even when they were addressing monastics rather than the laity, they were well aware that these were people who were born and grew up in the modern era of rationalism, of the questioning of everything, of consumerism on all levels, of bionic technology, and the quest for convenience.

As our, then, principal at the Athonite Academy, the holy Bishop aptly said: 'On the Holy Mountain we only give death certificates, not birth certificates'. What he meant was that we all, to some extent bear the experience, the problems and the sins of the world.

In his interpretation of Abba Isaiah, Elder Aimilianos says: *'Since we're dust, we suffer from ailments of the body, the soul and the spirit. Our body has a propensity to every sin and it's prone to all sicknesses, as is the soul. What if somebody hurts us? Our egotism immediately takes over. Somebody makes us feel bad? We're troubled. What is all this? Ailments. Isn't jealousy a sickness of the soul? Isn't vainglory a disorder? Isn't it a sickness to bridle? All our passions are ailments. People in general are invalids. This is why Christ is called the physician of souls and bodies.*

We're sick because we sin, wittingly or unwittingly. For this reason Abba Isaiah says: Never fear sickness. Never be afraid that you'll fall ill. Don't be troubled if you are unwell. There's no greater blessing from God than sickness. Those who are sick are under the protection, the love, the benefaction and the care of God; they're in his embrace.

Sick people can become apostles of God, chosen vessels, whereas those who are well are, as a rule, callous, insensitive, uncharitable and unable to open their hearts. This is why sick people are usually sweet and caring; they show compassion to others and are able to beseech God.

So don't fear illnesses... those who are afraid of bodily ailments can't attain to what is natural in Christ; they'll always remain with the unnatural. But what if they love God and are fainthearted? If you're fearful... then fall on your knees, humble yourself, bow down to God and tell

him: 'God, I'm afraid I'll fall ill' or 'I'm afraid I've fallen ill' and shed tears. Do whatever you must to make God take pity on you. He alone can bring you rest. Faintheartedness is the result of the deification of our self, of the desire to extend our life, to enlarge it, to avoid pain, to evade worry, to escape difficult situations and to have others look after us'.

For the Fathers, although worry about health is understandable and, to some extent excusable, in the end it's carnal, and it distances us from our ultimate goal, which is sanctification. Cowardice in the face of death and giving undue importance to bodily health, things which seem greatly increased in our own day, are used by the cunning devil in order to disorientate us and darken our mind. This is why the saints consider interest in one's health to be humiliating and unworthy of Christ's call.

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