

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

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Christ is Risen! Al Maseeh Qam! Christos Voskrese!



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3rd Sunday of Pascha-Myrrh Bearers Sunday

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It is easy to assume that we have strong faith when it seems like everything is going our way. All too often, that means that we have come to trust in ourselves for following a religion that we imagine will give us what we want. When difficult struggles come, however, the truth about our weak souls is revealed. Then we come to see that real faith in God is not about serving or congratulating ourselves, but something entirely different.

Today we commemorate those whose dedication to Christ shone brightly in the midst of their sorrow and despair. With broken hearts and in terrible shock and grief, the Theotokos, Mary Magdalen, two other Mary's, Johanna, Salome, Martha, Susanna, and others whose names we do not know went early in the morning to the Lord's tomb in order to anoint Him properly for burial.

They had seen Him die a terrible death and expected to find His body lying in the grave. By doing what they could to show one last act of devotion to the Savior, the Myrrh-Bearing Women received the astounding blessing of being the first to hear from the angel the good news of His resurrection.

Along with them, we also remember today Joseph of Arimathea, who had
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+ Sunday-Holy Myrrh Bearers +
+ St. James-Brother of the Lord +

Epistle: Acts 6: 1-7

Gospel: Mark: 15:43-16:8

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.*

The Life of St. George the Great Martyr (part 2)

The sorcerer Athanasius, falling down at the feet of St George, confessed Christ as the All-Powerful God and asked forgiveness for his sins, committed in ignorance. The obdurate emperor in his impiety thought otherwise. In a rage he commanded both t Athanasius and the man raised from the dead to be beheaded, and he had St George again locked up in prison.

The people, weighed down with their infirmities, began to visit the prison and they there re-

ceived healing and help from the saint. A certain farmer named Glycerius, whose ox had collapsed, also visited him. The saint consoled him and assured him that God would restore his ox to life.

When he saw the ox alive, the farmer began to glorify the God of the Christians throughout all the city. By order of the emperor, St Glycerius was arrested and beheaded. The exploits and the miracles of the Great Martyr George had increased the number of the

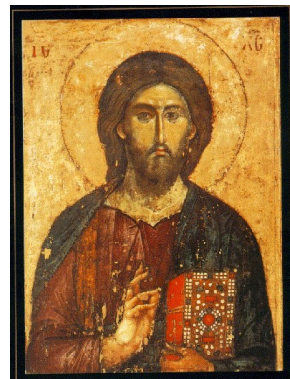
Christians, therefore DIOCLETIAN made a final attempt to compel the saint to offer sacrifice to the idols. They set up a court at the pagan temple of Apollo. On the final night the holy martyr prayed fervently, and as he slept, he saw the Lord, Who raised him up with His hand, and embraced him.

The Savior placed a crown on St George's head and said, "Fear not, but have courage, and you will soon come to Me and receive what has been prepared for you."
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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 with us today and 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, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Mackenzie, Mike, Jessica, Lisa, Jeff, Bonnalee, Skip, Colleen, Stan, David, Carol, Lee, Norris, Debbie, Linda, Daniel, Matthew, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

Arise Quickly

‘Arise quickly’. These words of the angel are directed to each of us. They urge us not to dwell on what we experienced in Passion Week and at the Resurrection as mere memories, but to prepare, to tie on the sandals of fervor and love, to fasten our belt round the garment of faith and to follow Christ in the presence of every angel of his, in the Church, in spiritual discourse, in the works performed by the saints and everyone who experiences

Christ in their hearts.

And we should return to the community of the Church, because that’s where the angel took Peter: to the community of the Church. He didn’t abandon him to make his way in the world by himself, but took him back to where he had been before, to his family and ours. Because this is the paramount message of the resurrection. That, armed with fervor, love and faith, we all need to find our community and to speak with our whole being about the Christ we’ve experienced; about the Christ to whom we pray. About the joy of the resurrection, his and our own. About the fact that we haven’t experienced a private event, but an experience which we share with the Church. That we’ve taken communion. That we’ve each rejoiced, in the presence of others. Tears and laughter. Defeat and victory. Christ is everything and is all things to everyone.

‘Arise quickly’. With these words, the angel woke Saint Peter the Apostle, who was in the prison of King Herod, who, having agreed to Christ’s death warrant, refused to believe that he had risen.

Life of St. George, cont’d from p.1

In the morning, the emperor offered to make St George his co-administrator, second only to himself. The holy martyr with a feigned willingness answered, “Caesar, you should have shown me this mercy from the very beginning, instead of torturing me. Let us go now to the temple and see the gods you worship.”

Diocletian believed that the martyr was accepting his offer, and he followed him to the pagan temple with his retinue and all the people. Everyone was certain that St George would offer sacrifice to the gods. The saint went up to the idol, made the Sign of the Cross and addressed it as if it were alive: “Are you the one who wants to receive from me sacrifice befitting God?”

The demon inhabiting the idol cried out, “I am not a god and none of those like me is a god, either. The only God is He Whom you preach. We are fallen angels, and we deceive people because we are jealous.” St George cried out, “How dare you re-

main here, when I, the servant of the true God, have entered?” Then noises and wailing were heard from the idols, and they fell to the ground and were shattered.



There was general confusion. In a frenzy, pagan priests and many of the crowd seized the holy martyr, tied him up, and began to beat him. They also called for his immediate execution. The holy empress Alexandra tried to reach him. Pushing her way through the crowd, she cried out, “O God of George, help me, for You

Alone are All-Powerful.” At the feet of the Great Martyr the holy empress confessed Christ, Who had humiliated the idols and those who worshipped them.

Diocletian immediately pronounced the death sentence on the Great Martyr George and the holy Empress Alexandra, who followed St George to execution without resisting. Along the way she felt faint and slumped against a wall. There she surrendered her soul to God.

St George gave thanks to God and prayed that he would also end his life in a worthy manner. At the place of execution the saint prayed that the Lord would forgive the torturers who acted in ignorance, and that He would lead them to the knowledge of Truth. Calmly and bravely, the holy Great Martyr George bent his neck beneath the sword, receiving the crown of martyrdom on April 23, 303.

The pagan era was coming to an end, and Christianity was about to triumph. Within 10 years, the leader
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asked Pilate for the dead body of the Lord and took Him down from the Cross with his own hands. Nicodemus, the Pharisee who had previously not understood Christ at all, helped Joseph bury Him. These were both prominent Jewish men who risked a great deal by associating themselves with One Who had been rejected by their own religious leaders as a blasphemer and crucified by the Romans as a traitor.

Our Lord's Passion shook all of His followers to their core. John was the only one of the twelve to stand at the foot the Cross, for the others had run away in fear. Peter, the head disciple, had denied the Savior three times. They were all shocked and horribly disappointed that their Messiah had failed to set up an earthly kingdom; instead, He had been killed by His enemies. Death had apparently had the final word on Jesus of Nazareth. Overcome with fear and despair, His closest followers ran away and hid.

The Myrrh-Bearing Women, along with Sts. Joseph and Nicodemus, knew bitter grief also. They saw His crucifixion as a complete disaster and their hopes for Him were destroyed. Amidst their horrific pain, however, they refused to think only of themselves. They responded very differently from the disciples because they remained focused on showing their love for Jesus Christ as best they could. That meant doing the sorrowful task of giving their departed Lord and friend a decent burial. They accepted the risk of identifying themselves even further with One Who had just been crucified as a blasphemer and a traitor. Despite their shock and grief, they found the courage and strength to risk everything by maintaining their devotion to Christ as best they could in these awful circumstances.

What they did was not about serving themselves in any way; they could not have hoped to have gained anything from anyone by doing it. Their selfless devotion put the women in the position to see the Lord's empty tomb and to hear from the angel that He is risen. The good news of the Savior's resurrection was shocking to the point of absurdity, for "they went out quickly and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

To see and hear what they did was not to receive confirmation that they had been right all along. Remember

that they had expected to anoint a dead body. To see and hear what they did was not to get what they wanted from religion so that they could go back to life as usual with an optimistic or pious attitude. No, to see and hear what they did was to encounter God from the depths of their souls in a way that called them and all they had assumed about life in the world into question. Their eyes were opened to behold the joy of the resurrection not because they had everything figured out or had warm feelings about the Savior, but because they stood firm in their devotion to Him, even when all seemed lost and there was nothing left to do but anoint His dead body.

It may be easy to think that we have devoted ourselves to the Lord quite well when we believe that we are getting what we want from religion. Perhaps we attribute the happiness of our marriages and families to our faith. Maybe we see our physical health, financial success, or good reputation among our peers as a reward for our dedication to God. Of course, all the good things of this life are God's blessings and we should be grateful for them. We must be on guard, however, against the subtle temptation of thinking that entrusting ourselves to Christ leads to this or that positive result in the world. It is so easy to view devotion to the Lord as a means to serving our own ends. If we want to see where that leads, remember the disciples fleeing in fear when the Cross revealed that Christ was not the Messiah they had expected. Any of the blessings of this life can disappear in an instant and the same is true of a faith based on the belief that God should give us what we want on our own terms.

The devotion of the Myrrh-Bearers, Joseph, and Nicodemus shines all the more brightly because, even in the midst of their deep despair about the fulfillment of their desires, they refused to abandon Christ. That is what true faith looks like, and we will never acquire it by running away or merely becoming indifferent when we do not get what we want for ourselves, our loved ones, or our world. Entrusting ourselves to the Crucified and Risen Lord requires engaging in a persistent struggle to reorient the deepest desires of our hearts for fulfillment in Him, especially when we find it hard to see any signs of His presence in our lives.

Growing in true faith demands that we focus our energies on opening our souls to His healing power, especially when we are sorely tempted to think that there is

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no hope for the likes of us. Practically speaking, we must mindfully reject thoughts that tempt us to abandon Christ even as we focus our minds on the words of the Jesus Prayer. Each day of our lives, we must refuse to invest ourselves in serving the false gods of our own vain imaginations and instead embrace the basic spiritual disciplines of the Christian life in order to serve Christ in the life of His Body, the Church, and in our neighbors.

The struggle to do so will often be inconvenient and frustrating, and at times we will perceive no visible signs of progress. We will grow in the faith necessary to behold the joy of the resurrection not by imagining that we are effortlessly going from success to success, but by steadfastly remaining focused on serving our Lord in the humble ways that are available to us today, regardless of how well we think things are going. At times, our hearts will be broken by our own dashed hopes for ourselves and others.

But if we remain vigilant in our dedication to Christ, then we—like the Myrrh-Bearing Women—will be completely shocked to know the joy of the Risen Lord. As we continue to celebrate this blessed season of Pascha, let us all do precisely that as we invest ourselves in serving the Savior, for there is simply no other way to enter into the eternal blessedness that none of us has earned, deserves, or has any right to expect, for Christ is Risen.

So today we keep the feast of people who proved faithful, the ones who in their frailty had not fled, and the ones who in the face of defeat and tragedy had suddenly become disciples and faithful. Let us remember them, not only seeing their glory as we have done today in the service, but also asking ourselves: do we belong, to any extent, to the example given by one or another of them?

Can we say that in the face of the defeat of Christ we would come out and say: I am one of His disciples, although in the time when there was no danger around I kept out, hesitant, unsure, asking myself questions, indeed asking Him questions? Is any one of us Joseph of Arimathea, is any one Nicodemus, and can we say that we are like these myrrh-bearing women, whom neither the needs nor the defeat nor the death of Christ had been able to alienate from Him?



St Constantine would issue the Edict of Milan, granting religious freedom to Christians. Of the many miracles worked by the holy Great Martyr George, the most famous are depicted in iconography. In the saint's native city of Beirut were many idol-worshippers. Outside the city, near Mount Lebanon, was a large lake, inhabited by an enormous dragon-like serpent. Coming out of the lake, it devoured people, and there was nothing anyone could do, since the breath from its nostrils poisoned the very air.

On the advice of the demons inhabiting the idols, the local ruler came to a decision. Each day the people would draw lots to feed their own children to the serpent, and he promised to sacrifice his only daughter when his turn came. That time did come, and the ruler dressed her in her finest attire, then sent her off to the lake. The girl wept bitterly, awaiting her death. Unexpectedly for her, St George rode up on his horse with spear in hand. The girl implored him not to leave her, lest she perish.

The saint signed himself with the Sign of the Cross. He rushed at the serpent saying, "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." St George pierced the throat of the serpent with his spear and trampled it with his horse. Then he told the girl to bind the serpent with her sash, and lead it into the city like a dog on a leash.

The people fled in terror, but the saint halted them with the words: "Don't be afraid, but trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and believe in Him, since it is He Who sent me to save you." Then the saint killed the serpent with a sword, and the people

burned it outside the city. Twenty-five thousand men, not counting women and children, were then baptized. Later, a church was built and dedicated to the Most Holy Theotokos and the Great Martyr George. St George went on to become a talented officer and to amaze the world by his military exploits. He died before he was thirty years old. He is known as Victory Bearer, not only for his military



achievements, but for successfully enduring martyrdom.

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Nobody can hate those who are humble; nor can they berate or despise them. Christ loves them and they're beloved by all. They love everyone and everyone wants to be with them. The wise and the instructors are all silent before the humble, to whom everyone pays attention. They speak simply. Those who despise the humble blaspheme against God himself. (*St. Isaac of Syria*)