

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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4th Sunday of Pascha-Christ Heals the Paralytic

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During the season of Pascha, the Church calls our attention to how particular people responded to our Lord, Who rose from the dead on the third day. Thomas did not believe until he saw and touched the wounds of the Risen Savior. Joseph of Arimathea took Christ's body down from the Cross and, with the help of Nicodemus, buried Him. The Myrrh-Bearing women went to the tomb very early in the morning in order to anoint their

dead Lord as a final sign of love for Him. That is how they became the first witnesses to His resurrection.

On this Sunday of the Paralytic, the Church calls us to enter personally into the joy of the resurrection by directing us to see ourselves in light of the Savior's healing of a man who had been paralyzed for thirty-eight years. The man, whose name we do not know, was in the tragic situation of being right by a pool of water where he could be healed, but due to his paralysis he was unable to enter it before someone else received the miracle. At first glance, we may wonder what his situation has to do with celebrating Pascha.

If we view our Lord's Passion in legalistic terms about satisfying justice or paying a debt, we will miss the point entirely of why we are focusing
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+4th Sunday of Pascha-Paralytic+
+ St. Alexis of Wilkes-Barre +

Epistle: Acts 9: 32-42

Gospel: John: 5: 1-15

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.*

Evil and the Passions by Savas Alexandrou

In Orthodox Patristic Theology, evil is viewed as a consequence of our submission to the passions, which are inflamed by the demons, abetted by our wicked disposition. In the Philokalia, in his work '400 headings on love', St. Maximos the Confessor tells us that three things move us to evil: the passions, the demons and our wicked disposition. He goes on to say that 'a passion is the fulfillment of an irrational desire'. The passions lurk in our soul and, according to the

theology of Abba Isaac the Syrian, as described in his 'Ascetic Writings', the passions are 'thorns arising from the seed in the body', i.e. which we carry from the moment of our birth.

So, according to the theology of Saint Maximos the Confessor, 'when the demons see our spiritual negligence they attack us with great ferocity, activating the passions which then take over our life, if we're susceptible to our wicked disposition'. According to the theology of the Fathers of the East,

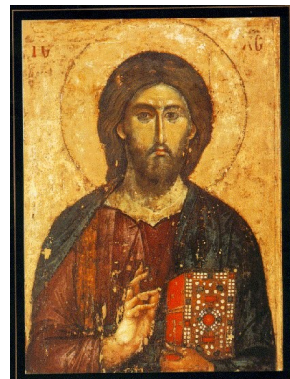
we have a wicked disposition if, while knowing what's good we practice what's bad.

As has been said, the passions engender evil, and arise in accordance with the dual nature of the human person. Saint Gregory the Theologian clearly states: 'a human being is both visible and invisible, mortal and immortal, earthly and heavenly'. In other words, human beings are a mixture of the material and the spiritual, since they have both body and soul.
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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, Michael the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

Regarding Anger

Anger in itself is natural. You can even direct your anger against your own sins and what cause you to fall. However, when you become angry against other people like your brothers, your friends, your colleagues, you destroy whatever good deeds you have done. You should know that this anger is the result of pride and vanity. Absolve it by love for all and true humility.

When anger comes, close your mouth and do not speak back to the person who insults you or dishonors you or tries with multiple ways to tempt you, even though you have done nothing to deserve such a treatment. Man is made to be calm and reasonable and therefore anger is never in his nature, while with love he always grows as a human being. With good and love you can calm down many, and if someone has good intentions, he can quickly become peaceful as an Angel.

Learn to bravely endure the temptations that the Lord permits to come upon you. Asking for what is "right", is exactly when you are in the wrong! Learn not to make excuses but accept what has come upon you by saying "blessed"! And without even being wrong, learn to say you are wrong. The righteous thing to do is to bravely endure the coming temptation so you can become victorious regardless if you have fallen to this temptation or not. If you do not do that and you say, "But why?" you fight God, the one who tries to heal you from your state of passions by allowing temptations to come you.

Evil and the Passions, cont'd from p.1

The carnal passions are linked to the body: gluttony, avarice, sensuality and so on; while spiritual passions are associated with the soul, the greatest of these being haughtiness, that is conceit, which, according to the theology of Athanasios the Great, is directly linked to the devil. In his work 'On the appearance of the Word in the flesh and against Arians', he notes: 'Pride is in the devil, just as humility is in Christ'.

So the passions generate evil, aspects of which are: wars, the various forms of discrimination, inequality, fornication, and so on. In a profound discourse entitled 'On Gratitude', Saint Basil the Great states that, regarding the way in which we should deal with the passions, which, as we noted above, are the fount and origin of evil: 'the mind which has been cleansed with the teaching of Christ should use reason like a fortress and, in this way, fend off the attacks of the passions'.

People who work at observing Christ's commandments have nothing

to do with the passion of selfishness which, according to St. Nikolaos Stithatos, is 'love for the body', that is individualism. This passion of selfishness is the root of the evil of greed, which divides people into rich



and poor. Speaking of this evil, St. Basil says that: 'greedy people are those who aren't satisfied with what they have, but constantly want more'. He adds that things which belong to everybody are appropriated by greedy individuals through wicked means, in this particular case by exploitation and injustice.

Moreover, St. Maximos the Confes-

sor declares that the passions which generate evil dominate the lives of those whose minds aren't connected to God: 'A mind connected to God through prayer and love rightly becomes holy; but if it departs from God, it becomes bestial, brutish, feral, demonic, and sensual'.

According to St. Gregory the Theologian, the evil that is war, which is related to the brutalization of the human person, is the consequence of the hatred that exists when people don't respect the gift of peace which Christ left us. This is precisely why Saint Silouan the Athonite stressed that there's no greater sin than war and no people worse than warmongers.

The Orthodox Church, which is a seedbed for the sanctification and deification of the human person and which is the sole means of expunging the passions which generate evil, invites people to participate in its liturgical, ascetic and sacramental life, in which people are cleansed of the passions, purified of evil and are glorified.

today on His healing of the paralyzed man. Through His victory over death, Christ heals us from the corruption, weakness, and despair of being enslaved to death, which is the wages of sin. Before His resurrection, we lacked the strength to fulfill our calling to become like God in holiness, and obviously could not overcome the ultimate paralysis of the grave. We need One Who brings life to the dead, not merely a teacher of legal, moral, or religious truth.

The paralyzed man was near the Temple in Jerusalem, right by the pool that provided water for washing lambs before they were slaughtered. The scene occurs at the Jewish feast of Pentecost, which commemorated Moses receiving the Law, which had been given by angels. The Old Testament Law and the sacrificial worship of the Temple foreshadowed the coming of Christ, but they could not heal anyone from the degrading ravages of sin, including bondage to the grave. The Savior fulfilled both as the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.

Our Great High Priest offered Himself on the Cross as He entered fully into death itself, from which He liberated us by His resurrection to become “partakers of the divine nature” by grace. He did so in order to restore and fulfill us in God’s image and likeness as He set us free from the paralysis of sin and death. We were radically sick and needed the care of the Great Physician.

The plight of the paralyzed man shows us the common condition of fallen humanity left to our own devices. We did not take the initiative in bringing salvation to the world and this fellow did not ask Christ to help him or even know His name. Instead, the Lord graciously reached out to him, asking the seemingly obvious question, “Do you want to be healed?” The Savior’s words challenge us because of the tendency to define ourselves in terms of our distorted desires and habitual sins to the point that we often equate being true to ourselves with denying that we need healing at all. People on all sides of our society’s debates and divisions often do precisely that and encourage us to follow their bad example.

Regardless of what we think about anything, our opinions will not heal our souls. Far from it, serving our passions in the name of freedom, justice, or anything else

will only make us spiritually weaker. Doing so will only make us impotent before temptations that we refuse to recognize as such, perhaps even as we congratulate ourselves on our authenticity and virtue.

The uncomfortable truth is that we all lack the ability to bring healing to our souls every bit as much as the paralyzed man who could not move himself into the water of the pool. The only solution to our problem is to receive healing and strength that we cannot give ourselves and do not deserve. In order to accept the Lord’s mercy, we must recognize the truth about ourselves as we struggle to obey the Lord’s command: “Rise, take up your pallet, and walk.” No matter how great the struggle, we must rise up in obedience in order to participate personally in His victory over the paralysis of sin and death. We must also remember that embracing His heal-

ing will never be as easy as resting content with whatever forms of corruption we have allowed to dominate our hearts.

After a lifetime of not moving, the paralyzed man could not have found it easy to obey Christ’s command to stand, pick up his bed, and walk. He had learned how to survive as an invalid, but the Savior called him to a very different life, the challenges of which he could not know or predict. At some level, he must have been afraid about what would lie ahead. We feel the same way whenever we gain the clarity to see our spiritual infirmities more clearly.

The more we embrace Christ’s healing, the more we will be aware of the ongoing paralysis of our own souls. The Lord does not say to us only once to rise up from sin and move forward in a life

of holiness. He commands us to do so every day of our lives, calling us to enter evermore fully into the infinite joy of the heavenly kingdom opened to us through His glorious resurrection.

The man in today’s gospel reading would never have been able to walk had he insisted on remaining as he had been for thirty-eight years. Lying still for a long time makes people weak and unable to move. The same will remain true of us spiritually if we do not undertake the struggle to receive the healing of the Lord by serving Him as faithfully as we presently have the strength to do. The more accustomed we become to sin, and especially

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the more we accept the lie that embracing that sin is somehow part of freely becoming our true selves or serving some greater good in the world, the weaker we will become before it. The longer we insist on remaining enslaved to our passions, the less inclination we will have to receive personally the liberation that the Savior died and rose again to share with us.

As the God-Man, Christ Himself is the healing, restoration, and fulfillment of the human person. Entrusting ourselves to the Savior requires that we refuse to remain paralyzed before our sins and instead take the faltering steps that we can to open ourselves to the holy strength that has overcome even death itself. Instead of ob-

sessing about how well we are doing, we must entrust ourselves to the mercy of the One Who is healing and strengthening us in ways we cannot know as we reorient our lives to Him, even in small ways.

We must also take to heart the Lord's words to the man after his healing: "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse befalls you." Obeying that command requires remaining vigilant as we mindfully turn away from the familiar passions and subtle temptations that so easily ensnare us. Entering into the holy joy of Pascha is truly an eternal journey of sharing ever more fully in the healing mercy of Christ as we become more like Him in holiness. The only way to do that is to rise, take up our beds, and walk each day of our lives in obedience as best we can. That is His command to us all and the only way to know the joy of His victory over sin and death, for "Christ is Risen!"

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At this time of the year, we hear the encouraging words: 'Let no-one fear death; for the death of the Savior has set us free'. We look forward expectantly to the resurrection of the dead. This hope of ours, which is an insult to reason, remains the last great source of meaning for people and the world. It's the risen Christ who illumines history, with its high points but also with the darkness of the human vicissitudes which accompany it. He sheds light and provides an explanation for the unanswered questions- 'Why?' - which are full of pain.

These often crush us and we pour them out like the cry of the saint of our literature [Alexandros Papadiamantis]: 'As if the sufferings and heartaches of the world would ever come to an end'.

If Christ didn't rise, our faith is in vain, as our spiritual tradition confirms. It's worth remembering that the risen Christ doesn't look down with contempt on the human condition. The resurrection isn't a dream of secular power. It's he, who asked God the Father to let him avoid his sufferings, who was betrayed by one of his own people, who was mocked and scourged, who was wounded and bled profusely, who cried: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?', and who died upon

the cross. We saw him in Great Week, 'covered in bruises', defeated in the eyes of his disciples, finished from a human point of view and utterly humiliated.

This is the crucified Lord we worship; in him we believe. This defeated man, an affront and foolishness in himself, is God. Our Church tradition boldly proclaims: 'God died; the blood of God on... the cross'. He abrogates the dominion of death, 'for it was not possible for the Lord of life to be held by degradation'. Since he is both God and human, he raises humankind with him. Human history, tragic circumstances, natural wickedness, the often inexplicable moral evil, and the torturous negation of our hopes on all levels are all called upon to participate in the transformational perspective of the resurrection. In opposition to decay, the dazzling joy of the resurrection. The risen Christ shows us the infinite possibilities that human nature, all of us, can acquire by grace.

He is the Savior and is still controversial: 'destined for the fall and resurrection of many'. For a struggle of love and freedom. 'Come', then, 'and let us walk with him and be crucified with him... so that we may live with him'. The resurrection is the action of divine love in all its great brilliance. Christ's descent into hell, such a favorite depiction in our iconographical tradition, marks the resurrection of the human race. On this auspicious and holy day, let us pay heed to the message of the empty tomb. 'Christ has risen; he is not here'. Death has been defeated, my brothers and sisters.

