

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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8th Sunday of Pascha-The Feast of Pentecost

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Today, Pentecost, the Feast of the Holy Trinity, is a day of great rejoicing: All that Christ imparted to us through His saving Incarnation, defeat of sin and death on the cross, resurrection, and glorious ascension, has its fulfillment and culmination on this day of illumination and empowerment by the descent of the Holy Spirit. The disciples, formally confused and fearful, who cowered in the upper room for

fear of their fellow Jews, are now emboldened and enlightened by the descent of the Holy Spirit.

In an instant, all is changed: the disciples now courageously witness to the truth, speaking with great conviction and authority—the Holy Spirit has descended upon them and replaced their heart of fear with power from on high. Now, we see Christ's disciples take on the mantle Christ has given them as Apostles; they are in the streets, united, and preaching with one voice the Good News of new life in Christ Jesus in fulfillment of all God had promised in His great love and mercy. The importance of Pentecost is seen in even greater light if we understand its historical context in man's relationship with God.

Humanity's efforts at unity without God are always prideful, ego-centric, *(continued p.3)*

+ Pentecost-Trinity Sunday +
+ Sts. Martha and Mary +

Epistle: Acts 1: 1-11

Gospel: John 7:37-52; 8:12

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.*

Jesus Christ-Son and Word of God by Metropolitan Agathangelos

The Sunday of the Holy Fathers, which our Church celebrates during the time of Pentecost, is dedicated to the memory of the Holy and God-bearing Fathers of the 1st Ecumenical Synod, in Nicaea, at which Saint Athanasios the Great and Saint Spyridon the Wonder-Worker were present and gave their testimony on behalf of the faith.

In the Holy Spirit, the Synod expressed the received faith of the Church and formulated its dogmatic teaching concerning the second

person of the Holy Trinity, the Son and Word of God, Jesus Christ, who is both God and human.

The significance of the 1st Ecumenical Synod lies in the fact that it defended the faith against the heretical teaching of Arius and his supporters, who claimed that Christ was not God but a human person. This is the greatest heresy ever, since, as the Holy Fathers point out, if Christ is created and is merely a human being, how could he save us?

According to the teach-

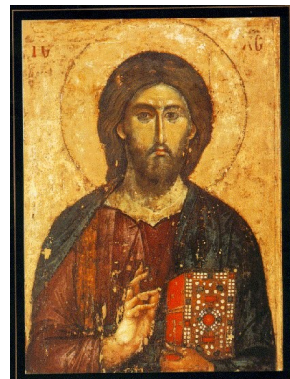
ing of the Church, the name 'Christ' stands for the whole of the Holy Trinity. 'The title of Christ is a confession of the whole. For it denotes the chrismating Father, the chrismated Son and the chrism, the Spirit (St. Basil the Great). The God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob was revealed to us in the person of Christ, through his incarnation.

The incarnate Word of God, then, the historical Jesus, God and human being, is precisely the essence of the revelation *(continued on p.2)*

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, Colleen, Stan, David, Carol, Norris, Debbie, Linda, Daniel, Matthew, Tracy, Michael the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

The lost coin!

Christ often touches on the subject of money. One such parable is the story of the lost coin. It tells of a woman who had ten drachmas and lost one. She lit candles and began sweeping the floor and thoroughly searching everywhere in the house to find the lost coin. When she found it, she gathered her friends so that they would rejoice. Why was the woman so happy to find the lost coin? Was she in so much need of money?

Obviously, finding such a small item was not an easy task. Why then look so hard for it? The most obvious is the extreme poverty of the woman with only ten drachmas. Some researchers suggest another hypothesis. The drachma was used not only as a means of payment, but also as a traditional ornament. Married women wore a headdress decorated with ten or more silver coins. A bride would wear it to greet her bridegroom, like a dowry. Losing such a coin posed serious problems for the woman. Her husband might think that she had misused it against his will. It may well be that the coin in the parable refers to such a drachma. This also explains why the woman was so happy to have found the small drachma in the semi-darkness on the floor.

Christ then compares the woman's joy to that experienced by God's angels "over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10). In this parable, He reproves the scribes and Pharisees who accused Him of eating with outcasts of Jewish society, such as tax collectors and sinners. When we find one who is lost, the heavens rejoice.

Jesus Christ-Son and Word of God, cont'd from p.1

of God, the essence of the faith.

In the Orthodox faith and in the experience of our Church, Christ is inseparable from the Church, which is his body, and the Church is inseparable from Christ, who is its head and origin, its life and its ethos. Those who seek to separate Christ from the Church or the Church from Christ make the greatest of errors and fall into the greatest of deceptions and heresies: Christ is the incarnate Word of God, but they denude him and strip him of his flesh, expelling him from his body. But this also means that they expel him from humanity and from the world.

In the person of Christ, the greatest battle was fought and the power of sin was routed, the curse of the law, the ineluctable fate of us mortals, the dominion of death. Those who are baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity put on Christ and enter his body, the Church, and make this victory their own, by the grace of the Spirit.

The Holy Fathers give us the mes-

sage of a new effort towards our internal and external freedom, the way we experience our identity. What we need to do is to allow ourselves to be kindled by the flame of their own burning inspiration. Because they



know that the greatest enemy of any people is its loss of self-awareness, the erosion of its cultural identity and the alteration of its whole ethos. The clearest dereliction of responsibility towards ourselves and the problems we face is to think that our greatest concern is what we demand, rather

than what our ethos is. It's only through the preservation and conservation of our identity and the awareness of who we are that we can be witnesses to the faith and our culture. Witnesses to ourselves and worthy to hold in our hands our inheritance and tradition which have been guarded in hearts over generations.

In other words, we must focus on the Church, mature in it, and experience its sacramental tradition, which encompasses all revelation and vision, and is a foretaste of the life to come and of bliss.

* * *

The Holy Spirit is Light and Life, a living Fountain of spiritual gifts, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, all-knowing, upright and good: He leads us and washes away our sins. He is God, and He makes us gods; He is Fire proceeding from Fire, speaking and acting and distributing gifts. Through Him all the Prophets, Martyrs and Apostles of God are crowned. Strange account, strange and wonderful sight: wonderful gifts.

seeking to take the place of God and challenge God's place. We see it in the Tower of Babel, where mankind erroneously thought to exclude God. To humble man and teach him to follow God's way that alone is life, He divided the tongues. But now, at Pentecost, God offers us again a way to unity—not one of man's prideful making, but the way of God by the Holy Spirit. Christ promised before His Ascension: "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for... when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:7, 13).

By the Holy Spirit we are indeed led "into all truth." And what is this truth? Pilot asks this same question of Jesus. Christ's answer, found in Jn. 14:6 is clear: "*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*" This revelation of Christ is manifested through His fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, by His power over death, His ability to heal and give life, to forgive sins, and through the witness of the changed lives of His Saints, which continue to bring into the present the message of that same Gospel that changed the world on that Pentecost day 2,000 years ago.

The early Christians knew that the Truth is not an ideal, a philosophy, or an ethic, but a Person, Jesus Christ, the Word of God. The idea that there can be many 'truths,' or in the language of ecumenism, "many paths" to God, all of which are equal, is an oxymoron. By definition, truth is objective, not subjective or divisible. Christ declares and demonstrates Himself to be that Truth.

Pentecost is then an opportunity for the renewal of our Baptism into Christ, our new life in Christ, of our being sealed by the Holy Spirit; it's an opportunity to step forward in our faith in Christ to witness to the Truth He alone is. By the power of the Holy Spirit and our cooperation with Him, we're given the means to thirst more after God, to advance in His Kingdom, because on this day, the life in Christ is made accessible to all, manifesting to us Christ's abiding presence in our lives by the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit.

God promised Israel that through the Messiah He would "pour out His Spirit on all flesh." This prophecy

is fulfilled this day. Those present at Pentecost from all nations heard the good news of salvation in their own tongue: They all hear in their own language, the one thing that can unite all humanity together in true community, one not based on prideful human ambitions, or humanism, our modern '*tower of Babel*,' but on communion with God Himself, He who is Life—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Life in the Spirit *after* Pentecost is manifested then not in chaos or confusion or individual frenetic expression, but always in order and for the sake of the Gospel, as St. Luke relates of the early post-Pentecost Church in Acts 2, "... they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship in the breaking of the (Eucharistic)

bread, and in 'the prayers,'" This same order continues at the heart of Orthodox worship to this day! And despite differences in language, culture, geography, and time, the same message of "good news," of healing and salvation, of new life in communion with God in accord with His commandments, is proclaimed with the same power to change lives—the life of everyone here.

This life in unity in the Spirit, is depicted in the icon of Pentecost before us. In it, we see the *heavenly* reality of the descent, what it means for us, for the faithful in the Church. The unity of common Orthodox (i.e., 'right-believing') faith is seen in the Apostles' communal gathering. The diversity of gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, faith, healing, knowledge, teaching,

prophecy, language (I Cor. 12), are depicted in the Apostles' differing gestures, the Gospel writers are shown Gospel in hand, others with scrolls, depicting their gift of teaching and preaching. The vacant space at the top signifies that Christ has ascended and is now *invisibly* present with us by the Holy Spirit, whom God the Father has sent to empower them to minister in Christ's name.

The Holy Spirit is represented by tongues fire. Why *tongues*? Because God *spoke* creation and life into being by His Word, Who then became incarnate to enter into and redeem our human nature. God has sent us His
(continued p. 4, column 1)



Holy Spirit to further us in this redeemed life in Christ, to empower our speech and actions to *proclaim* to the world the Good News of His salvation. Today the tongues are united; the curse of Babel is undone. Today, God is proclaimed and manifested as Holy Trinity, a relationship of truth in perfect unity and love that we are invited into through communion. The fire testifies to the truth that God is “a consuming fire,” healing our passions by “burning up all the thorns of our offenses,” as we pray in the pre-Communion prayers.

To all those wearied by sin, grudges, mediocrity in faith, indifference, fear of witnessing to the truth of Christ in this age, all of which is represented in the holy icon as the old man, *‘the cosmos,’* ruled by sin and darkness, Christ proclaims in today’s Gospel, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12). The Apostles and their successors in Christ’s holy Church today proclaim this same truth that was proclaimed then: there’s freedom from enslavement to this world, there’s fulfillment, enlightenment, healing from sin-sickness, and new life in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I urge you this day: renew your baptism into Christ, your love for God and His holy Church. The same Holy Spirit, Who filled the Apostles and our forefathers with zeal, conviction, and boldness for the sake of the Gospel, is here to fill you as well. Devote yourselves as our Christian forebears did after Pentecost, to continue steadfast in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship in the breaking of the (Eucharistic) bread, in ‘the prayers’ of the Church. Pray daily, make time to attend the divine services, come to Bible study, love others enough to invite them to church, to “come and see” for themselves.

Be zealous for the Truth that is Christ. Through your witness, others will be strengthened in faith and the truth of Pentecost will inspire them to put Christ on in baptism, to be born again by water and the Spirit. So then, beseeching God and begin to pray again this day: “O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, who art everywhere and fillest all things, treasury of blessings and giver of life, come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every impurity, and save our souls, O Good One!”

Death in Orthodox Christianity is not viewed as the end of our existence. After death, the soul is only temporarily separated from the body. During the first 40 days, it goes through certain trials and meets its Creator. During this period, a soul’s posthumous fate is decided until it will be ultimately determined at the Final Judgement preceding the Universal Resurrection. The 3rd, 9th and 40th days after death are important for the posthumous existence of the deceased.

What is the meaning of 3 days after death? Although the Bible says nothing about any particular days after death and their meaning for a human soul, revelation resonates with biblical events (Christ rose from the dead on the 3rd day after the crucifixion, and ascended on the 40th).



An angel revealed to St. Macarios that in the first two days after death, a person’s spirit remains on earth accompanied by angels and remaining free to travel wherever it wills. Many souls spend these days at their homes, next to their loved ones and their own coffin. On the third day, in parallel with the Resurrection of Christ, the angels ascend the soul to worship God.

After that, the spirit stays in heaven until the 9th day, dwelling among angels and saints. Seeing heavenly bliss makes the souls of the righteous rejoice, while the unrighteous lament their futile lives, realizing that heaven is beyond their reach.

Why are funerals held on the 3rd day after death? In the first two days after death, a soul experiences separation from the body. Being able to stay with the body alleviates its suffering. After a spirit ascends to God on the third day, it will not return to earth until the Second Coming of Christ. Just as the spirit departs to God on the third day, so the body must be buried in the ground.

Significance of the 9th day after death On the 9th day, the soul once again stands before God in worship. However, after the ninth day instead of contemplating the bliss of heaven, it goes to behold the torments of hell. What happens to a soul on the 40th day after death? On the 40th day, angels take a person to God once more, this time not for worship, but for a personal judgement. The Lord determines where each soul will dwell until the Second Coming, the General Resurrection and the Last Judgement. the prayers of the Church and loved ones are especially important for a deceased’s soul.