

# A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor



*Glory be to Jesus Christ!*

*Glory be Forever!*

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1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost-All Saints

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Some of us grew up in churches that gave as little attention as possible to the saints out of fear that honoring those who served our Lord so faithfully would somehow distract us from worshiping only Him. Today's reading from Hebrews makes exactly the opposite point, for the "great cloud of witnesses" inspires us to "lay aside every weight" and to "run with perseverance the race that is set before us"

as we look to the Lord "Jesus, the pioneer and perfection of our faith." In other words, the saints are living witnesses of Christ's healing of the human person in the divine image and likeness. Instead of somehow distracting us, they inspire us to a life of holiness, for they show that it is possible to share so fully in the life of our Lord that we become radiant with His gracious divine energies.

That is true of the saints of the Old Testament, who had not yet received the fullness of God's promise in the coming of the Messiah, and it is all the more the case for those who have borne witness to Christ across the centuries by refusing to deny Him even to point of death. The root meaning of the word "martyr" is witness, and there is no more powerful way to give testimony to the truth of our Lord's  
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+ 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost- +  
+ Sunday of All Saints +

Epistle: Hebrews 11:33-12:2

Gospel: Matthew 10:32-33, 37-38;  
19:27-30

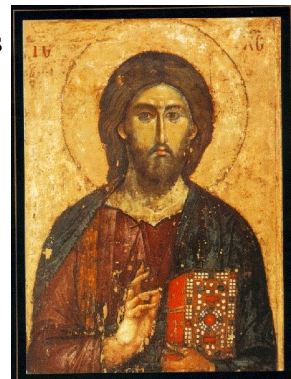
St. George Orthodox Christian Church is a community of believers who strive to live a life according to the Gospel of Christ and teachings of the Church.

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.*

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

## ***St. Luke of Simferopole-Surgeon and Confessor***

If you ever find yourself on the Holy Mountain or in other old churches, you will notice that many of them are painted red. If you ask the monks, they will tell you that the color symbolizes the blood of Christ and His saints.

It wants to remind us that, whereas the various religions or ideologies spread via propaganda, violence or oppression, the Church of Christ won people's hearts through weakness, the blood of Christ and the saints, martyrdom and witness.

There is not a single Orthodox Church that has not experienced its own martyrdom. And nor is there a saint that has not passed through his or her furnace of sorrows, temptations or martyrdom.

In the 20th century, the Russian Church underwent its own harsh martyrdom. For seven decades an untold number of martyrs and confessors gave their blood in their own witness on the cross.

One such moving witness on the cross is the figure of Archbishop Luke, Professor of Topo-

graphic Anatomy and Surgery. A man of rare talents and gifts, he served others as shepherd and doctor with remarkable love and self-denial, continuing the tradition of the great Unmercenary Saints of our Church.

His astonishing personality and his magnanimity are cause for amazement, admiration and also divine consolation. We now find ourselves in 1877, and on April 14, St. Luke was born, Valentin Voino Yasenetskij, in the town of Kerch in  
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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 Holy Spirit in our Lives

Ten days after Christ's Ascension into Heaven, the Holy Spirit descends upon the Disciples, thus inaugurating the fullness of the Church on Earth. Through the Holy Spirit's working in the Church, Christ's presence is continued on Earth. On the first day of creation, the Spirit was hovering upon the waters, brooding over them to bring forth life as a mother hen over her eggs. And in the very next verse, God says, *Let there be light.* (Gen. 1:3).

Likewise, Christ resurrected while it was yet dark—He is the light that shines in the darkness. And on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descends as fire upon the Disciples, who up to that point were yet in the darkness of the fallen condition. But now, with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they are empowered to go out and bring this light to the entirety of the world, which wallows in darkness.

So too, Christ remains with the Apostles for forty days, then ascends back to His Father, after which the Holy Spirit descends. The Apostles are filled with the glory of God, and as the men of old marveled at the sight of Moses, so the men of Jerusalem marvel at the Apostles on Pentecost (Acts 2:7). The Apostles then go out to preach the Gospel to the world.

Some say that the Mosaic Law dictates what to do and what not to do. In the Beatitudes, Christ spoke on a deeper level, of *how to be and how not to be*—He revealed, to a degree, the inner life of God. And with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that began on the day of Pentecost, men are again able of living that life of God.

### St. Luke the Surgeon, cont'd from p.1

the Crimea. In the 9th century the Greeks built the wonderful Church of Saint John the Forerunner at this site, one of the most important monuments of the whole Crimea. Today, in front of the church there is a bust of Saint Luke.

The saint's father was a pharmacist. But the shop did not do well and he decided to close it. Thereafter he worked as a public employee. The saint's mother was Maria Kudrim, who was well-known for her charitable works. Apart from Saint Luke, the Voyno Yasenetskijs also had another four children, all told three boys and two girls. Since the financial circumstances of the family became more embarrassed, the parents decided to move to Kiev, the cradle of Russian Christianity. This is an extremely beautiful and very green city, which is split by the River Dnieper. In this river, the first Christian Russian prince, Saint Vladimir, baptized his people in 988 and established the Orthodox faith on Russian soil. The Voyno Yasenetskijs lived in a house

in the centre of the town on Kresatik Street.

As a boy, little Valentin did not stand out. Everyone thought him average and said that he could not be expected to make anything out of his



life. He was distinguished, however, for being serious, honorable, high principled and sensitive. His talent for drawing displayed itself from an early age. When he was in secondary school, he also took lessons at the academy of fine arts in Kiev. At the age of 15, he took part in a painting

competition and won first prize.

Two worlds warred in his soul: doubt and faith. What had the greatest influence on his soul was the famous monastery of the Pecherskaya Lavra- the Monastery of the Caves. The monastery stretches over 70 green acres inside the town of Kiev, right above the Dnieper River. It used to house thousands of monks and has produced a host of saints. Apart from the archaeological value and interest the Lavra holds for the visitor, it also has unique spiritual treasures. The older ascetics used to hew their cells underground and live the enclosed life there in unceasing prayer.

At the same stage in his life, he was also influenced by the ideas of the great Russian writer, Tolstoy, with whom he established a personal correspondence. He quickly came to understand the latter's errors in matters of the faith and broke off contact. At this same time, he was also making a careful study of the Scriptures.

When he finished school, he was

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victory over death than to offer up one's life out of faithfulness to Him. From the first century to the present day, countless people have endured death rather than deny their Savior. He said, "Many that are first will be last, and the last first." And who appears lower in the eyes of the world than those who abandon everything—family, reputation, possessions, and even life itself—out of faithfulness to One Who was rejected and condemned?

We surely do not know the names of all those who have made the ultimate witness for Christ to the point of shedding their own blood. Nonetheless, we commemorate them today together with all who have become beautiful living icons illumined with the divine glory like an iron left in a roaring fire. By the power of the Holy Spirit, it is possible for everyone created in God's image and likeness to become a saint, to participate personally in Christ's healing and restoration of the human person. Indeed, that is what it means to become truly human, for He breathed life into us from the dust of the earth in order that we might become perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.

Such perfection is an infinite goal and we should not think in terms of meeting some objective standard, but of sharing ever more fully in the life of Christ as the distinctive persons He created us to be. He calls us all to acknowledge Him before others. If we do so, He will acknowledge us before His Father. But if we deny Him, He will deny us.

We acknowledge our crucified, risen, and ascended Savior when we take up our crosses and follow Him, which means putting faithfulness to Him above all else. Even those we love most in this life, such as our family members, cannot conquer death or heal our souls. If we look to other people for fulfillment in life, we will make them and ourselves miserable. As those created in God's image and likeness, we will never find fulfillment in anyone or anything other than Him.

In a world that encourages us to make money, pleasure, and power the standards of success, we must recognize that obedience to the Savior's call to acknowledge

Him by taking up our crosses will never make us first in its eyes. He certainly took the place of the last when He ascended the Cross as One condemned as an irreligious blasphemer by the leaders of Judaism and a failed traitor in the eyes of the Romans. Across the centuries, martyrs have endured the worst forms of torture and abuse before literally losing their lives out of fidelity to Him. They became, and in some places today continue to become, the very last in the world as we know it in order to wear the crowns of the heavenly kingdom.

Instead of romanticizing the martyrs after hearing the stories of their lives so many times, we must regain the ability to be shocked by their profound witness. These are people who loved their families and children every bit as much as we do. They enjoyed the normal blessings of life and likely had the same hopes and dreams for contentment in future years as we do. But when the only way that they could continue pursuing conventional life goals was by denying the Savior and worshiping a false god of whatever kind, they steadfastly refused. The Lord was with them, enabling them to remain faithful when it was well beyond normal human strength to bear up under the worst forms of torture and abuse, even to the point of death.

Their witness teaches that it really is possible to be faithful to our Lord, even when it is sorely tempting to turn away from Him for whatever reason. They made the ultimate witness to Christ not simply because they had a lot of will power and a high pain tolerance, but because they opened themselves to Him by the

power of the Holy Spirit from the depths of their hearts. That is not a matter of magic or a fit of emotion, but of uniting ourselves to Christ in humble faith and repentance such that His life becomes present in ours. If we are truly in Him, then we will take up our crosses in faithfulness to the One Who ascended the Cross for our salvation.

If we wonder what cross we need to take up in order to acknowledge Him before others, a necessary place to start is with loving our enemies. St. Silouan the Athonite saw the love of enemies as a clear sign of the healing  
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presence of the Holy Spirit in one's life.

He taught that when the soul "grows humble, the Lord gives her His grace, and then she prays for her enemies as for herself, and sheds scalding tears for the whole world." We must learn humility in order to pray for our enemies because of the strong temptation to self-righteous judgment. That means we must abandon our prideful illusions of somehow being justified in condemning others and obsessing about their faults, which is simply a distraction from recognizing the truth about the weakness of our own souls. Christ came not to destroy sinners, but to save them. He said "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" of those who nailed Him to the Cross as He died on it. If we are truly conforming ourselves to Him by the power of the Holy Spirit, His merciful love will become characteristic of us. There is no better indication of whether we are finding the healing of our souls than in how we respond to those we consider our foes.

Many today think that it is a sign of weakness to love and forgive as Christ did because they value their own power, reputation, or interests in this world before running "the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfection of our faith." If we are truly in Him, then we must risk being last in the eyes of the world in order to enter into the joy of His Kingdom. Instead of holding grudges, plotting for revenge, and figuring out how to gain victory over them, we must pray for the Lord's merciful blessing on those who have wronged us. We must ask God to forgive our sins by their prayers, for we know our own spiritual brokenness with much greater clarity than we could possibly know anyone else's. Regular use of the Jesus Prayer is a powerful tool for turning our hearts to God in true humility and away from the self-righteous judgment of others.

As we commemorate all the saints who have borne witness to Christ, let us gain the strength to follow their righteous example by embracing the path of humble forgiveness. Let us acknowledge Him by how we treat those who have wronged us, for nothing else so clearly reveals the true state of our souls.  
Amen.

unsure which career to pursue. Initially he enrolled in the School of Law, but stopped after a year. He then left to go to Moscow to study at the School of Fine Arts under the famous Professor Knir. But he quickly returned to Kiev. He had now become intensely interested in service to his neighbors, his fellow human beings. At this difficult time, he discussed his options with an educator, who urged him to study medicine. In this way he would be able to contribute a great deal to villagers, whose medical care was very substandard.

In 1898, he began his studies at the School of Medicine in Kiev, which had an excellent reputation for the quality of the courses it offered. From the very first years, he became particularly interested in anatomy. He took a first in his studies, specializing in surgery. He took up work at once, mainly on ophthalmic cases. In those days, a very common problem was trachoma, a dreadful eye disease which, for many people, resulted in blindness. The young doctor, as he then was, introduced a difficult method and gave thousands of people their sight.

Before he managed to get started working in the provinces, the Russo-Japanese war broke out and Valentin volunteered to serve with the Red Cross contingent. Together with other doctors he set out by train for the Far East. The journey lasted a month. They took up residence in the town of Chita and, despite his youth, Valentin undertook the running of

the surgery department of the military hospital. He operated on wounded soldiers and performed operations, from the simplest to the most difficult, with consummate ease.

In Chita he became acquainted with Anna Vasilievna, a volunteer nurse who was conspicuous for her high moral standards. They married and four children were born to the marriage. From 1905 to 1910 he worked in a variety of regional hospitals. The demands were enormous. He had to be surgeon, gynecologist, pathologist, pediatrician, health-care worker and dentist.

At that time, he came face to face with the problem of general anesthesia. Its implementation had already begun, but, because there were no specialist anesthetists nor, indeed, appropriate facilities, general anesthesia was actually more dangerous than the operation itself.

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