

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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2nd Sunday after Pentecost-All Saints of North America

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It is much to easier to think, feel, and talk than to actually do something. Jesus Christ said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." (Matt. 7:21) He also taught, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (Jn. 14:15)

Too many people who call themselves Christians do so without reference to how they act in tangible, prac-

tical ways. The harsh truth is that, unless we actually obey the Savior in daily life, we have no part in Him. He did not come to make us feel better about ourselves or to give anyone power over anyone else, but to make us perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect in fulfillment of His gracious purposes for the entire world. As the Lord told His disciples, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5: 20)

If we want to share in His life, then we must become like the apostles who first responded faithfully to Christ's command, "Follow Me." The light yoke of the Apostles Fast provides us an opportunity to humble ourselves before the Savior in order to gain the spiritual strength to turn away from
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+ 2nd Sunday after Pentecost- +
+ All Saints of North America +

Epistle: Romans 2: 10-16

Gospel: Matthew 4:18-23

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.*

St. Luke of Simferopole-Surgeon and Confessor (part 2)

He often went up to Moscow to work on his thesis. In 1910, he moved to the town of Pereslavl-Zalessky. He found himself in a beautifully picturesque place, but his working conditions left a lot to be desired. The hospital had 50 beds, but its facilities were primitive. There was no electricity nor X-ray equipment. Water had to be brought every morning, in a barrel, by a water-seller.

He was taken to the hospital every morning in a carriage and he utilized

even this time. En route, he read teach-yourself foreign language books and managed to learn seven. He spent hours in the operating theatre, and would lock himself up in the evenings in his office, continuing his scientific studies by the weak light of a gas lamp.

In Pereslavl-Zalessky he performed 850 operations a year and was alone. He was among the pioneering surgeons in Russia and ventured to undertake difficult operations on the kidneys, the stomach, the bile duct and

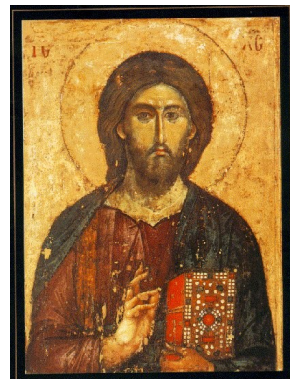
even the heart or brain, with great success. Towards the end of his stay, he considered becoming involved in surgery on pus producing infections, concerning which little had been taught at university. And then something strange happened. He himself explained that he had put together a plan for a book, had written the prologue and then quite suddenly the peculiar thought came to him: "When this book is finished, it'll be signed by a bishop".

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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, 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

What is so special about the Saints?

It's worth noting that the saints didn't derive their glory from scientific achievements, contributions to society or to a colorless and bland morality but to their victorious struggle, in Christ, to face up to evil. Needless to say, this was a battle which as a rule ended with their death as martyrs. In modern culture- and not only- we hide death as though it were dishonorable and dirty. The psalmist tells us, however, that 'the death of his saints is honor-

able before the Lord'. And it's honorable because it's witness to the truth (Jn. 18, 37), it's testimony to the truth of Christ. It's witness not to theories, but to facts; and, in particular it's testimony to the foundation of our faith: Christ's resurrection.

It has been pointed out that Christ didn't look for propagandists; he wanted witnesses. The faith can't degenerate into popular slogans. The faith is confessed by witness, and witness is the opposite of propaganda. Witness is a centripetal force, because it radiates. Bergson had understood this when he wrote about the saints: 'We don't need the saints to do anything else but exist. Their very existence is a calling'.

All of this recalls an acrobat trying to walk on a tight-rope. When a young acrobat was asked how he managed to walk on a rope for so long, he said he trained by gazing at his experienced acrobat father at the other end of the rope. This is exactly what we're invited to do our eyes fixed on Christ, the originator and perfecter of our faith.

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

1917 was a difficult year, not only for him but for Russia as a whole. The country was in turmoil. The Tsarist establishment crumbled. It was followed by a succession of interim governments and political instability. It was also in this year that Valentin's wife contracted tuberculosis. They had to leave and move to Tashkent. They lived in a spacious house and Valentin was immediately appointed head of the surgical unit of the state hospital, which he set about organizing diligently.

The political situation worsened, however. Immediately after the October Revolution, the Civil War broke out, which lasted four years and caused havoc throughout the vast country. Millions died. Numbers in the region of 20 million have been mentioned and, of course, there were also very many more wounded. There were also, however, other unfortunate victims, the children, who lost their parents and were forced to survive by scavenging. Valentin was at the hospital day and night, risking his life.

The few hours he was at home, he had to look after his sick wife, see his children, cook, clean up, do the washing.

In 1918, he was the leading figure behind the establishment of the Uni-



versity of Tashkent and was elected Professor of Topographic Anatomy and Surgery. The political situation was out of control; the civil war raged everywhere. The Tsar and his family were executed without a trial.

People were in despair. You could be arrested for the slightest thing. All

that was needed was the merest slander. And something of the sort occurred with Valentin. He scolded a problematic, hard-drinking worker at the hospital and the man falsely accused him to the authorities. One morning as he was going into the operating room, he was arrested and carted off to Tashkent's railway station. They had already arrested 2,000 soldiers who had mutinied. They condemned them to death and then executed them on the spot.

Valentin took a place in the queue and awaited his own execution. The hours stretched endlessly. Late in the evening, 16 hours, some party official recognized him. He heard about the pack of lies, intervened and they let Valentin go. And this is where we see his magnanimity and his self-denial: instead of going home, he went to the hospital. He went into the operating room at midnight as if nothing had happened and began to work.

But the arrest worsened the already poor state of health of his wife, Anna,
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slavery to our self-centered desires as we embrace the great freedom that is ours in Christ Jesus. In Him, we find liberation from the nets that hold us back from making every dimension of our lives a point of entry into the joy of the heavenly kingdom.

When the disciples first heard Christ say "Follow Me," they were doing their daily work as fishermen. He called them to the fulfillment of their work in catching people for the Kingdom, in drawing them into the blessing of God's salvation. They had to leave their homes and occupations in order to follow Christ around in His ministry and learn from His teaching and example as best they could. It was not until after His resurrection that they understood who He was and were empowered by the Holy Spirit for their unique work.

Despite their imperfect understanding, they still had to obey Him, for otherwise they would not have become His disciples. Their obedience provided the context within which they would find the healing of their souls and become evangelists, martyrs, and pillars of the Church. We may wonder, however, what their example has to do with us. They lived long ago in very different circumstances than our own.

As members of the Body of Christ, however, we serve the same Lord as they did. His Kingdom is present to us in the life of the Church, especially in the Divine Liturgy as we enter into the heavenly banquet. He has sent the Holy Spirit upon us as members of His own Body. We have an even greater responsibility to follow Christ than did the disciples when they were first called, for we already share in His life.

We often forget, however, that that is the case, and instead make the calling to obey the Savior an afterthought in our lives. Instead of recognizing that He calls us to the mission of serving His Kingdom, we easily fall back on thoughts, words, and feelings that do not require us to take up our crosses and follow Him. By reorienting our lives toward Christ, we answer the call to "Follow Me" our lives by devoting a few minutes to prayer each day, reminding us that our strength comes from God, not from our own will being done.

We may think that the disciples had it easy when Christ walked up to them and told them straightforwardly what to do. They had to leave their homes and livelihoods, but at least the Lord gave them clear instructions. Our challenge is different because we encounter Him in the life of His Body, the Church, and in our neighbors, as well as in our own hearts and souls. Our clouded spiritual vision makes it easy for us to misinterpret His calling to obey Him. We often are so captive to our own self-centered desires that we hear only what we want to hear.

We would usually rather make God in our own image than to take up the cross of truly becoming more like Him in holiness. It is so tempting to distract ourselves from listening in the silence of prayer from the heart. It is so easy to convince ourselves that just about anything else should take precedence over keeping a rule of prayer, reading the Scriptures, and preparing conscientiously for both Confession and Communion. If we have lost our sense of urgency in obeying Christ's calling in our lives, that is probably because we have gotten in the habit of not really paying attention to Him.

Saint Paul wrote of the Gentiles "that what the Law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus." Everyone created in the divine image and likeness has at least some knowledge of God. The pressing question is not how much of God's truth we have

received, but how we have responded to what has been revealed to us. As St. Paul said, "it is not the hearers of the Law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the Law who will be justified." The application to us as Orthodox Christians is quite serious, for "to whom much is given, much will be required." (Lk 12:48)

We have received the fullness of God's truth through the Church; indeed, we have received the Holy Spirit personally and been nourished with the Savior's Body and Blood and in the Eucharist. Consequently, we must

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live as those who already participate in the life of God by grace from the depths of our souls. We will always have room for growth in obedience, but we must also take the steps we are presently capable of in serving Christ faithfully in whatever circumstances we face.

The Lord said, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." Hardly anyone is interested merely in what we say or how we feel about God. The only way to shine like a city on a hill or a lamp on a stand in a world darkened by sin is to live in a way that provides a beacon of hope for the fulfillment of the human person in God. (Matt. 5:14-15) The path to doing so is open to us all through prayer, fasting, generosity to the needy, forgiving and praying for those who have wronged us, and confessing our sins and turning away from them. In order to pursue this path, we must reject the false gods we have been in the habit of serving and remain vigilant and embrace the struggle to keep our priorities in order as we serve every neighbor as a living icon of Christ.

When our Lord's disciples first followed Him, they anticipated a Messiah to liberate their nation from Roman occupation. Peter, Andrew, James, and John had not completed the journey to the Kingdom at that point, but they did leave behind their nets and follow Christ when He called them to do so. They were not perfect in their obedience and neither are we. The Church remains a hospital for the healing of our souls, for every one of us bears the burdens of our personal and collective brokenness. No person or society is free from the corruption that roots in the fear of death. That is why we all need the healing of the Great Physician Who came "to call not the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (Lk 5:32)

The Savior calls and enables us to obey Him not only within the dimensions of our lives that we like to designate as being religious, but in every action we perform. He says to us all, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." As we continue the Apostles Fast, let us humble ourselves in order to receive the healing and strength we need to serve Christ faithfully through the sacramental and ascetical life of His Body, the Church. That is the only way for us to follow in the way of the apostles and of all the saints to a kingdom that is not of this world.

and, a few days later, she died in the arms of her husband. She was only 38 years old and he was 43. They buried her in Tashkent Cemetery. Above her grave he wrote: "Anna Vasilievna, 38 years old. A pure heart who pursued the truth with passion." Valentin was now a widower with 4 small children. At this difficult juncture, God provided the answer: a nurse of very strong faith, whose husband had died, agreed to raise his children and become a second mother to them.

At this point we should, perhaps, speak of him in his medical and surgical capacity. Today he is considered the top surgeon of the 20th century in Russia. As Professor Kasirski writes "...His fame and skill were legendary. He could perform the most difficult operations without any problem". He himself said: "A surgeon should have the eye of an eagle, the heart of a lion and the hand of a woman", meaning a very delicate sense of touch.

Apart from his scientific expertise, he was also distinguished for his deep faith in God. He would call for His help during operations. He had an icon of Christ and the Mother of God hanging on the wall, with an icon-lamp in front. He would light it, pray a while and then with the gauze and iodine make the sign of the Cross on the patient's body, where he would start the operation. Only then would he make the first cut.

Although Valentin was always close to the Church, at that time he participated more actively in

the ecclesiastical life of Tashkent. This was a particular joy to the faithful. One day a clergy/laity trial was held in the Cathedral, the aim of which was to pass judgment on and remove from office the local Archbishop. Doctor Valentin, as he still was, was called to the trial and he boldly defended the Archbishop. He was cleared of the charges and much moved by the position taken by the doctor.

When the court was dismissed, the archbishop waited for the doctor at the door and thanked him for his defense as they walked three times round the church. Suddenly the archbishop stopped, looked the doctor in the eye and said to him: "Doctor, you should become a priest". Without a second thought, Valentin answered: "Your Eminence, if it's the will of God that I should become a priest, I'll do so."

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