

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!

Volume 12 Issue 574

5th Sunday after Pentecost-Jesus Heals the Gergesene Demoniac

July 9, 2023



The many challenges that we face today should open our eyes to uncomfortable truths about what it means to be a human person in the world as we know it. The pandemic shows that we remain subject to death and disease in ways that no one can fully control. Our social and economic crises reveal that no nation or culture embodies the fulfillment of the collective life of humankind.

Such struggles display not only how weak we are before large matters beyond our control, but also our captivity to our own passions. Self-centeredness, fear, resentment, and even hatred easily fill our hearts as ways of coping with problems that challenge our proud illusions. Instead of simply accepting what our disordered desires reveal about us and embracing the truth for our humility, we typically prefer the distraction of blaming others or at least of thinking of something else that turns our attention away from reality.

If we think we have remarkable problems today, consider for a moment the plight of the demon-possessed men in our gospel reading. The Savior did not require them to become Jews, obey a law, or do anything else. He simply set them free
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+ 5th Sunday after Pentecost +
++Martyr Bishop St Pancratius++

Epistle: Romans 10: 1-10

Gospel: Matthew 8:28-9:1

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 5)

Now he had to travel by sled on the frozen River Yenesei, a difficult and dangerous journey. In total he covered more than 2,000 kilometers. He reached Krasnoyarsk and embarked on a train to Tashkent.

He again took up his Episcopal duties. They would not give him a position at the university, so he received patients at his home. A lot of young people gathered around him and he helped them in a paternal manner, while they assisted him in his work.

They went around looking for people who were poor and sick and told him about them. People loved him very much.

It was not long before new problems presented themselves. A certain mentally unstable professor committed suicide. The authorities called it murder and Bishop Luke was accused of being complicit. For a whole year they spread lies about him in the press. Plays were even written about the bishop/murderer.

Finally, in 1930, they

arrested him. Back to the prison in Tashkent, back to the harsh cross-examinations, the threats, the blackmail. In vain everyone defended his innocence. He remained in Tashkent Prison for a whole year and was then sentenced to exile in Northern Russia. They took him to the railway station and their behaviour towards him was inhumane.

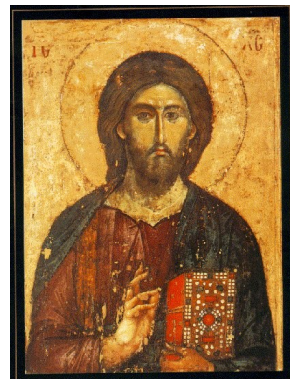
A woman who was present later related: "Lots of people had gathered... We saw him from a

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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, 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

From St. John Kronstadt

Those who are trying to lead a spiritual life have to carry on a most skillful and difficult warfare, through their thoughts, every moment of their life--that is, a spiritual warfare; it is necessary that our whole soul should be every moment a clear eye, able to watch and notice the thoughts entering our heart from the evil one and repel them; the hearts of such should be always burning with faith, humility and love; otherwise the subtlety of

the Devil finds an easy access to them, followed by a diminution of faith, or entire unbelief, and then by every possible evil.

Do not allow your heart to be cold, especially during prayer, and avoid indifference. Often, prayer is on the lips, but in the heart cunning unbelief, so that by the lips the man seems near to God, while in his heart he is far from Him. And, during our prayers, the evil one makes use of every means to chill our hearts and fill them with deceit in a most imperceptible manner to us. Pray and fortify yourself, fortify your heart.

All the blessings of the soul, that is, all that constitutes the true life, the peace and the joy of the soul, come from God! This I have proved by experience. My heart tells me so. O Holy Spirit, treasury of blessings! Come and abide in us. Save us. Having Christ in your heart, fear that you may lose Him, and with Him the peace of your heart; it is hard to begin again; Cling to Christ with all your might, gain Him, and do not lose boldness in approaching Him.

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

They were dragging him by his beard, as if he was some kind of miscreant. They spat in his face. It came to me in a flash that that was exactly the same way that Jesus Christ Himself was mocked”.

He himself wrote of the train journey: “There were so many lice that every morning and evening I had to take my clothes off and there were hundreds of them in there, every day. In among them there were some enormous black ones, the like of which I had never seen before”.

A good many days later they arrived at the town of Kotla. This had also been built in the vast forests by prisoners, many of whom had died martyrs' deaths. Bishop Luke was initially taken to the prison in Kotla and then three kilometers further on to Makarikhha. They lived in wretched, roughly-built shacks. They were forced to sleep in the open where they had to deal with the cold and damp. Many committed suicide.

At that time an epidemic of typhus and other diseases broke out in Ma-

karikhha. The inmates died without being given any attention. Every day, they dug a large pit and would bury about 70 bodies. Today, lots of memorials have been erected in Makarikhha to recall the tragedy of those people.



ple.

Bishop Luke watched this drama, the hecatombs of the dead, unable to offer anything. Soon afterwards he was taken to the hospital in Kotla, and allowed to operate, because the needs were so pressing. It was not

long before he was moved again, this time by river boat down the Dvina to Archangelsk. This is one of the northernmost cities in Russia and, because they had sent thousands of prisoners there, Bishop Luke was pressed to find a house. The exiles shivered on the streets because there were not enough houses to go round. He finally found a room in a large house where other exiles were living. The authorities allowed him to operate at the hospital but he had to face the jealousy of his colleagues. He attended church in the cemetery chapel, but here, too, he was viewed with suspicion. (to be continued next issue).

We merely admire the Holy Athletes of the Church, the saints, martyrs, confessors, and pious men and women, without understanding how greatly they labored, because we haven't even tried to understand their efforts so that we can love them and, out of self-respect, strive to imitate them.

from slavery to evil and restored them to a recognizably human existence. The Fathers of the Church see their demon-possession as symbolic of the state of our ancestors, the Gentiles who worshiped idols and false gods. As St. Paul wrote to the Romans: "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." At the very heart of our faith is not a requirement to belong to any nation, class, or race, but instead the outrageous mercy of the Lord Who restores us to the dignity of those created in the divine image and likeness. The good news of the Gospel is that the Son of God became a human being for the salvation of all people, including those as lowly and miserable as demon-possessed Gentiles living in a tomb and scaring everyone away.

Just as Christ took the initiative to deliver them, He has done the same with everyone. He has become one of us, taking upon Himself the consequences of all human corruption and sin to the point of death, burial, and descent into Hades so that He could conquer them all in His glorious third-day resurrection. He has ascended into heaven with full, complete glorified humanity and sent the Holy Spirit to empower His Body, the Church, of which we are living members. He abides within our hearts by the Holy Spirit, casting out our demons, forgiving our sins, and enabling us to share in His eternal life even now.

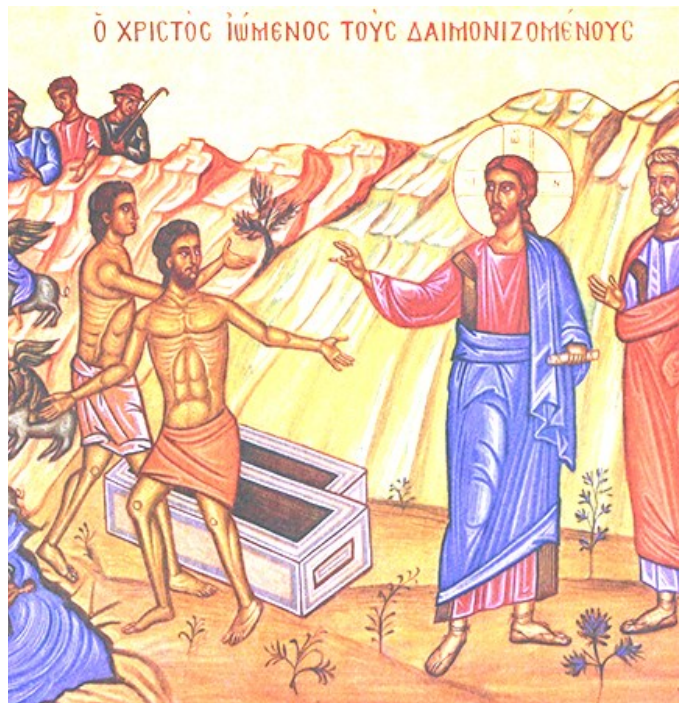
As St. Paul teaches, we must confess the Lord Jesus Christ with our mouths and believe in our hearts that God has raised him from the dead; if we do so, we will be saved. "For with the heart one believes unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." No, St. Paul is not giving us magic words which we say once in order to guarantee a spot in heaven. He is not giving us a new religious legalism that somehow earns salvation. Instead, He reminds us that we must commend our entire life to Christ our God. If we trust in Him, we will offer our words, deeds, and thoughts to embody the healing that He has brought to the world. He calls and enables us to become as transformed by the divine mercy as were the demon-possessed men who became powerful living examples of His salvation.

When those men were set free from the complete control of demons, that was only the beginning of their lives

in Christ. Even though their deliverance was quite dramatic, it was only a beginning and they surely had to press on from there to resist temptation, to grow in holiness, and to learn to love and serve the Savior in their neighbors. The very same thing is true of us. The healing of our souls is a process, an ongoing journey of sharing more fully in the new life that our Savior has brought to the world. Challenges large and small require us to confess Christ faithfully each day of our lives in what we say, think, and do.

To believe in and confess Christ is never something that we should think we have accomplished or fulfilled. To be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect is an eternal goal. To become a partaker of the divine nature is truly an infinite undertaking. Believing in and

confessing Christ requires that we share in His life without reservation such that His restoration of the human person in the divine likeness shines brilliantly in us. Only then we will be able to stay with St. Paul, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me." That change will not happen in an instant, but will be as profoundly transformative as what happened to the demon-possessed men who regained their true selves by encountering the Savior. That is what will happen with us as we turn away from slavery to our passions. That is what will occur when we rise up from the tombs of our sins and enjoy the freedom of liberation from



bondage to the fear of death.

Instead of being overwhelmed by threats to our prideful illusions, we must use those challenges to help us identify and reject the lies that have taken root in our hearts and minds. We may not live in a cemetery and scare everyone away, but we certainly fail to serve Christ in our neighbors because of our spiritual corruption. We would often rather fear, blame, and even hate others than take a clear look at the state of our own souls. We would often rather accept the most ridiculous assumptions about ourselves, our neighbors, and our world than simply admit we are the chief of sinners and entrust ourselves to the mercy of the Lord.

In order truly to have faith in Christ, we must become humble. Humble people accept the truth without making excuses or trying to change the subject in order to make themselves look better. We simply cannot believe in and confess the Savior without growing in humility, for
(continued p. 4, column 1)

His salvation is not something we can ever earn or control. To the extent that we have faith in Him, we will know that we need healing and liberation that we could never give ourselves. If obedience to a religious law or establishment of a righteous earthly kingdom could have sufficed, there would have been no need for the God-Man to fulfill our humanity through His incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension.

Those who distort the way of Christ into self-righteous legalism or a quest for earthly power over their enemies lack the humility to see and acknowledge the true state of their own souls. They do not have the spiritual clarity to recognize themselves in a situation like that of the demon-possessed Gentile men who needed much more than a bit of conventional religiosity or worldly respectability. They needed the restoration of their personhood in God, and the same is true of each of us. Contrary to popular opinion, being true to ourselves does not mean embracing identities that reflect our corrupt desires any more than the demon-possessed men were simply being true to themselves by not living a recognizably human existence.

The kind of true humility that opens us to faith in the Savior requires that we sacrifice the prideful illusions that tempt us not to conform our character to Christ's. He is the God-Man Who embodies the restoration of the human person in the image and likeness of God. Anything that would distract us from sharing more fully in His life and obeying His commandments does not reflect the truth about who He calls and enables us to become.

The only true response to the challenges we face today is to believe in and confess Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world. If we cultivate the humility necessary to entrust ourselves to Him, then we will gain the spiritual strength not to fall into self-centeredness, fear, resentment, hatred, or other sinful states of soul that are such appealing distractions to facing the truth about ourselves. Because our Lord's Kingdom is not of this world, we must offer even our deepest pains and most pathetic weaknesses to Him for healing that we simply cannot give ourselves. If we do so, we will find liberation from the slavery to our passions that serves only to alienate us from God, our neighbors, and even ourselves.

"I am not worthy." Is there any more rare saying in our current age? Modern people live as if they are owed everything in life and if something of their choosing is denied to them, it is considered a great travesty, insult and injustice. But we don't want to follow the example of the society. We want to be in rhythm and harmony with those who are well pleasing to God.

How did the centurion receive a great response from the Lord Jesus Christ, and in turn, how can we receive a warm and joyous response from the Lord in our own lives? He started from a point of humility and an overwhelming feeling of unworthiness. He knew that Jesus

was special, that some believed Him to be a great prophet and likely that some even thought He was the Messiah, the anointed, holy one of Israel.

In his humility, he maintained faith in the ability of Jesus Christ. He believed that Jesus was powerful enough to heal his servant with a mere word. And this man was right! Christ is the word of God and He created the whole of creation by the power of His word! With just a word, the Lord can transform everything. With one word, the Lord made the demons to depart from the possessed man. And with one word the Lord of power commanded His friend Lazarus to rise from the tomb after 4 days. The Lord can do this and will do this for each of us. He will speak a word on our behalf, into our lives, into our hearts and souls. He will do powerful work in the midst of one who is humble and faithful.



In the life of the Church, we can see it in the prayers of preparation for Holy Communion. "O Lord my God, I know that I am not worthy nor sufficient that thou shouldest enter under my roof into the habitation of my soul." Here we see the exact words of the Roman centurion in order to "warm" the heart of the Lord towards the one who comes to partake of His holy body and precious blood. This is one of the ways that we prepare our hearts to receive Christ and all of His blessings.

St. John of Kronstadt tells us what it looks like when we are humble. He says, "To be humble means to consider ourselves deserving, for our sins, of every humiliation, injury, persecution, and even blows; and to be meek means to patiently endure injustice and to pray for our enemies." And my brothers and sisters, this is the way to enter Christ's heart and the way for Christ to enter into our hearts fully. AMEN.