

# 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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6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost-Jesus heal the Paralytic

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I affirm in your presence this day that we're witnesses of a beautiful miracle this morning: through the living word of the Gospel, we see a paralyzed man who cannot walk on his own, healed of his paralysis by God, He who had made his legs in the first place and given this man his first heart-beat in his mother's womb. For, as the Psalmist David says, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made... You

formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb" (Ps. 138). Christ God, as the Logos (Word) of God, through whom all things were made, knew this man and loved this man with a fatherly love even before he was presented to him.

Yes, the paralytic was brought to His Creator, our Creator, and He received healing from the Lord. He was given a new lease on life, a new beginning. Every miracle, both those past and present, is a testimony of the truth of God, the truth that is God, in that it points us directly to the Kingdom of Heaven, to the restoration of the human race. Every miracle reminds us of God's defeat of sin and death on the cross, His triumphant resurrection from the dead, harrowing of Hades, glorious ascension, and His victorious and final Second Coming restore all  
*(continued p.3)*

+ 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost +  
Fathers of the First Six Councils

Epistle: Romans 12: 6-14

Gospel: Matthew 9:1-8

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.*

## ***Repentance and Prayer According to St. Paisios***

In general terms, Saint Paisios set the greatest store in the spiritual struggle on repentance and unceasing prayer. It was through repentance that he received revelations from heaven. He used to say that the life of a monk was one of repentance and prayer.

The monks are the Church's wireless operators and the aim of their life is to get through to God in order to help people, once they've first cleansed themselves of the passions, which are like atmospheric inter-

fering with good communications with the Lord.

This is why he used to say that we should ask God only for repentance, so that we'd be washed, because repentance is divine soap in prayer. A sigh of repentance in prayer is worth more than two buckets of tears.

The beginning of the work of prayer is examination of our self and knowledge of our sins. Because, if we lack an awareness of our sins, how will we ask God for divine mercy? Prayer is helped by our sense of

sinfulness. But if we're going to repent, we have to know ourselves and our weaknesses, we need to consider what God's given us and how we've responded to His gifts.

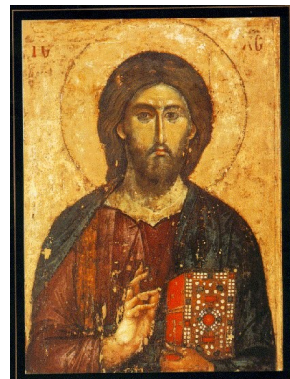
How has God behaved towards me and how have I behaved towards His love? The thoughts of Christian constantly revolve around this question. They see that everything's a gift from God and that only their sins are their own. This is the reason why we should be truly contrite.

*(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, 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

When you are threatened with temptation to sin, then represent to yourself vividly that sin is exceedingly displeasing to God, Who hates iniquity. "Thou hatest all workers of iniquity."

And in order to understand this better, imagine a father, righteous and severe, who loves his family, and is trying by every means to make his children well-principled and upright, in order to reward them afterwards for their good behavior

by the great riches he has laboriously laid up for them, and, who nevertheless sees, to his grief, that the children, disregarding their father's love, do not love him, do not pay attention to the inheritance so lovingly prepared for them by their father, but live disorderly, and rush impetuously to destruction.

Mark, that "sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death," because it kills the soul, because it makes us the slaves of the Devil--the destroyer of men; and the more we work for sin, the more difficult will be our return, and the more sure will be our ruin. Dread, therefore, every sin with the whole heart.

As the breath is necessary for the body, and as without breathing men cannot live, so likewise the soul cannot truly live without the breath of God's Spirit. As air is necessary for the body, so is the Holy Ghost for the soul. Air has some likeness to the Holy Ghost. As "the wind blows where it lists, and thou hears the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it come, and whither it go: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

### Repentance and Prayer, cont'd from p.1

Before we begin to count the knots on our prayer rope, it's a good idea to count our many sins and God's blessings. An awareness of God's blessings helps us to say the Jesus Prayer from the heart, rather than mechanically. Genuine repentance brings with it humility and it's from there that prayer starts. Before we start to pray, we should say: 'I'm to blame Christ. I'm ungrateful and I've saddened you. Forgive me'.

Prayer requires proper preparation, just as Holy Communion does. It's holy communication, because we're communing with Christ and talking to Him. We should read something succulent from the Sayings of the Desert Fathers or other spiritual books. Study of the holy Gospels also helps a great deal; even if we don't understand the meaning of the words, the soul is sanctified and nourished spiritually.

If Christians don't stick to their prayers, they'll suffer needlessly. They should avoid excessive talking and find contentment in prayer. This

is why they're called 'solitaries', because they live alone, with God. In order to stimulate us to pray harder, he used to say that every moment of our life which passes is irrecoverable. The Jesus Prayer is a weapon against the devil because the name of Jesus is all-powerful. The aim isn't to acquire unceasing prayer but to divest ourselves of the persons we once were.

He used to read the Psalms a great deal in his prayers and said it was a lightning bolt against the devil.

Another aspect of the struggle in prayer is love for our neighbor. Christ is content when you love your neighbor and make them content. This is why the saint stressed the dignity of our neighbor. He used to say that when people act spiritually but neglect everything else, sacrificing themselves and so on, then the spiritual deeds are also useless.

Since he loved Christ and the Mother of God so much, he also loved other people. No matter how tired he was, he sacrificed himself for others; he was completely indifferent to his

own needs, his rest or his health. He said that if someone else was suffering he would willingly die to help them. If we have a problem and we worry about it, that's a sign of lack of faith. But if we worry about our brothers and sisters, that shows the pain of love.

God gives great comfort to us when we feel the pain of other people, otherwise we couldn't bear it. He advised that we pray for

the dead, because the poor people can't do anything to help themselves; so we should intercede on their behalf. He prayed constantly for the glory and unity of the Church and often, during prayer, he received enlightenment on ecclesiastical problems.



those who have joined the new race of Adam in Christ and we will see a new heaven and a new earth in which Christ will be all in all. Miracles are a sign of the “*eschaton*,” the reality of the Kingdom of God after the Second Coming of Christ.

The healing of the paralytic alludes to all of these works and promises of God on our behalf, where those who are being saved will be gathered up to join the ranks of heaven in Christ God’s near presence, where “sighing and sorrow shall flee away” (Isaiah 51:11). A greater miracle is at work here in today’s Gospel: We read that when Jesus saw the faith of those who had brought the paralytic to him, He instantly healed the man of his paralysis? No! He said to the paralytic, “Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.” This was not what some were expecting; Christ’s words must have come as quite a shock.

These men didn’t pull up in a car, an easy drive from the city on modern roads, and carry their friend the last hundred feet to lay him before Jesus. These men must have carried their friend a great distance. Why? Because they had faith that Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, could heal their friend of his condition. They would not have undertaken such an exhausting enterprise as to carry a grown man so many miles on foot without possessing great faith. And Jesus first says to the man not, “take up your bed and walk,” but “your sins are forgiven you.”

Christ clearly teaches us here the priority of our eternal souls over our decaying bodies. Our souls are eternal. Sin, having entered the world and separated us from Him who is Life itself, means that our bodies wear out “like a garment” (Job 13). It wasn’t meant to be so: in Christ, we’ll be given resurrected bodies at His Second Coming. And so here we see yet another sign of the *eschaton* to come.

Christ addresses the ultimate need of the paralytic. Yes, he needs his legs, but more importantly, he needs to be cleansed, purified, forgiven. More important than the healing of his legs is the healing of his soul, of his becoming an adopted son of the living God, a co-heir with Christ. Everything else pales in comparison.

By forgiving the sins of the man, Christ clearly declares Himself to be God for, as the scribes rightly understood, “who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mk.

2:7; Lk. 5:21) Exactly! Their sinful hearts could not comprehend that the God who lovingly spoke creation into being through His Word (His Logos), would Himself enter into human nature to restore that nature, to restore a path to the Kingdom for His beloved sons and daughters, the pinnacle of His creation, with whom He so dearly desires communion. The Scribes instantly charge blasphemy. Then Christ, to deepen the faith of all those assembled and silence the actual blasphemers, does two things that reveal Himself to be God: first, He tells them what they are thinking, saying, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, Arise and walk?’ But that you may know that the Son of Man has power

on earth to forgive sins...” and then and only then, does Christ say to the man, “Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” The man arose and departed to his house. Both of these miracles, the revelation of the inner thoughts of others and the healing of the paralysis prove that Christ is God.

What a joy! Can you feel it? Can you see it on the faces of this man and his friends? Their load has been taken from them. They walk home together, rejoicing, glorifying God. But the greatest joy is that this son of Adam has been forgiven, reconciled to God. Before our baptism and the possibility of the renewal of that baptism through confession, we too are paralyzed by sin. Even in the life of an Orthodox Christian who has become part of the new creation, a beloved child of the *eschaton*, this world and all its

confusion and hedonism may take hold of the unwary soul and paralyze it with addictions and habitual sins.

Those beset by any passions, repeated sins that paralyze our souls from progressing in our deification, our journey further up and further in the Kingdom of God and communion with the only Lover of mankind, hear the words of our Lord, “Arise, take up your bed, and go unto your house.” With the Lord, there is forgiveness, there is new life, there is renewal. Fittingly, the title given to this story in the Orthodox Scriptures is “the Paralytic Restored.” Christ God will restore us too if we come before His presence with faith, with the hope of restoration, of growth, of renewal in Him who is Life itself, the Great Physician of our souls. Call on Him in time of need, entrust yourself to His grace and mercy. His grace is sufficient and His strength is perfected in weakness.



We sometimes start performing a task and are faced with a whole host of impediments. How are we to know whether these obstacles are from God? First, let's see if perhaps we're at fault. If we're not, then the obstacle's from God, for our good. This is why we shouldn't be concerned if the job's not done or is late in coming to fruition.

One time, I was hurrying down to Konitsa from the Monastery of Stomio on an urgent errand. At a difficult point in the road- it was called Golgotha- I met a friend of the monastery, old Anastasis, with three heavily-laden donkeys\*. Because of the steep incline, their saddles had slipped and one of the donkeys was close to the overhang and in danger of falling over the edge.

'You're a Godsend, Father', old Anastasis said. I helped him unload and reload them, we got them back on the road and I left. I went on some way further and came to a place where there'd been a landslide over a three hundred meter stretch and it had taken out the road. Trees and rocks had plummeted into the river. If I hadn't delayed, I'd have been there just at the time of the landslide. 'Old Anastasis', I said to myself, 'you saved me. You're a Godsend'.

Christ sees each of us from on high, how we act, and he knows when to act for our good. He knows how and where to lead us, so long as we ask for help, tell him what we want and leave it to him to arrange everything. When I was at the Monastery of Filotheou, I wanted to go out into the wilderness; I thought about going to a deserted island. I'd actually agreed with a boat-owner to come and fetch me, but in the end, he didn't come. It was God's providence, because I was still inexperienced and would probably have done myself a lot of harm on a deserted island. The demons would have made a meal of me. Since I couldn't go there, I turned to Katounakia. I loved the wilderness there and prayed and prepared to go there. I wanted to live the ascetic life with Elder Petros, a very spiritual monk.

But something happened and I had to go to Konitsa [the small town where he'd lived as a child] instead of Katounakia. One evening, after compline, I withdrew to my cell and prayed until late. At about eleven o'clock, I lay down to rest for a while. At half-past one I was

woken up by the simandro of the monastery, calling us to go to church. I made to get up, but it was impossible. An invisible force held me fast. I was fixed firmly to the bed until twelve o'clock noon. I could pray and think, but was completely unable to move.

While I was in this state, I saw, as if it were on television, Katounakia on one side and the Monastery of Stomio in Konitsa on the other. I was looking longingly at Katounakia. Then came a voice- it was our Lady's- saying clearly: 'You're not to go to Katounakia; you're to go to the Monastery of Stomio'. I said: 'My Lady, I asked you for the wilderness and you're sending me out into the world?'. Then I heard the same voice saying to me severely: 'You'll go and meet this person, who'll help you a great deal'. I was immediately set free from the invisible bonds and my heart was filled with divine grace.

Then I went and spoke to my confessor. 'This is God's will', he told me. 'But don't tell anybody about what happened. Just say that, for health reasons'- I was bleeding at that time- 'you have to leave the Mountain and go'. I wanted one thing, but God had his plan. I realized that it was God's plan that I should renovate the monastery and, in this way I'd fulfil a vow I made to our Lady when I was serving in the army during the war. I'd said then: 'Most holy Lady, help me become a monk and I'll work for three

years to rebuild your burnt monastery'. As it turned out, however, the main reason our Lady sent me there was to help eighty families who'd become Protestants to return to Orthodoxy.

God often allows something to happen that's in the best interests of lots of people. He never does only one good thing, but three or four good things at the same time. Nor does he ever permit anything bad to happen unless lots of good things will emerge. He utilizes everything for our benefit, including what's skewed and dangerous. Good and evil are mixed up together; it would be better if they were separate, but individual interests become involved and they get mixed up. But God makes good use even of this confusion. This is why we should believe that God allows only what will turn out well, because he loves us. He may, for example, allow a small temptation in order to protect us from a greater one.

