

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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7th Sunday after Pentecost-Jesus heals Two Blind Men

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The Prophet Isaiah wrote that, when the Messiah comes He will cure our illnesses. "Behold, our God renders judgment, and He will render it; He will come and save us. Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall hear" (Is. 35:4-5).

In today's divine Gospel this prophecy has been fulfilled before us. Two

blind men, as Jesus Christ was passing by, "followed Him, crying out and saying, 'Son of David, have mercy on us'" (Matt.9:27). These men were deprived of the greatest gift from God, their sight, and for many years lived in darkness. They struggled to survive by begging in the streets of their home town and were unable to see even their beloved ones.

Although blind, they were not deaf. They heard about Jesus of Nazareth. They listened to the stories, which their fellow countrymen were saying, about the miracles that this young Rabbi was performing and within their hearts a great hope was building up. They listened to the loud voice, arising from the depths of their hearts, crying and saying to them: 'He is the only One, Who can help you.

He is the One, Who all nations are waiting for. He is the Son of David.

+ 7th Sunday after Pentecost +
Martyrs Trophimus & Theophilus

Epistle: Romans 15: 1-7

Gospel: Matthew 9:27-35

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, *Lorve 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.*

What does the Cross mean for us today? Fr. Robert McClean

The cross of Christ, the Lord's triumphant and life-giving death whereby He destroys death, is so important for us to understand and internalize as Orthodox Christians, that the Church gives special significance and specific Scriptural readings for both the weekend before the Feast and the one that follows. So let us go beyond what is expected and ask ourselves, "what does the power of the cross mean for me personally, living in the world today?"

Sadly, for many in to-

day's secular culture, its meaning, personally and corporately, has been lost, drowned out by the priorities of our work-a-day lives, where the Church takes a backseat to so many other temporal priorities.

The secular world thinks in such terms: all I experience here and now, everything I see and touch, is the extent of my existence and what is knowable, so, "eat, drink, for tomorrow, we die" (1 Cor. 15:32). In part, for this reason, the world urges focus on self, ego,

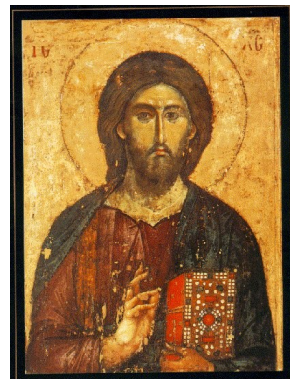
"me first," even as it urges us not to deny ourselves anything; in short, our culture leads us to and encourages *spiritual lethargy, spiritual death.*

For this reason, the keeping of the fasts and Feasts are vital to us and our salvation. A world that doesn't believe in God and His revelation, that denies the bodily Incarnation, and historic events of Christ and His power is a world where there are no real consequences for evil or the darkness and violence of
(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

You gaze upon the icon of the Savior and see that He looks at you from it with brightest eyes; this look is the image of how He actually looks upon you with His eyes, that are brighter than the sun, and sees all your thoughts, hears all your heartfelt distress and sighs. The image is an image, and represents in lines and signs that which cannot be delineated, cannot be given in signs, and can be comprehended by faith alone.

Believe, then, that the Saviour always protects you and sees each one of you--with all your thoughts, sorrows and sighing, in all your circumstances, as upon the palm of the hand. "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; thy walls are continually before Me," says the Lord God. How much consolation and life are contained in these gracious words of the Almighty and Provident God!

Therefore pray before the icon of the Savior as before Himself. The Lover of men is present in it by His grace, and with the eyes depicted in it really looks at you: "The eyes of the Lord are in every place," while with His ears as represented on the icon, He hears you. But remember that His eyes are the eyes of God, and His ears are the ears of the omnipresent God.

In the well-intentioned works of men, esteem the light of Christ--"the true light, which lights every man that cometh into the world" --and read them with love, thanking the Light-giving Christ, Who so richly bestows His light upon those who are zealous for the glory of His name.

What does the Cross mean for us?, cont'd from p.1

the evil one. It's a world where the way to healing from passions is forgotten and we as a people go from bad to worse. It's a world where it becomes increasingly difficult to be a true Christian, one who loves God "with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind," (Matt. 22:37) to which we are all called; it's not the world as God would have it and for that reason, Christ gives us the cross.

The cross is our answer to the fallen world and its hopelessness, to those who deny God and His loving calling on their lives, and to all who falter in their faith. The cross is always a reminder of the ultimate reality and relevance of the Kingdom of God for us, a reminder of Christ's self-emptying (*kenosis* in the Greek)—Christ's willing, voluntary offering of Himself to defeat sin and death on our behalf and make possible a new race of Adam that will in Him likewise conquer sin and death.

In His "dying to self," we who take up *our* cross to prioritize Christ and the Gospel, regain *our* true humani-

ty, *our* God-given purpose and calling in this life.

But here's the truth: we can't follow Christ and become fellow partakers of His victory if we aren't likewise



willing to empty ourselves of all that's not in keeping with Christ and His Gospel. As Christ says, we cannot serve God and mammon (Mt. 6:24). Instead, we're called to be 'in the world, but not of the world.' This calling isn't something we can just decide to forego as 'modern' Chris-

tians. Instead, we challenge ourselves daily to live for Christ, to submit ourselves to His will and reflect the Kingdom of God in all that we are and all that we do. In other words, we deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Christ. In this way, we are deified.

St. Paul says in baptism "we have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). Well, if we've truly "put on Christ", then we *are* Christ's and we are to be about Christ's work even as we are being made more and more into His likeness and further united with Him. Each of us, is, in a sense, through our action or inaction on this account, deciding for God—or—against God. St. Paul reminds us that the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, even as it is the power of God to those who are being saved (I Cor. 1:18). To the world, self-denial, even true love itself, is alien because a secular, humanistic world seeks to understand 'love' *apart* from God, the Author of love.

(continued next issue)

(Homily on Jesus healing 2 Blind Men, (cont'd from p.1)

He is the Messiah of Whom the Prophets have spoken about. He is the Savior of the world, Whom God the Father has sent for the salvation of mankind. He is the true Physician of both soul and body. He is the only One Who can give you the light, because He is the Light of the world'.

With these thoughts they followed Christ and with faith cried out to Him: "Son of David, have mercy on us! Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God have mercy on us! Lord Jesus Christ, You Who came into the world to save Your creation from the darkness of sin, ignorance and death, show Your loving kindness to us sinners, and have mercy on us. You, Who are the only Philanthropic God and created us in Your "image and likeness", show us Your Love and mercy. You created man and gave him reason to admire the works of Your Hands. Grant to us the light of our eyes, in order for us to see the beauty of the universe." The results of their faith was that "their eyes were opened" (Matt. 9:30).

In today's society, how many people walk around blind not because they are incapable of seeing, but because they refuse to see with their own eyes the problems of society today? How many have the gift from God to see His creation, remain blind and refuse to approach and believe in Him, Who created all things? How many refuse to open their eyes before the truths of God's Revelation and accept Jesus Christ, as the only Son of God and their Savior?

How many times do we find people who, although believe in Christ, refuse to hear the real teachings and interpretations of the Church and remain blind and deaf in the darkness of heresy? How many have lost their spiritual sight, because they remain under the shadow and slavery of sin? How many people, who are blessed from God to have earthly riches, remain blind and deaf before the needs of their fellow man and refuse to give with their hearts? How many times have governments around the world become blind and they destroy the fruits of the Earth, in order to keep the stock market high and they do not see the true needs of the poor people of other countries? How many billions of dollars are spent for man to go to the stars, and yet people on Earth are starving to death?

The two blind men of today's Gospel reading, my be-

loved friends, when Christ our God asked them to keep silent, "they spread the news about Him in all that country" (Matt. 9:31). As Orthodox Christians, living in this beloved country of S. Africa, or in any part of the world, we also have to approach Christ. Man can only find the restoration of his spiritual sight, when he approaches Christ, the source of true Light. He is the only One, who can heal our infirmities and our blindness caused by sin. He is the only One, Who can free us from the slavery of sin and death.

The Prophet Isaiah spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit saying, "He bears our sins, and is pained for us; yet we accounted Him to be in trouble, and in suffering, and in affliction. But He was wounded on account of our sins, and was bruised because of our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and by His bruises we were healed" (Isaiah 53:4-5). "Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses" (Matt. 8:17). He

is the One about Whom St. John, the Baptist, testified saying: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). He is the Paschal Lamb, who offers Himself for our deliverance from darkness and death (1 Peter 1:19).

In Jesus Christ, man finds his true health. Man is healed by Jesus through the actions of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Sacraments of the Church the Holy Spirit acts and sanctifies the faithful who believe in Jesus Christ, as their Lord and Savior. Man is restored to his original condition of health only within the Church, which Christ

established. Outside the Church there can be no true restoration of man's health, because outside the Church man is unable to overcome and to be free from sin.

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will come again in all His glory and power to judge the living and the dead. And according to our deeds, He will reveal before the whole universe the secret works of each and every one. Let us open the eyes of our understanding now that we have the time. Let us approach Him, Who can heal all our infirmities and will restore our spiritual health. Let us testify to the world, that only in Jesus Christ man can find the true aims for life. Let us approach the source of true Love. Let us approach our neighbors and see to their needs. We must never forget, that we should love our neighbors as we love ourselves.



Saint Gregory Palamas, speaking in general about the prophets, as also the Fathers of the Church, notes: "God raised up the Prophets and the Fathers unto our guidance and He showed signs and wonders to us through them, so that He could correctly lead us up to faith." The Prophets, as also the Fathers of the church, are essentially God's gift to men, because they lead us to true faith and furthermore through the miracles they do, they experientially certify God's presence among us.

One such gift of God to man was also the Prophet Elijah the Tishbite who was called thus, because he hailed from the city Tishbe and belonged to the tribe of Nephtalim. He lived during the time of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. Jezebel, an idolatrous and simultaneously dynamic woman, was essentially governing the Israeli people in the name of her husband who was weak in terms of his character. This resulted in idolatry being imposed in the whole kingdom of Israel. It is mentioned in the Third Book of Kings: "And Ahabdid evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all the Kings of Israel who were before him for his soul to be annihilated." So the worship of the false God Baal was imposed, whereas simultaneously Ahab constructed the statue of the false goddess Astarte in a sacred idol worshipping forest.

Immorality prevailed everywhere. As Saint Symeon the New Theologian characteristically wrote: "people ended up in such ignorance of God and his divine commandments, that the honor which they ought to have rendered to God they rendered to visible creation and having deified these lewd passions they also worshipped them." So, complete spiritual darkness.

In this condition the Prophet Elijah appeared, who bearing divine zeal ordered a complete drought to occur, which resulted in a plague ensuing in the whole country. "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." A fearful thing, he not only ordered that not a drop of rain fall, but he declared that only with his own commandment will it rain. In the specific case, the Prophet Elijah gives us the dimension of the ontological and not simply of the moral dimension of the saint. The Saint is God by position and action. So, for precisely this reason, and according to the theology of Saint Maximus the Confessor: "as many as

God [does], thus also the person deified by grace without identification in essence".

Precisely through this prism and from this dimension the Prophet Elijah acted, in order to chasten the people of his age, who unfortunately in their vast majority were swayed into idolatry and into immorality. St. John Chrysostom writes: "therefore a harsh famine and a plague more bitter than everything occurred and this the Great Elijah brought as some fearful petitioner calling so that the fellows servants, cursing the Master, would be chastened." He also stressed that in the whole life of the Prophet Elijah, divine providence is evident.

In the beginning he was nourished by crows and afterwards by a widow in Zarephath of Sidon. In this way, the sacred Father says, God shows His love to the person of the Prophet. First irrational nature serves him and afterwards rational nature. He also again says "so for this reason previously through the Crows He nourished only him himself saying. If I prepared irrational nature to offer you hospitality, how much more so will the rational one be convinced for this".

Wondrous also was the end of his earthly life. As is familiar, the Prophet Elijah did not die, but he ascended to the heavens. The narration of his ascent is amazing, as this is described in the Fourth Book of Kings: "And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a

whirlwind into heaven." According to the Fathers of the church the prophet Elijah is a type of Christ. Was Elijah a Prophet and Judge? Christ is also the same. Did Christ defeat death? Elijah also ascended. Was Christ sent to the gentiles, did he fast for 40 days? The Prophet Elijah also did the same.

Furthermore according to Saint Gregory Palamas, he was the model of vigilance and fasting. In one of his homilies he said: "Elijah prepurified by fasting became a seer of god." He adds, "Moses and Elijah appear to the Lord who of all people exercised fasting and prayer showing thus how these accompany and support one another." For all this, the Church honors his memory, "the incarnate angel, the peak of the prophets, the second forerunner of the Coming of Christ, Elijah the glorious, from above having sent grace to Elisha, he chases away illnesses and cleanses lepers. Therefore to those who honor him he springs forth healings".

