

# 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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12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost-Parable of the Rich Young Man

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Today in the Gospels, we hear the story of the young man who comes to Christ to ask Him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Christ responds not with an answer to his question, but with a test of the young man’s faith, saying, ““Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.” In other words, the young man’s encounter with Jesus

Christ becomes a question about recognizing, not only who Christ is, but who we are truly called to be.

Who you believe Jesus is will make all the difference in your life regarding your identity and your ability to find a way out from all the common dead-end patterns of brokenness that result from sin and a life lived without knowing and obediently following the One true God as He’s revealed Himself to be as the Savior of the world.

We often hear people today making Jesus into something that He simply cannot be—friend, teacher, prophet, best human who ever lived. Many choose to reduce Jesus to something less than God because if He’s just another man—however great—then they owe Him no answer, no obedience, no accountability, and can make of Him whatever suites their lifestyle. *(continued p.3)*

+ 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost +

++St. Pimen the Great of Egypt++

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11

Gospel: Matthew 19: 16-26

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.*

## ***The Holy Prophet Sameul, by Theodore Rokas***

The Prophet Samuel, the last Judge of Israel, appeared on the stage of Biblical history towards the end of the period of the Judges, which, because of the lack of a king was a chaotic period of intense political instability and of the introduction of foreign elements of worship into the Israelite religion.

Samuel came from the small town of Ramah, and was dedicated, by his mother, Anna, who gave birth to him after a long period of infertility, to the sanctuary at Shiloh,

the most sacred in the land of Israel. It was here that the Ark of the Covenant was kept, under the care of the priests of Eli, and the boy was brought up in the Mosaic tradition.

One evening, while he was sleeping in the sanctuary at Shiloh, he heard the voice of God calling him to take up the office of prophet. This scene could be interpreted as a theophany with the purpose of calling him to be a prophet and the delivery of a message from God during the course of

a dream at night. Since there was no king, Samuel exercised the roles of both prophet and leader.

Samuel retreated from public life, bidding farewell to the people and ordering them to observe God’s commandments. He did not, of course, cut himself off entirely from them, but criticized the actions of the king, reminding him that the real king of Israel was God and that he, Samuel, was the instrument God had used to anoint him.

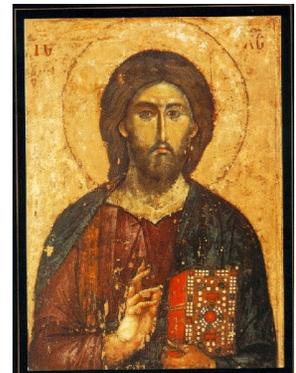
According to scripture *(continued on p.2)*

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, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Mackenzie, Mike, Jessica, Lisa, Jeff, Bonnalee, Stan, David, Carol, Norris, Debbie, Linda, Daniel, Matthew, Michael, Tom, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

**From St. John Kronstadt**

Why should it be wonderful if God Himself, the Creator of all things visible and invisible, transforms, transubstantiates bread and wine into His own most pure Body and His own most pure Blood? In these--in the bread and wine--the Son of God does not become again incarnate, for He was already once incarnate, and this is sufficient unto endless ages; but he is incarnate in the very same flesh in which he was before incarnate, in the same manner

as He multiplied the five loaves and fed with these five loaves several thousands of people.

There are a great many mysteries in nature which my mind cannot grasp, although they have concrete forms, yet they exist, with their mysteries. So also, in this Sacrament of the life-giving Body and Blood, it is a mystery for me, how the bread and wine are made into the Body and Blood of the Lord Himself--but the mystery of the Body and Blood really exists, although it is incomprehensible to me.

My Creator as the Most Wise, the infinitely Almighty God, has innumerable mysteries: I myself am a mystery, as the work of His hands. For my soul there is the Spirit of the Lord, and for my soul and body there are His Body and Blood. In the same way as the soul carries its body, so God carries the whole universe, all the worlds, being Himself more vast than they are; the soul fills the whole body, and the "Spirit of the Lord filleth the world;" the Spirit of the Lord is not limited by the universe.

**The Holy Prophet Samuel, cont'd from p.1**

Samuel's prophecies were "visions", that is a revelation of the word of God through vision. Although the prophet was awake, not dreaming, he did not see images or scenes, but the word of God itself. The vision was a means of transmitting the prophetic word and was inaugurated by Samuel, the Judge and Prophet, who is characterized as the "seer." This term indicates that the capacity which Samuel enjoyed of being able to "see" and to give answers which came from God, someone who saw with the eyes of the spirit.

Apart from being a "seer", Samuel is also referred to as a "mouthpiece", a term which suggests that he spoke in the name of God and as one whose mission was to transmit the word of God. He was also known to be "a man of God" indicating the special relationship Samuel had with his Creator. So the prophetic terms all came together in his person, thus indicating God's intervention to promote Samuel as His prophet and to retain him in His service.

The period of prophecy inaugurated by Samuel is marked by the feature of ecstasy. A prophecy which issues from the lips of a prophet when he is in a state of ecstasy is known as "ecstatic prophesy".



The prophets of ancient Israel went into ecstasy when they were seized by the Spirit of God, (which, according to the approach of the Fathers of the Church, is the same as the Holy Spirit) and they uttered properly constructed prophetic discourse. Prophecy at the time of Samuel appears to have been a mass movement, known

as the "chorus of prophets." The choruses of prophets were religious groups, the purpose of which was to preserve the Mosaic tradition, the basic features being leadership by an outstanding personality, and ecstasy. The foremost among this group of prophets was Samuel himself and his group/school is considered his legacy to the people of God.

When Samuel had completed the mission for which God had appointed him, that is the establishment of the institution of kingship, the anointing of David as king even while Saul still lived, and the introduction and organization of prophecy, the time came for him to bid farewell to this earthly life. He died and was buried in his courtyard at Ramah (Armathaim), having gathered all the people of Israel around him.

As the note to his memory in the Synaxarion mentions, he prophesied for forty years and finished his task 1,035 years before the advent of Christ. He is commemorated on 20 August.

## Homily on the Rich Young Man (cont'd from p.1)

If we dumb Jesus down and make of Him primarily a “friend,” or ‘moral’ figure, as some groups do today, if we make Him according to our likeness, our desires, then we’ll struggle to submit ourselves to Him and the authority He’s entrusted to His Church, which will impede our rescue from our fallen human nature; we’ll prevent ourselves from becoming all that God wills us to be as godly men and women. If we fail to recognize Christ’s holiness, then we’re likely to struggle to take seriously His calling for us to become holy. If we fail to recognize His divinity, then how can we recognize our calling to deification/theosis through communion with Him.

All such revisionism and remaking of Christ into our likeness fails to account for the reality of Christ’s own revelation as the very Logos (Word) of God. C.S. Lewis put it this way when it comes to the question of who Jesus is: “liar, lunatic, or, Lord.” No man could do the miracles that Christ did in plain sight before countless eye-witnesses, unless He were also God. No man has power over the elements of nature, unless He is also the Logos (the Word of God), who is the Creator of those elements. No mere man, who is only man, can raise the dead on his own command. A lunatic would talk and speak of amazing and strange things, but his witness wouldn’t be true; alone, he would work no miracles.

The only true option is to see Christ as He’s revealed to be through the mystery of the Incarnation: the God-man, who enters into human nature as man and redeems it as God, restoring us to life, defeating sin and death, making us fellow victors through new birth in Him, and the continued striving to repent and live out and grow in that new life in head and heart.

This question of Christ’s identity hits us head on in today’s Gospel. A young man comes to Jesus relegating Him, addressing Him, as a “good teacher.” Ironically, while at the same time addressing Jesus as a mere man, however ‘good,’ he asks Jesus a question that only God can ultimately answer: “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?”

This explains Jesus’ pointed response to the young man, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but

One, that is, God.” Jesus is not, as some revisionists and humanists today say, suggesting He is not fully God; instead, Jesus is convicting the young man of his error, as if to say something along these lines: “you can’t have it both ways: If I’m merely ‘the good teacher’ and not Lord and God, then I can’t tell you what your soul lacks. If you can see Me with the eyes of faith, then know that I am the Messiah, God incarnate, who sees into your soul.”

As St. Justin Popovic says of this passage, “No one is sufficiently good to be able to give the greatest good: eternal life. Only the Perfect Good—and that is God, the God-Man—knows and has the Perfect Life, Eternal Life, and can give it.” Having set the record straight, Jesus proceeds to give the man instruction, referring him to what every faithful Jew would know: to keep the commandments. But in his youthful pride, the young man

tells Jesus that he’s done all this “from his youth,” and ventures to ask the Master, “what do I still lack”? Wow, what pride! He still doesn’t realize Whom he’s addressing.

Here Jesus reveals further His true identity to the man as the Messiah, the God-Man who is eternal life: He sees into the man’s soul as to where his true loyalties lie: his wealth. The young man is looking for legitimacy, looking to be told that he’s arrived, looking for Jesus to affirm him on his terms, to be the Jesus

made in the image of the rich, young man. But Jesus reveals this to him; He shows the man who his true god is, his wealth, saying, “Go, sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow Me.” We read that he went away from Jesus dejected; for he loved his wealth more than he loved God.

For this reason, Christ gives us this warning: “I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.” The Lord isn’t saying that having wealth is a sin; there’s no hidden Marxist ideology here. Rather, Jesus is reminding us of this other truth: “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” The New Testament teaching is not that we’re to give a tithe to the Lord, as was the case in the Old Testament, but rather, that everything we have is to be offered up to God,

*(continued on p.4, column 1)*



hence Christ's invitation, "Go, sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven..." Our Lord to help us to understand His truth, to cultivate a thankful heart towards God, to find freedom from the idols of false security.

No, it's not a question as to how much we have, but how tightly we hold on to that imaginary security, that idol, rather than entrusting ourselves, our families, our well-being, our present, our future, to God. For this reason, the Church admonishes us, rich and poor, if we don't want to give away all that we have, then freely tithe from our income, give a "first fruit" to help build up the Kingdom of God and support the work of the Church in changing hearts, in converting and healing souls, in helping others journey into the Kingdom of God.

God doesn't demand of all of us that we sell everything we have and give it to the Church, but He teaches us here that it's incumbent on each one of us to deny ourselves, to give up those false idols, whatever tempts us to put our trust in materialism or could cause us to make of Jesus something else than the God-man, the Logos (Word) of God, Who He's revealed Himself to be.

We don't need a 'watered-down Jesus' or a Jesus conforming to our likeness. As Orthodox, we reject all such historic and modern revisionist efforts to "re-imagine" Jesus Christ. We affirm that Christ is our Lord and God, the only Savior of mankind.

Christ God sees into the heart of the young man in today's Gospel. He sees what he's still lacking, and He sees in our hearts too with a desire to heal and save us. Today, Christ gives us an opportunity to relinquish our vain attempts to follow Christ on our own terms, to make of Him what we wish. Instead, He invites us to build up treasure in heaven as we ground our identity in Him and entrust ourselves to Him who is Eternal Life. So, we submit ourselves today and our vain efforts to control, to the One who alone can save us, the One who alone can see what we're still lacking; the One who offers us a new way, so that we can continue to become the men and women of God He in His love and mercy has called us to be. Amen.

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When a Christian speaks about death, he is not being pessimistic or compromises in a fatalistic way; neither

does he regard it as something natural; He considers death as an enemy he must win over through Christ. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15, 26). "The Word was made flesh" (John 1, 14) "that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2, 14). God was incarnated to abolish death and sin and to beat the devil. Christ took over a mortal flesh subjected to passions in order to win over death with His own flesh. Through His crucifixion and His Resurrection He beat death and gave man the ability to also thrash it, after being united with Him. Thus, after the incarnation of Word God, death has changed its name and its direction. It is no longer called 'death' but 'repose' and becomes the bridge towards eternal life. The righteous one "passes from death to life" (John 5, 24).

St Nicodemus the Hagiorite advises us not to forget that "death shows up like an unexpected thief and we do not know how or when he will visit us. He may appear today, at this hour, at this very moment and you, who woke up feeling fine, will not last until the evening, while you, who have reached the evening, may not wake up... Therefore, my brother, take heed and tell yourself: "If I die suddenly, what will become of the wretched old me? What would be my benefit even if I enjoy all the pleasures of the world?... 'Get thee behind me, Satan and evil thought! I do not wish to obey you and commit a sin."

According to the Fathers and the experience of our Church our reposed brothers- especially those who have departed suddenly- benefit a

great deal from the memorial services and the customary forty- liturgies we offer them, as well as from our prayers, almsgiving and our own righteous way of living which is reflected on their souls as light. In concluding our short presentation in which we have briefly touched upon some aspects of the issue of sudden death from a theologian point of view, we would also like to stress that death, namely the separation of the soul from the body, constitutes a mystery on which only the Ruler of life and death has a say. It is up to the Lord's unanswered judgments whether we will die a sudden death or not; but we must firmly believe and totally assimilate with all our might the fact that through the Resurrected Christ, "death has no more dominion" (Romans 6, 9) and that "the gift of God is eternal life" (Romans 6, 23).

