

# 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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16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost-Christ calls His Disciples

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We have all felt at some point like the disciples did when Jesus Christ found them washing their nets. They had fished all night and caught nothing. Things had not turned out as they had hoped, and they were disappointed and frustrated to the point of giving up. We have all been right there with them many times.

But then the Lord told them to get

back to work and let down their net. They did so and caught so many fish that their net was breaking and their boats began to sink. Just imagine what a surprise that was for them. They were all amazed and St. Peter fell down before Christ and said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" But the Lord said, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men." Then the disciples left behind their boats and nets and followed Christ as His disciples.

That day probably began like any other day. The fishermen were busy with their work and who knows whether they expected anything out of the ordinary to occur. It was just another day with the same old routine and the same responsibilities and worries. But then the Lord blessed them and they saw that their work was not

*(continued p.3)*

+ 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost +

++ St. Thecla the Great Martyr ++

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10

Gospel: Luke 5: 1-11

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 Christ's commandment, *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.*

## Simple Instructions by St. Cosmas of Aetolia

First of all, we need to love God, because for this temporary life He gave us such a large, comfortable earth, a great variety of plants, springs, rivers, seas, fish, animals, as well as air, fire, day, night, sky, stars, sun, and moon. All this was created for us. What did we have to do in return? Nothing. God gave everything to us for free. He made us people, not animals; pious Orthodox Christians.

Even though we sin a thousand times an hour, He, like a father, has

mercy on us, does not kill us, and does not cast us into hell. He, ready to embrace us, is waiting for us to repent, stop committing iniquities, and begin to do good, confess and reform, in order to accept us into His arms, kiss us, open the doors of Paradise to us, so that we may rejoice forever. Shouldn't we love such a God, such a sweet Lord and Master?

*Pride is the first daughter of the devil*

When a person repents, prays, and fasts, the devil becomes scorched and

leaves him. When the first rank of angels fell from glory and turned into demons, the other nine ranks humbled themselves, fell on their faces, and bowing to the Most Holy Trinity, remained in their ranks to rejoice forever.

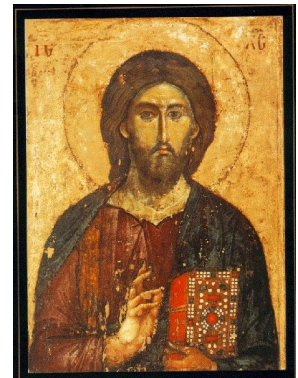
We should also understand what evil pride is: it cast the devil out of the glory of the angels and prepared for him eternal torment. Humility kept the Angels in heaven, and they eternally rejoice, seeing the great glory of

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

**From St. John Kronstadt**

Sometimes in the affliction of your soul you wish to die. It is easy to die, and does not take long; but are you prepared for death? Remember that after death the judgment of your whole life will follow. You are not prepared for death, and if it were to come to you, you would shudder all over. Therefore, do not waste words in vain. Do not say: "It is better for me to die," but say rather, "How can I prepare for death in a Christian manner?"

By means of faith, by means of good works, and by bravely bearing the sorrows that happen to you, so as to be able to meet death fearlessly, peacefully, and without shame, not as a rigorous law of nature, but as a fatherly call of the eternal, heavenly, holy, and blessed Father unto the everlasting Kingdom.

Remember the old man who, being weary of his heavy burden, called for death. When it came he did not wish to die, and preferred to go on carrying his heavy burden. With the mental eyes of my heart, I see how I mentally breathe Christ in my heart, how He enters into it, and suddenly tranquillizes and rejoices it. O, do not leave me to dwell alone, without Thyself, the life-giver, my breath, my joy! It is hard for me to be left without Thee.

The Holy Trinity sees and hears me; this is the most life-giving assurance for my heart, penetrating it with peace and joy. The Mother of God, the Word also sees me, and hears my prayers, and my sighing, and this is another comforting assurance. Thus will I walk, with the feeling of God's omnipresence and omniscience.

**Simple Instructions, cont'd from p.1**

the Holy Trinity. We must also know that the All-Good God does not accept the proud, but loves the humble. And not only God, but we ourselves look at a humble person as an Angel, and a proud person as a devil.

Let us avoid pride, since it is the first daughter of the devil, the path leading to destruction. But let us take care to acquire angelic humility, which opens the way to Paradise for us. Here's a vivid example: when we see a woman, ugly, in torn clothes, crippled, but humble, she seems to us like an angel. When we see a woman in beautiful clothes, with precious jewelry, sparkling like the sun, but proud, shameless, like a "counterfeit coin," she seems to us like the devil and we turn away so as not to see her.

*A body without a soul is like a stone*  
There were no men and women on earth. The All-Good God took earth, clay, and created man, breathed life into him and gave him an immortal, angelic soul. Just as we mix flour and water to obtain bread, so God mixed clay with spirit to form man. We

must reflect on what the soul is and what the body is. The body is earth, clay, and tomorrow it will become food for worms, and the soul will forever rejoice in Paradise if it has done



good, and burn in hell if it has done evil.

My beloved, the body that we see is not the person himself, but only the garment of the soul. The soul is a person, it sees, hears, talks, walks, learns to read and write, and learns sciences and crafts. It gives life to the body, and does not allow it to decompose. As soon as the soul leaves the body,

the body immediately begins to decay because by itself, the body is not a person. The body has eyes but it does not see, it has a mouth but it does not speak, it has hands but it cannot grasp, it has legs but it cannot walk. A body without a soul is like a stone.

*You are the root of your children*  
When you cut a tree, its branches immediately dry up, but if you water its roots, the branches are filled with strength. So you, parents, can be likened to a tree: you are the root of your children, and when you "water" yourself with fasts, prayers, alms and good deeds, God protects your children too. If an apple tree produces sour apples, who is to blame: the apple tree or the apples? The apple tree. So, do the right thing, parents, so that your apples become sweet.

*Forgiveness enlightens and cleans*  
Beloved, forgiveness has two properties: on the one hand, it enlightens, on the other, it cleans. I advise you to forgive your enemies for your own good. And you who offended your  
*(continued p.4, column 2)*

## Homily on the Calling of the Disciples, (cont'd from p.1)

simply about fish, but about bringing people into the eternal life of the Kingdom of God.

Surely, the disciples knew that they could not take credit for such a large haul of fish. And there was no way that they could become fishers of men simply by their own power. We are made of the dust of the earth, enlivened by the breath of God. We are just flesh and blood. We cannot make fish swim into our nets or even solve many of the small problems we encounter every day. Much less can we give anyone eternal life.

The good news of the gospel, however, is that our Lord is able to bless and transform our humble work, the difficult situations we face, and all the struggles of our lives. No matter what we are doing, no matter how well or poorly it seems to be going, no matter how frustrated we may be, Christ is with us, inviting and empowering us to make the same old frustrating and boring routine into a ministry of the Kingdom, even when we cannot imagine how that could possibly be the case.

He called the disciples to a very special ministry in the founding of the Church; they had to leave their old occupations and serve the Lord full-time as evangelists, apostles, and bishops. Some continue to be called to serve in that way. But most of us will remain right where we are, spending each day in an office, a shop, a classroom, our homes, or another similar place.

We may be tempted to think that what we do has no spiritual significance, that we are somehow second or third-class in our service of the Kingdom because we remain in the same old world. But that would be a great error, for all work is holy because it provides opportunities to be good stewards of God's creation and to offer our lives and the fruits of our labor to the Lord for blessing and fulfillment.

Our work, our education, and our daily grind of whatever kind can be very difficult and frustrating, but He calls us to bear our crosses and learn patience through our struggles and problems. In response to disappointments and difficulties, we have opportunities to grow in humility and trust. That is what Zacharias and Elizabeth did as a faithful Jewish couple who had not been blessed with children. Like the disciples, their nets were empty

and they had given up hope for children, an especially painful situation for Jewish people who had a role to play in continuing the family line of Abraham that God had promised to bless in the Old Testament.

Of course, the story of the Hebrew people began with Abraham and Sarah, another elderly couple without children, whose frustration and sorrow was overcome by God's promise to bless them and their descendants. They could take no credit for this blessing and neither could the parents of John the Baptist. And even though Zacharias responded to the message of the Archangel Gabriel with doubt, he and Elizabeth were still blessed beyond their expectations. God always remains faithful to His promises, even though we are often not faithful to ours.



Their life was not easy, however, for Zacharias would be martyred when the wicked King Herod murdered the young boys of Bethlehem. Elizabeth died forty days later, and John grew up in the wilderness as an ascetic prophet who would eventually lose his head for criticizing the immorality of the royal family. But God worked through these painful circumstances to prepare the way for the ministry of Jesus Christ, to extend His promises to Abraham to all who have faith in the Savior.

Do you see what these stories have in common? Barren elderly people have babies. Fisherman who have caught nothing suddenly find that their nets are breaking and their boats sinking be-

cause of their large haul. And worn-out, discouraged people like you and me grow in patience, humility, and selflessness by enduring our daily disappointments, worries, fears, and aches and pains. At times, we may feel that we are accomplishing nothing and be tempted to think that there is no point at all to what we do all day or maybe even to what we have done for years.

But that would be truly a temptation, for the Lord has promised never to abandon us, to be with us always, and we know His power most when we have no doubt about our own weakness. If we are offering our lives to Him as best we can, we can trust in His blessing—even if we cannot figure out how He could possibly be at work in our present situation.

*(continued p4, column 1)*

## Homily on Christ calling His Disciples (cont'd from p.3)

What is failure and frustration in our eyes may present a unique opportunity for us to grow into the people God wants us to be, to prepare us for a role we cannot yet imagine. He used the childlessness of Zacharias and Elizabeth to prepare the way for Christ. He used the frustration of the fisherman to open their hearts to the new life of discipleship. And in ways that we probably do not yet have the eyes to see, He calls us to use our present circumstances as an opportunity to grow in faith, hope, and love and to better serve Him and our neighbors.

Contrary to what our culture teaches, our daily occupations are not simply about us. They are forms of service through which we transform God's good creation for His glory. We do not do that alone, for we journey together toward a new heaven and a new earth. Jesus Christ's ministry of feeding the hungry, healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, and proclaiming good news to the poor shows that His salvation concerns the real-life challenges that people continue to face in the world as we know it. He showed God's love for the hated Gentiles and Samaritans, for people who had fallen into great sin and were shunned by respectable people, for the sick, blind, and lame. In His Body, the Church, all peoples and nations are reconciled and united in the life of the Kingdom.

Whether we see it or not, our routine tasks and challenges provide an opportunity to play our unique role in bringing His salvation to the world. Everything that we do and say may become a sign of God's blessing. We all have the opportunity to forgive those who wrong us; to work toward reconciliation with those from whom we have become estranged; to refuse to treat people poorly because of some trivial human difference; and not to let greed, pride, or any passion get in the way of treating others as we ourselves want to be treated.

Of course, our work must support us financially, but there is a difference between meeting our legitimate needs and selfishly worshipping comfort, convenience, and commercialism or obsessively making any form of worldly success our false god. Ultimately, our work is not about us, but about playing our small part in fulfilling God's gracious purposes for His creation. And

when our disappointments in it reveal our own brokenness, we are in the position to call out to the Lord in true humility.

Like Abraham and Sarah, Zacharias and Elizabeth, and John the Baptist, our calling is to use the challenges, blessings, and painful struggles of our daily lives to grow in holiness as we play our role in making this world an icon of God's salvation. That is how we may all become fishers of men. So even if we feel like we have fished all night and caught nothing, we must let down our nets again in obedience to Christ's command. He alone brings life even from the tomb and turns apparent failure into glorious victory. He alone

works even through our more difficult challenges to bless us. So we must not fall into despair or fear, but instead trust that God is with us and at work in our lives, especially when we obey His command to put down our nets just one more time.

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*(Simple Instructions, from p.3)* brothers, when you hear that I told them to forgive you, do not rejoice, but cry and howl! This forgiveness will burn you if you do not give back what you took from your brothers, and if you do not cry with tears for the forgiveness of those you have offended. You will not be forgiven, even if all confessors, patriarchs, bishops, priests, and laity forgive you. Who has the ability to grant you forgiveness? Only from the one offended by you. You must repay the one you offend-

ed fourfold, and then you will receive forgiveness - this is what it says in the Holy Gospel.

*Properties of love;* Love has two properties: to give us strength to do good and to kill evil. Imagine: a mother takes bread to eat, but at this time her child begins to cry. Forgetting about food, she rushes to console her child. What motivates a mother? Love for a child. Or, say, a child cries when his mother is sick. And then she immediately forgets about her illness and hurries to her child. What motivates her? Love. If I love you, then my love fetters my hands, and I can neither kill you, nor rob you, nor betray you, nor take revenge, nor do you any other harm. Therefore, if we want to be saved, let us not look here on earth for anything other than love for God and our brothers and sisters. "Let us love one another that with one heart, we may confess."

