

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor



Glory be to Jesus Christ!

Glory be Forever!



Volume 12 Issue 586

17th Sunday after Pentecost-Christ the All-Merciful

October 1, 2023



If it is hard for us to live faithfully as Christians in our time and place, imagine how difficult it was for the new Gentile converts in the Greek city of Corinth. They lived in a culture that was notoriously immoral and had themselves worshiped pagan gods before their baptism. There was so much corruption all around them that they were surely constantly tempted to

return to decadent ways of life. The outrageous problems that St. Paul had to correct in their congregation provide evidence that many of those converts still lived in worldly, as opposed to holy, ways.

As those created in the image and likeness of God, our calling is to become “partakers of the divine nature,” to be transformed by personal union with the Lord such that His holiness becomes truly characteristic of us. We are to become living icons of His salvation to the depths of our being and to live out that in every way. That high calling ought to bring us all to our knees, for we all fall short of it in one way or another.

If that is not clear, all that we have to do is to pay attention to Jesus Christ’s teaching on loving our enemies. It is fairly easy to do good to those who do
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+ 17th Sunday after Pentecost +

The Protection of the Theotokos

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1

Gospel: Luke 6: 31-36

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.*

Skepticism and the Reality of Miracles by Archpriest Alexander

The most important miracle of Christianity is the Resurrection of Christ, but no less miraculous are His Incarnation and work of redemption. Thus, all Christianity is based on miracles.

Of course, not every unexplained phenomenon should be immediately regarded as miraculous. In general, the pursuit or constant expectation of miracles is very destructive for the faith. A miracle should not become an end in itself.

We should remember that the Lord is not a ma-

gician, and, therefore, if He performs a miracle it is always for a specific purpose and under certain special circumstances.

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structive for the faith. A miracle should not become an end in itself. We should remember that the Lord is not a magician, and, therefore, if He performs a miracle it is always for a specific purpose and under certain special circumstances.

The most important miracle has already taken place. But we can say that Christianity is a religion of miracles.

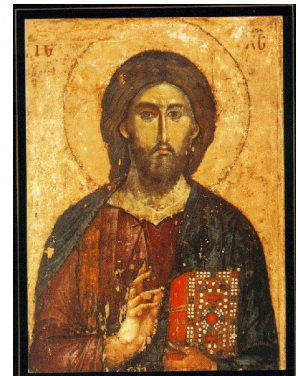
That is why one of the assaults of modern skepticism is directed against the reality of miracles.

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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, 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

Is it possible to pray rapidly without injuring the effect of the prayer? It is possible to those who have learned to pray inwardly with a pure heart. During prayer it is necessary that your heart should sincerely desire that which you ask for, should feel the truth of what you are saying, and this comes naturally to a pure heart.

That is why it is capable of praying even rapidly, and at the same time agreeably,

to God, as the rapidity in this case does not injure the truth (sincerity) of the prayer. But for those who have not attained the capability of praying sincerely it is necessary to pray slowly, waiting for a corresponding echo in the heart to each word of the prayer. And this is not always soon given to men unaccustomed to prayerful contemplation.

Therefore, for such men, it must be laid down as an absolute rule to pronounce the words of the prayer slowly, and with pauses. Wait until every word gives back its corresponding echo in your heart.

Sometimes in his heart a man draws near to God, sometimes he goes far from God, and therefore he experiences either peace and joy, or fear, disturbance, and oppression. The one is life, the other spiritual death. We draw near to God mostly in time of affliction, from which no one can save us but God, to Whom we then turn with our whole heart, and thus approach Him sincerely; never forget God, the Judge and Recompenser, and the call to love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself.

Skepticism and the Reality of Miracles, cont'd from p.1

I would like to say a few words about the possibility of a miracle as such from the point of view of common sense.

With the described formulation of the question, a skeptic or an atheist will immediately declare with indignation that belief in miracles is incompatible with common sense. Well, that's the way it is, but only in his rather narrow, materialistic, scientific world—where there is a lot of information but little breadth of thought.

When a person who believes only in nature encounters some unusual or inexplicable phenomenon, he is sure to argue that his observation was incorrect or incomplete, that it will be possible to explain it in the future, or that there is some statistical probability, albeit infinitesimal.

Someone may smile at this suggestion, but I would not advise anyone, as it usually happens, to trivialize everything and start shouting that religion slows down scientific progress—so to speak, “If you think that

way, then everything can be attributed to God's will.” It is better to leave this popular primitive judgment for internet memes, but not for any serious reflections.



In any case, we should take into account the fact that if we exclude God, then in making attempts to explain a miraculous phenomenon, we ignore one of the possible explanations. A materialist perceives the universe as a closed system in which nothing can interfere from the outside, but at the

same time he seems to forget about the limitations of his own feelings and cognitive capacity.

For a proponent of scientism and skeptic, science becomes a self-sufficient value—it exists as if separately from the people who created it and are creating it, as a kind of “Holy Grail”—the sole and independent source of truth. But how can the source of something for mankind be a derivative of human labor? It would be the same as saying that the heat and light emitted by the sun are its sources of heat and light.

I'm by no means saying that science is not objective; but I repeat: It is a field of knowledge created by limited human beings. Those who believe in God, or at least accept metaphysics and value humanitarian knowledge, do not reject mankind's cumulative religious experience as unequivocally false; they regard the universe as an open system, and therefore admit the possibility of outside interference in it and therefore miracles are possible.

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Homily on the Lesson of Mercy, (cont'd from p.1)

good to us. When we help someone with whom we have a good relationship, we can usually expect something positive in return. But it is quite hard to do good to those with whom we do not have a good relationship and from whom we can realistically expect nothing positive in return.

We may wonder why the Lord gave us such difficult teachings to follow as those as we find in today's gospel lesson. Be merciful even as your Father in heaven is merciful. Love your enemies. Do good to everyone; lend expecting nothing in return. Treat others as you wish to be treated. Christ Himself tells us that this is the difficult path of true holiness. We all struggle against the spiritual diseases that make it so hard to forgive, love, and serve those who have violated our pride by offending us or who will probably not respond in kind.

We have these struggles because we have turned away collectively and individually from the truth that we are made for a common life in the image and likeness of God. We have forgotten that it is our very nature as persons to be united with one another in love as are the members of the Holy Trinity. When St. Paul wrote of Christians as the temple and people of God, he was pointing to the fulfillment of our calling as human beings by the power of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and our collective life.

It might be fairly easy to obey a set of religious or moral laws about this or that form of outward behavior, even though personal experience teaches that we often fall short of them. It is an entirely different thing, however, to acquire such purity of heart that we love, give, and forgive as God does to the ungrateful, the selfish, and to our enemies and nuisances. So instead of patting ourselves on the back that at least we are decent to those who love us, we should instead fall on our knees asking for mercy and strength to love those who hate, disregard, or simply ignore us.

Of course, it is much easier to recognize the flamboyant sins of the people of Corinth than it is to recognize how we ourselves fall short of "perfecting holiness in the fear of God." It is much easier to point our fingers at individuals and groups today who celebrate beliefs and behaviors contrary to the way of Christ. Yes, we like to

praise ourselves and condemn others because we want to let ourselves off the hook, perhaps by saying that at least we go to church and lead fairly decent lives.

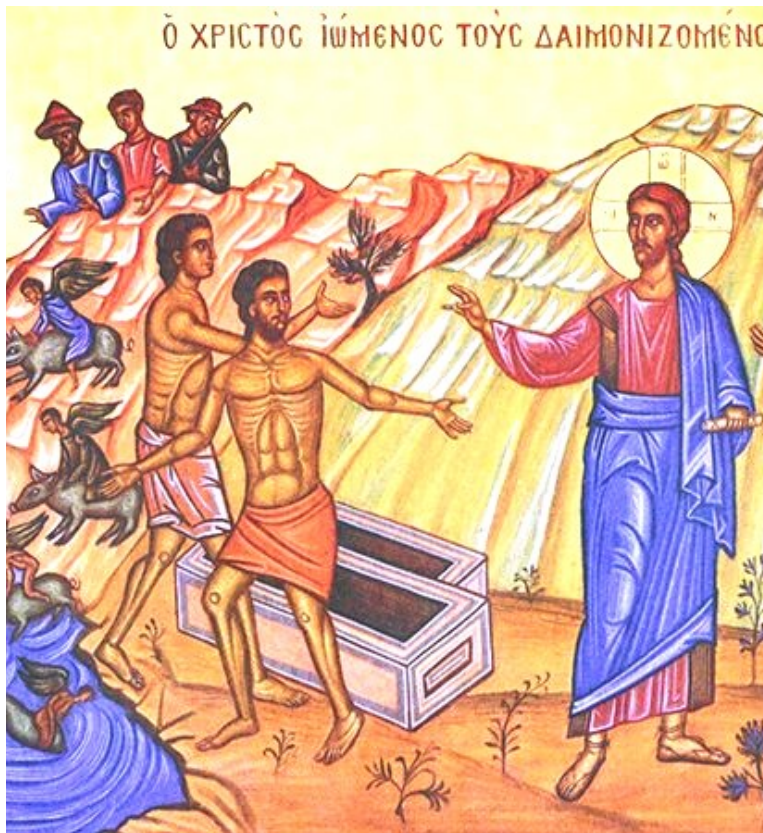
So when we refuse to show mercy and love toward difficult, annoying, and inconvenient people from whom we expect nothing in return, we turn away from our calling to be God's holy temple as surely as if we bowed down before an idol like the pagans of Corinth. For when we do so, we simply serve ourselves and disregard the calling that the Lord has given us all: to be so transformed by the mercy of our Father in heaven that we exclude that same mercy to others. For He is kind to the ungrateful and selfish and loves even those who reject Him, even those who killed His Son and the rest of us who reject Him so often in how we live. Still, He bestows

countless blessings on us all. And through the Son whom He sent out of love for the world, He has made us His own sons and daughters.

Jesus Christ is certainly the hope of both the Church and the world. He is our hope because He brought a new, blessed, and saving way for human beings to relate to others and to God. He died and rose again for those who rejected Him, who nailed Him to a cross and thought that He was demon-possessed. He not only healed His own people, but showed the same mercy to Gentiles, Samaritans, and even a Roman centurion, a foreign soldier who occupied His homeland. He was at times very frustrated with the disciples

for their lack of faith; they largely abandoned Him at His arrest and crucifixion, but Christ still appeared to them after His resurrection and blessed them as the leaders of the Church.

Our Savior is the embodiment of mercy to everyone, for He came to save and transform the entire world and especially every human being. Even more amazing is the truth that we are able to participate in Him, to be nourished by His Body and Blood, the medicine of immortality and holiness in Holy Mystery of the Eucharist. And, yes, we really are able to become merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful. By being filled and transformed by His grace, we may become living icons of the divine love and light even in our most difficult relationships.



and therefore miracles are possible.

No matter how intelligent and well-educated a person may be, no matter what worldview he has, there is hardly anyone who dares assert that he has gotten to know everything that exists, and therefore, “there is certainly no spiritual realm”. But exploring the natural world around us, we have the opportunity to observe and experience only a tiny part of Creation. So, if we know so little about what we can touch or bring into a laboratory, then voluntarily limiting ourselves to only material cognitive capacities, how can we objectively speak about non-material things?

C.S. Lewis’s idea is also very important here. Let’s think about the fact that all scientific knowledge is based on “old” experience. Broadly speaking—an experiment is conducted, the results are recorded, and conclusions are drawn. If the results of the experiment repeat themselves, then we can predict some events for the future. But God’s intervention in the usual course of the laws of the universe is not only an extraordinary event—it is always “new”, and therefore science with its methods of cognition of the “old” is powerless in this case.

As C.S. Lewis said, the basis for faith and unbelief is always the same, because much depends on your inner worldview. Observation of nature around us cannot provide total proof of the existence of God, but it still contains indirect indications of it. Take the famous “Watch and Watchmaker” argument by William Paley. We can conduct various experiments with a watch, but the resulting physical data will not tell us anything about the watchmaker who created it.

But if we start thinking more broadly, move away from dull numbers and formulas and try to look not at the individual metric parameters of hands and gears, but at the mechanism as a whole, where not only is each part dependent on the other, but everything together serves a specific purpose, we will understand that the clockwork was created by an intelligent watchmaker. Similarly, God is unknowable by scientific method, but this does not mean that He is unknowable in principle. If there is a “Watchmaker” of this world, doesn’t He have the right to interfere in the work of the “watch” when there are good reasons to do so? For the inhabitants of the “watch”, who are accustomed to obeying

certain laws, such an intervention will seem miraculous. God as the Creator of laws is not obliged to obey them, and by violating them He does nothing wrong.

Criticizing the reality of miracles, the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776) refers to the uniformity of nature. He argues that if a miracle is a rare phenomenon, and the law of nature is an event that occurs regularly, then the arguments in favor of the frequent here clearly prevail over the arguments in favor of the rare. However, if we accept such a seemingly reasonable premise, then the whole “building” of modern evolution and physical cosmogony will collapse, because the statistical probability of the universe that we live in coming into existence and the life spontaneously arising are so negligibly small that in laboratory conditions,

instead of 500 zeros after the decimal point scientists would write just zero. However, for a proponent of scientism, that number is sufficient, if only they might avoid believing in God.

It is also worth noting that Hume equates probability to authenticity. If the Resurrection of Christ is an unlikely event, but there were many witnesses to it, then it does not mean that it is inauthentic. By and large, almost all of our knowledge is built on trust. For example, I have never been to Antarctica, but I know for certain that it exists, because I trust the testimonies of people who have been there. Likewise, no living person has ever personally met Alexander the Great, but we believe the chronicles that described his life. If we were as distrustful of all fields of

knowledge as we are of religion, then there would be no science.

Skeptics keep saying that we must only trust facts, but when it comes to miracles, they immediately appeal to statistics, claiming that if people are not resurrected nowadays, then neither was Christ risen from the dead. Thus, the reality of miracles, as well as the reality of God, are not as obvious as, say, the law of gravity; but equating them is categorically erroneous. Everything depends on a given person’s *a priori* worldview. However, if we dig deeper, then faith in the Creator of the universe, Who is capable of intervening in the usual course of life for us, is much more reasonable than faith in the “omnipotence” of science and the cognitive capability of the human mind.

