

# 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 589

20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost-Parable of the Rich Man & Lazarus

October 22, 2023



The fruit we're expected to manifest in our lives is how we live out our faith in witness and response to those around us. To be with God in the next life, you and I are called to desire that life, the life in Him, above all else, to be rich toward God and others, and 'poor' toward the distractions and temptations of the world, its power, hold, and indifference.

God is so rich in love and mer-

cy. He gives us opportunities to love and to serve to His glory and our deification, to become more God-like. He gives us the Scriptures and the divine services to form us in the mind of the Church, the mind of the Kingdom. He feeds us with the sacramental life of that Kingdom even now as a foretaste of the Heavenly Banquet, the Kingdom of Heaven.

The question then is, how do we each respond to that which God's entrusted to us. Do we avail ourselves of these God-given means of our growth in divine grace, of opportunities to love, serve, and witness or do we prefer, like so many, to focus on gratifying our own wants?

Today's parable of the rich man and Lazarus reminds us that we can run the risk of taking God, and His love and mercy, for granted: we remember  
*(continued p.3)*

+ 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost +

Epistle: Galatians 1:11-19

Gospel: Luke 16: 19-31

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.*

## **Reply to Mockery with a Smile, by St. Nicholas of Zicha**

Their mockery comes from a malicious heart; let your smile be without any badness. Mockery sits well with ignorance; a smile is more suited to knowledge. Through their mockery they're increasing the value of your prayer before the eternal Judge.

Because God is more enamored of the prayer of a bold soul, surrounded by the arrows of wickedness, hatred, envy and mockery. The tips of these arrows have been blunted and the base of the shafts sharpened, so

that they're warded off by you and pierce the archers who shot them.

David's wife, Michal, once mocked the fervent prayer of her husband. God was more affronted by this mockery than King David was. This is why the Lord most high punished Michal: 'And Michal, daughter of Saul, had no children to the day of her death' (2 Kings 6, 23 [2 Samuel 6, 23]). If you pay attention to events and the fate of people, you'll see for yourself that today, too, God punishes severely

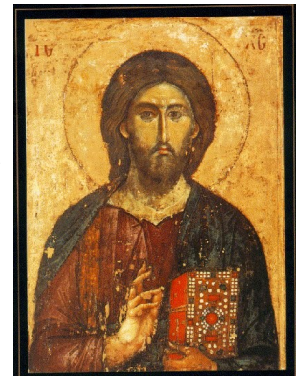
those who mock the sacred.

And if you think that any word is stronger medicine for them than silence, say to those mocking you: 'Are my eyes deceiving me or am I seeing straight? Every day, you entreat merchants, land-owners and law-enforcers, each for a variety of reasons, and yet you're mocking me because I entreat our eternal Creator. Isn't it more ridiculous to ask for something from somebody who's incapable,  
*(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, Larissa, Jack, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Mackenzie, Mike, Lisa, Jeff, Bonnalee, David, Carol, Norris, Debbie, Linda, Daniel, Michael, Abraham, George, Rochelle the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

**From St. John Kronstadt**

Our soul is a reflection of God's countenance, and the brighter this reflection is, the clearer and calmer is the soul; and the less bright this reflection is, the darker, the more disturbed is the soul. And as our soul is our heart it is necessary that every truth of God should be reflected in it through feeling, through gratitude, and that there should be no reflection in it of any lie.

Feel God's love in the most pure myster-

ies, feel the truth of all prayers. Our heart is a mirror; as the objects of the outer world are reflected in an ordinary mirror, so ought the truth to be reflected with all exactitude in our hearts. It is good, very good indeed, to be virtuous; the virtuous man is at peace himself, is pleasing to God and agreeable to other people. The virtuous man involuntarily attracts everyone's attention.

Why is it so? Because fragrance involuntarily attracts attention and makes everyone wish to breathe it. Look upon the very appearance of the virtuous man, upon his countenance. What sort of a countenance is it? It is the face of an angel. Meekness and humility overspread it, and involuntarily captivate everyone by their beauty. Pay attention to his speech; from it there comes still greater fragrance: here you are as if face to face with his soul, and are enraptured with his sweet converse. Love calms and agreeably expands the heart while hatred painfully contracts and disturbs it. Those who hate others torture and over themselves; therefore they are the most foolish of the foolish ones.

**Reply to Mockery with a Smile, cont'd from p.1**

instead of going to the Almighty? Isn't it absurd to venerate dust rather than the Lord, the Giver of life?'

It says somewhere in the prophet: 'Cursed are they who place their hope in people' (Jer. 17, 5). Those who place their hopes in mortal people, in a fleeting bubble and don't lay it on God Almighty are obviously cursed. And this curse on them and their houses can be confirmed through everyday experience. It's clear that, in the same way, those people are cursed who ask things of people but not of him who sustains everything and can do everything. But take note: sometimes silence is more effective than words.

The first mockery unsettles the soul that prays. But you've already survived and haven't given up on prayer. Any further mockery is an incentive. You can tell yourself you already have experience. Now you feel that God's somehow closer to you, the Church more beloved by you and prayer is sweeter.

You should know that the time will

come when the mockery will cease. Then people will come round, they'll admire and praise you and then your soul will be in greater danger than it is now. Now you're learning humility, but then you'll be defending your-



self against pride. But that's another issue, a different temptation.

You should know that those who torment us with their mockery are precisely those who are our enemies.

These are the people Christ was referring to when he gave the commandment 'Love your enemies' (Matt. 5, 44). Without knowing, they're doing us good. By hurting us and troubling us, they're lighting the flame of divine fire within us. They bark behind our backs when we're on our way to church, but that just pushes us closer to God. By making the earth more tiresome for us, they make heaven more attractive. Frost and the wind don't think about the tree, but even unwittingly they do it good. So it is with your enemies and you.

So forgive them and bless them, pray to God for them and- this is the culmination- love them as your greatest benefactors after God. Pay frequent visits to houses of sorrow. Visit the grave-yard, as well. Think about Christ's cross and kiss it as often as you can. And think about the end of life.

All of this will help strengthen your resolve to pray and you'll reach the final victory. Peace and the Lord's mercy.

## Homily on the Rich man and Lazarus , (cont'd from p.1)

that we'll all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ to give an account of how we've lived, of what our response has been to God's gracious offer of life and love with Him. Some of the Fathers say that our judgment on that "Last Day" will be based on how we know God now, how we love God now, how we say "Yes" to God now in this life, day to day—or, sadly—how we have said, "No" to God in all of the above. This parable is an example of such judgment through self-examination, and so, it's an opportunity for us to become convicted of our need to grow in faith and put it more into practice, not living just for ourselves but for the love of God and those whom God brings into our lives.

God brings Lazarus into the life of the rich man, who treats Lazarus with scorn in this life. Even in the next life, he still sees Lazarus as his slave, existing solely for his need, saying, "Send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue." In this life, this man's wealth was his god; he lives for his own selfish pleasure, surrounding himself with all sorts of creature comforts. He has 'know-ledge' of God, but does not know or love God as we see in his lack of concern or compassion for Lazarus, or what God thinks about his actions.

Lazarus, "full of sores," laid at his gate, and longed to eat the crumbs off the rich man's table. Lazarus dies and is taken up to God's near presence, i.e. 'the bosom of Abraham.' The rich man also dies and is buried. Having been deprived of his needs in this life, Lazarus enjoys the heavenly banquet in the true and eternal life with God and His Saints. Lazarus is in eternal and perpetual *memory* before God. This is the basis for our prayers for our departed Orthodox brethren. We desire for them "Memory Eternal" before God who is Eternal Life. God knows Lazarus by name, just as He will remember the name of each of us who have lived with the priority of the Kingdom of Heaven in this life: in true repentance and communion, carrying our cross to follow Christ, to die to the old self and live to God and His truth in the new.

The rich man, on the other hand, having lived only for himself and his own self-pleasure in this life, is deprived of God's near presence in eternal life. *His name is not even remembered before God.* From God's perspective, as St. John Chrysostom puts it, the rich man was already

'buried' in life by his "couches, rugs, furnishings, sweet oils, perfumes... wine, varieties of food, and flatterers" (*Orthodox Study Bible*, p. 1399). In other words, because these things were his 'god' and his 'god' is temporal—all these things are buried with him.

It's tempting to see this story from an "us versus them" perspective. "Oh, I'm not like that rich man." But it behooves us to examine ourselves for a moment in light of the rich man just as we do in the Triodion period before Great Lent when we examine ourselves in light of the Pharisee. All of us have been given 'riches' of one kind or multiple kinds or another—gifts, talents, intelligence, abilities, resources or other kinds of earthly treasure. Certainly, just by living in America, we live at a standard of living above most of the world. The truth is that all of us will be asked what we've done with those riches entrusted to us at the Second Coming. All of us will be asked how we've demonstrated our love for God and those around us, how we've furthered the work of the Church and lived out Christ's Gospel, not just for our-

selves but for the Church.

It should also be noted, however, that this parable is not a story condemning wealth. Rather, it's an illustration of what happens if we allow our soul to become cold-hearted, selfish and vain-glorious toward

God, the Church, and our fellow man and become 'poor' or stingy towards Him and those around us—*whatever our means*. Already, the rich man is withering and dying to God in this life, even as he fills himself with so much sumptuous bounty and indifference to others.

To this extent, St. John asks, "Do you see how by the place, by the things that waste there (in the rich man's house), he draws men off from this desire that is here, and rivets them to Heaven. For if you transfer your wealth there where neither rust or moth corrupts, nor thieves break through and steal, you will both expel this disease and establish your soul in the greatest abundance (Manley, *The Bible and the Holy Fathers for Orthodox*, p. 472).

Our Lord reminds us in this regard, saying, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21). Ask yourself, are you longing for heaven? Is your 'treasure' in Christ God and the eternal Kingdom?

(continued p.4, column 1)



If it is not, repent of any coldness of heart and start now to live with the priority of Christ and His Church before you, pray for greater love for God, your brothers and sisters, and your fellow man.

All of us need to be wary of the 'disease,' of wanting to have our ease, of using others, even God, for our own ends, of being cold-hearted toward Him and the needs of His Church and others. We conquer this disease by keeping our 'vigil lamps' lit, by examining how and for Whom we're living now, how we're loving, serving, and giving. How much have we been willing to be Christ's "light" and "salt" in this world, modeling the Gospel in word and deed, how generous are we in giving our "first fruits" to God in obedience to Him and His calling.

To this end, it can be helpful to periodically do an inventory of our riches—material and spiritual—to evaluate how we're using them, whether for our own temporal use or for the building up of the Kingdom, that is, our life with God, our salvation, *and that of those around us*. We offer back to God from the "first fruits" He's so graciously entrusted to us of our time, talents, treasure.

And so, we come away from this parable reminded that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, that Christ is coming back again to judge the living and the dead. God beckons even now to prepare and consider for Whom we live our earthly lives, that our names too, like Lazarus, may be remembered by God in His eternal Kingdom.

May we love Christ God first, being sensitive to the needs of those around us—both to their physical and their spiritual welfare. May we give a "first fruits" of ourselves to God's glory and our deification, serving and loving God, that we, like Lazarus, may be inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven now and in the life to come.

+++++  
How often do we do something considered spiritual—prayer, church attendance, fasting, some alms-giving—and think we've become 'Saint Anthony'. Because we compare ourselves... to ourselves. We ourselves are the criterion. It's like somebody going on a run and thinking they're running quickly. Then a proper athlete turns

up alongside them and they realize that they might as well be running on the spot. Scripture points this out directly: 'Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight' (*Is. 5, 21*). So our delusion is obvious: we're living in a dream-world, under the false impression that we're 'magnificent' and 'saintly'. Because naturally, we could, in fact, compare ourselves to other people and become aware of our real stature—other people are our mirror.

And, of course, for a Christian the other people can't be those outside the Church, those with a secular outlook which is not that of Christ. Because they've written God out of their lives. So the other people we have to use as our measuring-rod are the people of God, that is holy people and, above all, the first among all the saints, Our Lady herself. We must turn our gaze onto her, the first among us, and onto our brothers and sisters among the saints. We should see ourselves mirrored in their lives—they're our charismatic selves, the limits we can reach. Because they're the ones who followed in the footsteps of Christ to the greatest extent possible. This is why it's so important to study their lives, their works and the hymns of the Church which sing their praises.

If we do this, we'll realize two things. First that we, too, will begin to act on a charismatic level, because we'll see for ourselves what we've observed in all the saints: their synergy with Christ. They wanted him in their lives in response to his love, because without him they could do nothing. Secondly, and more importantly, we'll be constantly aware of how small and inadequate we are, that 'we haven't even take a step on the path of the real Christian life'. Faced with Our Lady and the saints, all we can do is beat our breast, repeating again and again: 'God have mercy upon me, sinner that I am'. Is this not how we're brought to holy humility, the foundation of the virtues where God acts? Saint John of the Ladder puts it in no uncertain terms:

'Let's not cease to discuss our Fathers and luminaries who've gone before, comparing ourselves to them. Then we'll discover that we haven't even take a step on the path of the real monastic (viz. Christian) life' (*Ladder Discourse 22, 21*).

