

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



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Christ is in our midst!

He is and ever shall be!



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20th Sunday after Pentecost– Parable of the Good Samaritan

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There are some people who think that worshipping God in beautiful liturgical services distracts us from serving our neighbors and accomplishing His purposes for us in the world. There are those who say that focusing on prayer, fasting, and other spiritual disciplines wastes time and energy that could be better used in helping others. St John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, remains famous for his powerful preaching and interpretation of the

Scriptures, his doctrinal and moral soundness, and his association with the Divine Liturgy.

In a society still influenced by pagan traditions that completely disregarded the needs of poor and suffering people, St John stressed the importance of serving Christ in them. Through his preaching and support of philanthropic ministries, he demonstrated that those commonly viewed as worthless and undeserving were those with whom our Lord identified Himself. He taught that, in the face of unmet need, it was impossible to be in communion with Christ without ministering to His hungry and sick body in daily life. He knew that the Lord calls us all to be neighbors to one another, refusing to pass by on the other side when we can be of help in practical ways.

In this respect, our Savior's ministry
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++ 20th Sunday after Pentecost ++

+The Holy Apostle Thomas+

Epistle: Galatians 1: 11-19

Gospel: Luke: 10: 25-37

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.*

On Faith in the Christian Life, by St. Seraphim of Chernigov

Faith in Christ the Savior taught mankind obedience to God by faith, and then, when faith in the Son of God returned man his lost blessedness and unity with God, then true obedience to God out of love was restored to mankind.

You must understand the word "obedience" as the renunciation of your own will, as committing yourself entirely to the will of the Almighty Creator Himself.

The will of God

If God is perfect, then His will is infallible, and

therefore, obedience to the will of God protects and delivers man from errors and delusions.

If God is love, then His will is all-good and obedience to it leads man to every good. The will of God, for all believers and loving and rational people, is law. God is our life, our strength, our Judge!

Therefore, it's only natural that the purpose of man's life is to follow the one will of God and coordinate our will with it.

And our mind and heart must strive for this

knowledge of the will of God, because the Lord isn't only the Father and Creator of all of mankind, but also Love itself, and all His actions are nothing but loving.

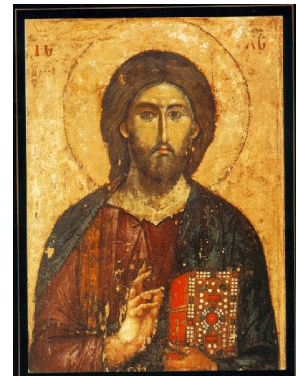
It's also clear that no one can be in communion with God save those who fulfill His will. This statute is repeatedly shown in Holy Scripture, and fulfilling it is called the source of all goods, while violating it is the source of all evils. Thus, God promised Abraham a blessing, and not to him

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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 for the Centennial Celebration of our Church.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

Please keep the following in your prayers: Mother Onufria, Larissa, Jack, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Mackenzie, Lisa, Jeff, David, Carol, Debbie, Linda, Daniel, Michael, Abraham, Karen, George, Rochelle, Theresa, Tamam, Patti, Priscilla, Helen, Loretta, Sybil, Frankie, Jim, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Our Prayerful Requests

Everything in our world has a price—not in monetary terms, but as a sum total of efforts, time, and resources spent to achieve something. It is no coincidence that the Apostle Paul admonished the inhabitants of the rich and corrupt city of Corinth, remembering the Sacrifice of the Cross: *Ye are bought with a price* (1 Cor. 7:23), and the Holy Hierarch Basil the Great stated concisely: “The price of man is the blood of Christ.”

Our petitions to God also have their price: sorrows, prayers, labors, temptations and patience. Our business is to pray, leaving the overall outcome to God’s care. This leads to a complicated conclusion: We know what we want, but we don’t know if it’s good for us, and we don’t know what God wants, but we know that it’s good for us.

It defies the earthly logic of justice, but stems from the “illogical” Divine mercy that penetrates the depths of the human heart. That is why the Lord, Who knows the hearts of all men (cf. Acts 1:24), above all requires trust from us. Yes, there is also a price in our relations with God—trust.

It is a voluntary choice that combines voluntariness, hope, risk, openness, fortitude and readiness for any outcome. The value of any relationship is determined by the measure of sincerity and the level of trust, the boundaries of which can only be limited by the freedom of the one who trusts. Trust imposes a great responsibility on the one who is trusted. Absolute trust is possible only in God and the ability to hear “trust Me” in God’s silence.

On Faith in the Christian Life, cont’d from p.1

alone, but also to his posterity, on the condition of obedience: *Walk before Me, and be thou perfect* (Gen. 17:1). The same law was declared to the people of Israel as well when they were chosen by the Lord.

And Christ the Savior said to us all: *Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father Which is in Heaven* (Mt. 7:21).

Consequently, the path that we must freely choose in order to fulfill our purpose is self-evident: It’s the path of the will of God. Only God, Who created us rational and free and chose a high calling for us—to be in living communion with Him—can show us the right way for us to achieve and remain in this communion with God.

To know the will of God, knowledge in general, spiritual development, life experience, humility, and patience aren’t enough; faith is much more necessary. People listen to and accept the one whom they believe as their well-wisher, guide, and

mentor; they believe the one whom they love.

The higher and lower will

All people are aware that they have two wills in them, invisibly struggling with each other: one is rational,



higher, and the other is sensual, lower, irrational, secret, passionate, carnal. The good will is the will of God, of Christ, that not a single sinner should perish, but be saved while still on earth, because after death, the

soul’s labors and struggles can no longer change any properties it acquired in its earthly life, in sinful habits, but it’s freed by death from contact with the realm of the spirit of malice.

That people might become perfect on earth, even if it requires the soul to grieve when it’s full of passions, and for the body to suffer when it destroys the soul with its lusts. That mankind, struck by the humility, self-sacrifice, and boundless love of the Son of God and His victory over the ancient evil, would resolve to undertake the feat of salvation and follow His path into the abode of the Heavenly Father.

That Christians, to whom He revealed all the secrets of the present and future, would be left with not only His Church and His power in the Sacraments, but also His world, for which He prayed to His Father to the point of bloody sweat that He might preserve and enlighten them for Him; that they might be reborn in the

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Homily on the Christ healing the a Woman and Raises a Young Girl from death , (cont'd from p.1)

was clearly made present in St John's life. Christ refused to allow the lawyer to narrow down the list of people whom he had to love as himself in order to find eternal life, and St John proclaimed the same message. Even as today's parable criticizes the religious leaders who passed by on the other side, St John denounced distorted forms of spirituality that separate true faithfulness from how people live in the world, especially in relation to meeting the urgent needs of others.

The character of the good Samaritan is, of course, an image of Christ in many ways. The same religious leaders who rejected and despised Him ignored the true needs of the people before God. Purely out of love for us, Christ came to bind up our wounds as those corrupted by sin and enslaved to death. Out of compassion, He nourishes us back to health with His own Body and Blood and anoints us with holy oil for forgiveness and strength. He makes us

members of the Church, the inn where we continue our recovery through His ongoing grace and mercy through the Holy Mysteries. He Himself forgives our sins every time that we humbly repent in Confession. The only limits to our healing are those which we place on ourselves, for there is no boundary to His transforming love for those He created in His image and likeness. The vocation of a bishop is to manifest the fullness of Christ's ministry. As a bishop, St John was an icon of Christ mostly obviously in presiding as a high priest over the church's celebration of the Divine Liturgy.

Our Lord is the true High Priest Who has ascended into heaven at the right hand of the Father, where He ministers eternally in the Heavenly Temple. We participate mystically in that heavenly worship whenever we celebrate the Divine Liturgy. When we do so, we join ourselves to His one offering through the Cross, by which He conquered death and brought us into the blessed eternal life of the Holy Trinity. In Him, we dine as guests at the Heavenly Banquet when we receive the Eucharist. We truly become participants in and communicants of life eternal in His Body, the Church.

As St John made clear through his preaching and witness, we must never think that worship, offering, and

communion are somehow limited to what we do during the liturgical services of the Church. If we limit them in that way, then we will not truly worship Christ, offer ourselves to Him, or commune with Him for the healing of our souls. If we do so, we will become like the hypocritical religious leaders in today's parable who failed to see that they encounter our Lord in every needy human being, in every neighbor who bears His image and likeness.

Perhaps they ignored the victim of the robbers because they were hurrying off to fulfill their religious duties in the Temple. Perhaps we do even worse by ignoring the needs of our spouses, children, parents, and neighbors due to our own self-centeredness or obsession with our work, hobbies, or routines. Perhaps we do even worse by passing by on the other side because we think that people with this or that problem deserve what they get. Perhaps

we do even worse by thinking that other people's difficulties are theirs alone and have nothing to do with us. Perhaps we do even worse by becoming so addicted to satisfying our cravings for pleasure that we find it impossible to serve anyone other than ourselves.

By offering Himself on the Cross, rising in glory, and ascending into heaven, our Lord overcame the corruption of the entire creation. He did so as the New Adam Who has made it possible for us all to fulfill our original vocation to become like God, to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect. As the God-Man, He offered every dimension of Himself for our salvation.

Through His eternal High Priesthood, He calls us to ever

greater participation in eternal life. While the Eucharistic worship of the Divine Liturgy manifests our communion with Him most profoundly, it should be obvious that so great a salvation may not be limited to any sphere or segment of our lives.

If we are truly in communion with Christ, then we must bring every dimension of our lives into right relationship with Him. We must offer not only bread and wine, but all our blessings back to Him so that we will faithfully play our part in making His salvation present in the world. We must join our time, energy, resources, and relationships to His High Priestly offering so that they will all become signs of His healing of our corrupt humanity.



knowledge of such Divine love and begin a new life, detached from all perishable, mortal, and temporary things, and understand that they are near to God, dear to Him, and are to live with Him now, forever, and eternally in His glory, in blessedness, and in the life-giving light of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, is it possible not to understand this good will, God's will, and not be able to distinguish it from the will of the flesh, which demands carnal pleasure and bodily satisfaction and comfort in evil?

Imagination

Imagination is an irrational force. It works mechanically, pictorially, artificially, according to the laws of image association. The imagination distracts people from God, directing attention to everything vain and sinful and disturbs a man's spirit and good mood. We suffer from the imagination not only when awake, but also in sleep. Thus, preserving all that is sensual and carnal in our mind and heart, the imagination hinders the ascent to God in the spiritual life, disperses our thoughts and defiles them with impure notions and memories of past falls and pleasures. It aggravates, robs of peace, and deprives you of grace. For the spiritual life, the imagination is a harmful and pernicious force.

If imagination brings not only harm but also good in secular life, when it directs a man to the idea of the blessedness of the future life, helping him cross into the Heavenly world, then why does the imagination cause only harm in the spiritual life? Because the omnipresent, omnipotent, and all-righteous God is above and beyond all imagination. Therefore, the imagination is incapable of uniting man with God. This was proven by the fall of the angel who dreamed of being equal to God and turned into the devil. He filled his mind with imaginations and thus invented this force, which is used to destroy people.

The memory and imagination preserve all the sensory things a man has seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched. Therefore, both memory and imagination should be of great importance in our lives as forces guiding our hearts along the same good and safe paths that our lives followed in the past. But since the structure of secular life distorts our external senses, it's not

difficult to understand what great evil these powerful forces—memory and imagination—bring to men, keeping so much that is sinful and destructive in their hearts and minds, and so little that is bright and salvific. In view of this, for the sake of salvation, man must fight more with the memory and imagination than the passions and his obvious shortcomings.

The temporal and the eternal

Man so passionately desires to enjoy the temporary, the perishable, the perverted, the defiled, which he can feel, see, and contain within himself, even though he enjoys it with anguish, despondency, tears, and sometimes even with mourning and despair, that he closes his eyes to the future, the eternal, that which is promised for faith in the word of God, which undoubtedly

exists, irrefutably proven by men themselves both through their righteousness in temporal life and by those who have departed to that world.

He pushes all this away with indignation, as if unnecessary now, replaced by human love, foolish and temporary attachments. He doesn't want to hear or see anything eternal, joyful, true, or blessed, even the infinitely strong and perfect, life-giving, all-seeing, unchanging, incomparable love of God; he doesn't want to see his true happiness—true, deep, inexplicable.

Pride

The root and cause of all human suffering and is pride. All sins are vile before God, the Holy Fathers say, but viler than all is pride; it's expressed in vanity, conceit, and arrogance, and is proof of the poverty of

the mind. "Pride is denial of God, an invention of the devil ... a source of anger, a door of hypocrisy ... the guardian of sins, the patron of pitilessness, the rejection of compassion, a bitter inquisitor, an inhuman judge," says St. John Climacus. Therefore, God resists the proud; good people don't tolerate the proud.

Pride is therefore difficult for people to recognize, because it has many forms and degrees. St. John Climacus defines the degrees of this vice this way: The beginning of pride is vanity, the middle is the disdain of others, the shameless preaching of your own labors, self-praise in the heart, hatred of reproof, and finally, the rejection of God's help, arrogant self-reliance, and a demonic temper. Pride is the source of all that is wrong in our world.

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