

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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32nd Sunday after Pentecost—The Canaanite Woman

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It is easy to fall into the trap of looking only at the surface of the challenges that we face in life. Instead of getting to the heart of the matter, we often accept simplistic answers about ourselves, others, and even God. One of those false answers that Jesus Christ corrected was that only people of a certain ethnic and religious heritage were called to holiness and capable of

finding salvation. That is another way of saying that He came to bring all peoples and nations into eternal life, for His Kingdom is radically different from the ways of the kingdoms of this world.

In first-century Palestine, the Jews did not think such holiness was even a possibility for Gentiles, such as the Canaanite woman who called out “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely possessed by a demon.” No one was surprised when Christ did not answer her at first, for who would have expected the Jewish Messiah to help a Gentile, especially a woman with a demon-possessed child? But the Lord was actually doing something quite surprising, for He challenged her to respond to the conventional wisdom of the Jews when He said “I was sent
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**** 32nd Sunday after Pentecost ****

***** New Martyrs of Russia *****

Epistle: 1 Timothy 1: 15-17

Gospel: Matthew 15: 21-28

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, *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.*

The Divine Liturgy, by Metropolitan Dionysios

Every day, a task is performed on earth. It’s the greatest, most important, most sacred task that humans can aspire to. It’s the Divine Liturgy, the continuation of the Last Supper at which Jesus sat with His disciples. People are capable of carrying out many great feats, but none is greater or more important than the Divine Liturgy.

This is the one privilege God gave to us humans, because even the angels can’t celebrate the Divine Liturgy. At the Di-

vine Liturgy, the angels serve with people, as we hear in the troparion of Saint Spyridon: ‘And in the singing of your holy prayers you have angels celebrating with you’.

Indeed, as Saint Peter says, ‘even angels long to look into’ what the hands of the priest perform on the holy altar.

‘Liturgy’ means a public work, that is, for the people, the people of God. The Church prays for everyone, but the Divine Liturgy is celebrated only for the faithful; ‘For

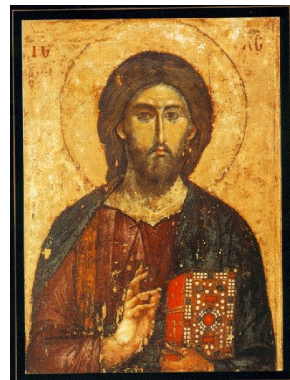
devout and Orthodox Christians’. The Church is the people of God, so it follows that, as a public act, it is for the people of God, from the people of God.

Because the priests of the Church don’t celebrate alone or in secret, but rather it’s the people of God who serve the Divine Liturgy, together with their priests. When we say ‘people of God’ we don’t mean ‘the laity’, as opposed to ‘the clergy’, but both. Laity
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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.





Troparion to St. George

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
for our souls
salvation.

News and Notes

We welcome all who are worshipping with us today and invite you down to the church hall for our social hour.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

We ask that you keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Olga, Lillian, Meg, Larissa, Stephen, Louise, Marcia, George, Lorraine, Peg, Christopher, Jackie, Karoline, Evan, Ryan, Kathleen, Sandy, Andrea, Samuel, Anatoly, Linda, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Sally Lou, Bob, Catherine, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, and those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

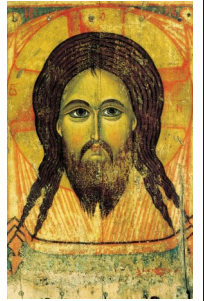
Words of wisdom from the Elders

Isn't it true that gratitude springs up in our hearts more powerfully, more gloriously when what we receive is undeserved, when it is a miracle of divine and human love? When we think that we deserve something and receive it, we receive it as our due; so did the nine lepers. But the Samaritan knew he had no right to the mercy of God, no right to this miracle of

healing, and his heart was filled with gratitude.

The first Beatitude speaks to us in that respect very clearly: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God.....Who are the poor in spirit? It is not those who are simply poor; poverty does not call out the great virtues simply by itself; the poor in spirit are those who in their heart and mind, in their whole self, know that they possess nothing which is not a gift, and deserve nothing of what gratuitously is given to us.

We did not come into being of our own volition; God brought us into being, and not by command, by an act of power. He brought us into being by an act of love, He loved us into existence. By doing this, He says to us: I love you! Without you, the world which I have created would be incomplete in my eyes; but also, I have faith in you that you will not betray my trust.
(Metropolitan Antony Bloom)



The Divine Liturgy, (cont'd from p. 1)

and clergy together form the people of God.

It's not easy to say what the Church is, but we understand and live it when we celebrate the Divine Liturgy. When we're in Church during the Divine Liturgy, we don't simply watch what's happening, like spectators, but instead we're all celebrating together. We're the people of God and we celebrate the Divine Liturgy together with the ministers of the Church, who, through their ordination, have the grace of the priesthood. This is why all the prayers and all the hymns at the Divine Liturgy are written in such a way as to make it clear that it's not just the priest who's celebrating, but all the Christian who are present in church. 'Let us pray to the Lord', says the deacon; and 'Let us attend'. This is said for all the people because we're all the Church and we all perform the service.

Every time we go to church we say there's a congregation, which means not only that we go to church but that we congregate so as to become the

Church. Our assembly shows that we're the Church. But we're the Church even more when we not only congregate, but when we celebrate the Divine Liturgy with the priest. It's this service which demonstrates what the Church is.

The liturgical assembly is the Church. The Divine Liturgy is the center of all the services which take place in church, through the Church. Always in the presence of us and a priest, because without a priest and without the Divine Liturgy we aren't the Church, merely a gathering of people, such as those at an association or club. Of course, the Divine Liturgy isn't something thought up by people, it's the greatest and most holy sacrament, founded and instituted by Jesus Christ. To put it better, Jesus Christ founded the sacrament of the Divine Eucharist and the Church celebrates the Divine Liturgy, continuing the great and holy sacrament.

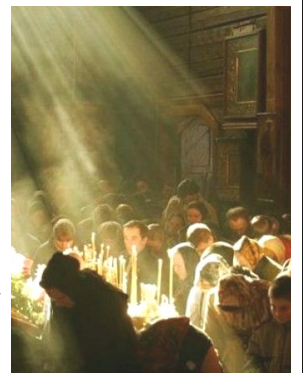
This is why the Liturgy is also called the Eucharist, because it's the same thing, the same sacred and holy

rite of the Church, at which the bloodless sacrifice of Jesus Christ is continued.

The Divine Liturgy or Eucharist is the same sacrifice as Jesus Christ made when He offered Himself for the salvation of the world. On the evening of the Last Supper, He broke the bread, gave it to His disciples and said: 'Take, eat; this is my body...' He then blessed the chalice, gave it to His disciples and said: 'All of you drink from this; this is my blood'... Both times, He spoke clearly and meant literally what he said: 'this is my body' and 'this is my blood'.

However, He didn't merely assure them as regards this, but gave them a command, as well: 'Do this in remembrance of me'.

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only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” She knelt before him and cried “Lord, help me!” He then pressed her even harder by saying “It is not fair to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” Christ was stating clearly the common Jewish understanding of that time that Gentiles had no claim to the promises to Abraham. Our Savior is obviously an excellent teacher, however, for these sharp words inspired her to utter a profound theological insight that had been forgotten by the Jews and was not known by the disciples.

For she responded, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” In other words, she saw the deep truth that God’s promises to the Jews were always intended to bless the entire world, and now they are fulfilled in all who have faith in the Messiah. That is why the Lord then said to her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And then the demon left her daughter.

Think about it for a moment. The Messiah of Israel praised the faith of a Gentile woman whose daughter was possessed by a demon. Could there be a more powerful sign that all people, including the hated foreigners, are also God’s people? Could there be a more brilliant icon of how all nations are called to holiness than how the demon immediately left the girl when her mother showed such great faith? This is a sign of all humanity being delivered from corruption by the Savior Who came to heal, bless, and sanctify all who bear His image and likeness. Yes, that means even the Canaanites, the Corinthians, and people like you and me who probably are not of Hebrew descent. Race, ethnicity, nationality, and other merely human characteristics have nothing to do with whether someone shares by grace in the holiness of God. The healing of our souls is equally open to all through the God-Man Who has sanctified every dimension of our common humanity.

We must, however, do our part by actually living as God’s holy temple, as His sons and daughters who “cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit.” St. Paul’s message to the Corinthians was not to congratulate them on having already achieved something, but instead to challenge them to live faithfully to their high calling. He does the same with us. Our identity as members of Christ’s Body is nothing that we have earned, but purely a gift of grace which we must contin-

ue to receive with humility. If it were our achievement or possession, then perhaps we could look down upon others as though God’s blessings were for us and not them. Instead, we are exactly like the Canaanite woman with no claim to anything before the Lord. We are as dependent upon His mercy as a foreign woman with a demon-possessed daughter begging on her knees and weeping as she cried out for help that no one else thought that she could possibly receive.

As we struggle to find healing for our souls and to grow in holiness, we must cultivate the bold persistence of that Canaanite woman. She refused to be denied, even though she knew that she was totally dependent upon the mercy of a Lord Who owed her nothing at all.

We must also persist in humbling ourselves before Him

as we separate ourselves from all that hinders us from sharing more fully in the life of Christ. We must refuse to be denied in our repentance, and that means taking steps that hit us where we live. If we watch shows or play video games that inflame our passions and put images, worries, and fears in our minds and then distract us when we pray, we should stop indulging in them. If the news or social media does something similar to us, we must carefully regulate our consumption of it or turn it off. If we put ourselves in social situations that tempt us to act, speak,

or think in ways that we know are not pleasing to God, we should stay away from them. If we find our greatest joy in food, drink, or any bodily pleasure, we should fast and reorient our lives from self-centered desire to growing in love for our Lord and our families and neighbors.

If we have harbored hatred and self-righteous judgment toward anyone or any group of people, and especially if we gossip about them, we must soften our hearts through the Jesus Prayer and keep our mouths shut when we are tempted to spew venom. If our daily routine does not include falling on our knees in prayer before the Lord with the humble persistence of the Canaanite woman, that must become our very first priority in life. For God’s holy temple must be a place of prayer, and as hard as it is to believe, by His grace we have become that temple. Now we must fulfill our calling “to perfect holiness in the fear of God” by cleansing ourselves from every form of corruption. That is how we will take our place with Canaanites, Corinthians, and other strangers and foreigners in a Kingdom not of this world.



Theological and Scientific Theories of Knowledge, by George Mantzarides (Part 2)

The conjunction and, even more, the equation of the two levels of knowledge, which was promoted during the Middle Ages with the encouragement of scientific research within the embrace of Western monasticism, was bereft of theology and often harmful. With the intervention of ecclesiastical authority, this later led to a conflict between theology and science, which, in turn, produced tragic consequences. These tensions, however, which were virtually unknown in the East, have largely been appeased in our own day and age.

Although theology has a positive attitude to secular knowledge and science, it continues to point out the relativity and impermanence which mark it. Secular knowledge is useful, though not always necessary in terms of recognizing or fulfilling our aims as people. Above and beyond it lies the truth which leads to knowledge of God and salvation. And this truth is not to be found in objects, nor is it objective. It is the truth of life and communion, love and peace, beauty and freedom. It's truth which befits the human person, a personal truth. It's Christ's truth, or to be more precise, it's the truth which is Christ Himself: 'Who is, was and will come.

This personal nature of the truth is of prime significance for us. The living truth cannot be objectified, because its objectification would be tantamount to its ossification and necrosis. Knowledge of this truth is an experience of life: it is the fruit of the union of two subjects into one and the same Being, God and the human person. Neither of them becomes an 'object' and both, God and the person, live this event as a unified life. This realization is of particular importance in terms of approaching and evaluating any specific truth we might be seeking in our life.

As a means of addressing secular truth, scientific research has a positive value. The same is true for the accomplishments and applications of this research. All of this is not the work of the devil, but of human beings who were created 'in the image' of God. Of course, given this creation 'in the image of God', it is incumbent upon us to keep our vertical relationship with Him alive. Our nous, which is the highest element of our existence, should be

illuminated by God. In any case, it is only under these conditions that the human nous can function in a natural way. When this happens, the work we produce on the horizontal plane is positive.

As Saint Maximos the Confessor points out 'the nous works in accordance with nature when it has subdued the passions and sees the causes of beings and lives close to God'. But even when we function independently of God, following our own will, our accomplishments and achievements are still connected in some way with what is good. Looked at from the perspective of Christian the-

ology, good is all that exists ontologically. Evil is not a position, but a negative value. It is the denial of good, or a 'parasite on the body of good'.

And as denial of or a parasite on good, which is the only thing that really exists, evil is firmly attached to it. So in any situation whatsoever, no matter what evil manages to achieve with us, there is always some positive point. But because it is detached from its natural perspective, it takes on a negative character. So in the field of scientific research, the value of any achievement cannot be immediately questioned, but its purpose and use need to be monitored. This is for the human nous to decide.

An important element with regard to scientific research is the purpose for which it was carried out. And, naturally, the quality of the purpose invests the research with commensurate value. When the purpose is negative from the very outset, the research can-

not be considered positive, nor can it be respected.

Often though, particularly these days, research is respected not only as the means for some purpose, but in its own right: 'Research for the sake of research'. Of course, it is not impossible that, even in such instances, some unexpected good might emerge, or, indeed, unintended evil. But making research autonomous in this way detaches it completely from all moral restraints.

In what we call the natural sciences, where the principle of objectivity rules, numbers and quantities predominate and, at the same time, persons and moral qualities and relationships are ignored.

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