

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

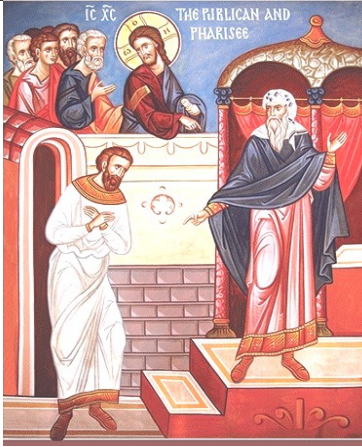
Glory be to Jesus Christ. Glory be forever.



Volume 9 Issue 398

34th Sunday after Pentecost—Sunday of the Publican & Pharisee

February 9, 2020



The Savior said, “He who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” These words speak directly to each of us, for we all follow in the path of our first parents in refusing to live in a manner worthy of people created in God’s image and likeness due to our pride. Our great dignity means that we will become more fully ourselves only

as we become more like God in holiness. True humility requires recognizing how far we are from fulfilling such an infinite goal. It is only through humility that we will be able to participate in the joy of the true exaltation of our Lord’s glorious resurrection.

It is certainly possible to use religion, or anything else, to distract us from humbling ourselves before God. Like the Pharisee in today’s parable, we can make prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and other virtuous actions ways of blinding ourselves to the truth. How appealing it is to magnify our own accomplishments in contrast to what we see as the failings of others. When we engage in that kind of self congratulation, it becomes impossible truly to offer our lives to the Lord. Instead, all that we say and do becomes simply an act of self-worship, a form of idolatry. *(continued p. 3)*

**** 34th Sunday after Pentecost ****
Sunday of the Publican & Pharisee

Epistle: 2 Timothy 3:10-15

Gospel: Luke 18: 10-14

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.*

How to warm up to your neighbor, Fr. Andrew Konanos

What did God say? “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” That all your loved ones, and your children, may see your good deeds. Will they only see your good deeds? The light! Do you radiate light? Do you show anything encouraging, admirable, and worthy of imitation?

If so, your child will notice it. But we don’t usually radiate light, we just say some words.

Anxiety, tension, concern. Is that what Christ teaches us? Those aren’t my words. I’ve never met a man in my life who would change under pressure.

We see the exact opposite. It is relaxation, but not of morals, i. e. the loosening of a necktie that strangles you, which brings about effortless change. Calm down first, take a little breath, restore your mental balance, feel at ease, make your movements free and choose what you want in

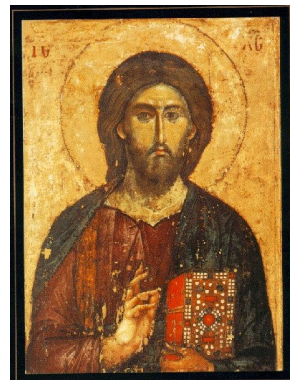
your life. Look at things carefully: it is important that you do not feel that they are exerting pressure on you, even if they seem to be holy.

I mean, for example, I fasted all day yesterday, I didn’t eat anything at all, I didn’t even drink water, but it was my personal choice. It doesn’t mean that I should push another person to do the same. When I see someone who does not want to fast, I need to understand that he is a separate *(continued 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.





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, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, and those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

On Christ in us-Fr. Roman Braga

Christ is in you. Christ is not just some nice guy. He is God, and God is within you. God is in our consciences, in our hearts, in our minds. He is not something material you see outside of yourself. You find God in yourself. You descend in your personality. We are eternal, we never die, the body goes to the cemetery but the conscience, the person, is continually alive.

So when you descend into yourself, your conscious is infinite. And this infinity is the temple of the Living God. Saint Paul says many times that you are the temple of the Living God because God lives within you. You find God when you know yourself, when you know who you are. If you neglect that, when you say, "I don't have time to think about myself," you will never find God, because God is not something material. You do not find him in a specific place. God is always with you if you want Him to be with you.

You find God when you find yourself. "Who am I?" Pay attention to these verses of the Scriptures—"you are the temple of the Living God because God lives within you," and as Jesus said, "remain in Me and I in you. I am the vine and you are the branches," and if you do not remain in me you do not have the sap to feed yourself, and you will dry up. People who complain that they do not feel God are dry branches. They have to remain in Christ and to accept Christ by saying, "Lord, come, I am here. You created me. Open my heart because You created this heart.

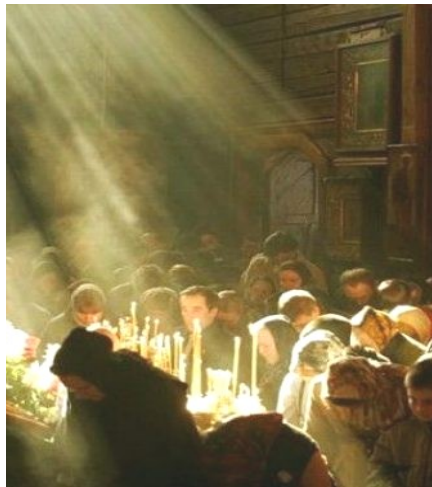
How to warm up to your neighbors, (cont'd from p. 1)

person who is free in his actions, and I need to treat him with great respect. Someone told me, "You're a priest and you talk so freely."

Yes, that's because I wear a cassock that speaks for itself, so I don't want to force anyone. I remember what Mother Gabriela's confessor said to her, "When you go to India, do not be in a hurry to preach. Your vestment speaks for itself. Others do not understand that the woman who came to India to wear a black cassock and forfeit earthly goods, wants a feat, wants asceticism, wants abstinence, wants fasting. Okay! Do it all! Do it all for yourself! The Lord does not send you to become a means of pushing others."

Freedom, respect, enthusiasm, prayer and the radiance of light. This light will warm the other. When it warms that other person, he will remove his outerwear which he wears: his selfishness, his anger, and his resistance. He will say, "I want to be warmed by your light, which exudes warmth, kindness, sweetness, and care."

That's the key! After that, the locals went to Gabriela and asked, "What is your God like, if He makes you hum-



ble and teaches you to respect us?"

For two years, however, Mother Gabriela had not said anything; she had only been helping lepers, cleaning their wounds, feeding the poor, and helping the locals in their daily activities. She was busy doing her Christianity without seeking any benefit.

She didn't expect anyone to give her

something so that she could give them something back. She was doing all those things from the bottom of her heart for Christ's sake, because she loved Him and wanted others to know Him, too.

It goes without saying that I want everyone to go to church, to pray, to fast, to take communion. I can't force them to do all those things, though. I want the other person to see in my eyes that I respect his freedom. Gerondess Gabriela spent two years talking about God without uttering a single word. Can you talk about God like that?

The Indians came to her and said, "What God do you believe in?" She replied, "My God's name is Jesus!" "We go to see Jesus too!" – "But I didn't tell you about him!" – "That's why! That's because we believe that the God who sent you must be the true God! Because there's no other way! Whoever created you that way must be a true God!" – "What do you mean?" – "He created you free! He made you with a broad perspective!"

(Homily on the Publican & Pharisee, cont'd from p.1)

The Pharisee in the parable may have used the word "God," but he was really praying only to Himself.

Anyone who has ever tried to pray in a focused way will understand why he did that. We usually find it extremely difficult to be fully present before the Lord, whether during services or in our private prayers. Profound humility is required to open our hearts to the One Who is infinitely "Holy, Holy, Holy." When even a glimmer of the brilliant light of the Divine Glory begins to shine through the eyes of our souls, the darkness within us becomes quite apparent. The temptation is strong to shift our attention to whatever we think will hide us from that kind of spiritual nakedness. To focus on how good we think we are, especially in comparison with others, is an appealing way of changing the subject as we become ever more blind to the true state of our souls.

The Publican was an easy target of criticism for the Pharisee. Tax collectors were Jews who collected money from their own people to fund the Roman army of occupation. They collected more than was required and lived off the difference. Consequently, the Pharisee believed that he was justified in looking down on someone who was both a traitor and a thief. Ironically, this tax collector would not have disagreed. He knew he was a wretched sinner, and his only apparent virtue was his humble acknowledgement of this true spiritual state. Standing off by himself in the temple, this fellow would "not even lift up his eyes to Heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner.'"

Despite his miserable way of life, the tax collector somehow mustered the spiritual strength to expose his soul to the blinding light of God in prayer from the depths of his heart. He knew that this was not a time for excuses or changing the subject. No, it was time simply to accept the truth. Christ said that the Publican, not the Pharisee, went home justified that day. The difference was not who had done more good deeds or obeyed more laws; it was, instead, who had the humility that is absolutely essential for opening our souls to the healing mercy of Christ. Without such humility, pride will destroy the virtue of everything that we do. With it, there is hope for us all.

In just a few weeks, we will begin the spiritual journey of Great Lent, the most intense period of repentance in

the life of the Church as we prepare to follow our Lord to His Cross and empty tomb. There could be no greater sign of the folly of exalting ourselves and condemning others than the Passion of Christ. He brings salvation to the world in a way completely contrary to prideful self-congratulation that hides from the truth. What could be more humble than for the eternal Son of God to empty Himself, take on the form of a servant, and become obedient to the point of death for our salvation.

It is only by knowing the depths of our brokenness that we will be able to embrace personally the heights of the Lord's humble, suffering love, which is well beyond our full rational comprehension. That is why we need to devote ourselves to prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and other forms of repentance in the weeks ahead. If we do not,

we will likely fail to gain the spiritual clarity of the tax collector, who was aware only of his sin and need for God's mercy. We will never enter into the deep mystery of our salvation if we do not open the eyes of our darkened souls to the light of Christ so that we may see our true state before Him.

The Church calls us to pray daily and with special intensity during Lent. Instead of congratulating ourselves for whatever apparent success may have in doing so, it is better to remember that our struggles in opening our souls to God reflect our weakness and need for strength that we cannot give ourselves. They provide an opportunity to pray

the Jesus Prayer or otherwise simply to turn our attention back to the Lord the best we can with a sense of our need for His mercy. In contrast, the worst thing we could do when struggling in prayer would be to become like the Pharisee who reminded God of his good deeds and condemned the tax collector. It would be better not to pray at all than to do so in such an idolatrous way.

As we begin our preparation for Great Lent this year, we should all be on guard against the temptation of self-exaltation in any form. Our only hope is to participate in Christ's exaltation by uniting ourselves to Him in humble faith. The coming season will provide us with many opportunities to do precisely that. If by the end of Lent, we see ourselves as clearly before God as did the tax collector and ask only for mercy from the depths of our souls, we will be well prepared to follow our Lord to Jerusalem, where He showed, once and for all, how humility leads to exaltation.



Theological and Scientific Theories of Knowledge, by George Mantzarides (Part 4)

Bio-technology, and bio-medicine in particular, have opened new perspectives with beneficial consequences for our health and life. This, in fact, explains the great interest taken in them today. But at the same time they've caused grave doubts regarding the propriety and legitimacy of research into certain fields. The way human embryos are treated, the experiments which are carried out on them, the attempts to create special categories of people and other related efforts are an indiscriminate intrusion into the human person and our life. What is at risk here is not certain interests, nor even human life itself, but our specificity and, in the end, our identity.

There is no reason for Orthodox theology to examine or assess scientific research in itself. But it ought to do so as regards the subject which that research is investigating and the aim it is pursuing. As long as scientific research serves us and our life, it is natural that we should welcome and praise it. But research does not have volition or conscience. And its service to us does not depend on it, but on the goals it sets itself and the intentions of the researchers. The other serious problem which arises here is that researchers are not, by and large, particular people acting autonomously and in all good conscience, but various impersonal organizations with their own aims and goals, which are almost always based on profit or influence.

But beyond that, we know that scientific research does not seek the truth per se. It is not interested in the truth that transcends evanescence and bodily sensations. The criterion for truth on the scientific plane is its applicability and resistance to repudiation. This means that every scientific truth is relative and is recognized as truth only until it can be disproved or supplemented. Science progresses by always using some truth that it formulates. And scientific research looks into the discovery and utilization of this truth.

But useful and conventional truth should not at all be confused with theological truth. Theological truth is absolute and does not even derive from the plane of the created, which is qualified, but from the uncreated which is

absolute. To use Aristotelian terms, we might say that theology is concerned with the invariable, whereas science deals with the variable .

According to Orthodox theology, truth is not revealed by people, but is offered directly by God. People don't create the truth; they welcome it, live it by observing God's commandments, which are 'eternal life.' So we are enlisted into the work of God and become co-workers with Him in repairing and perfecting it. The truth, which, in the end, is identical to God, is not offered as empirical knowledge, but as a personal relationship. The mistake

which has been compounded in the consciousness of Modern and Post-Modern humanity through the absolute value attributed to science is that scientific truth has become the reference for absolute truth which means that we are now indifferent to or completely disdainful of ontological or any supernatural truth.

Scientific research, with the methodological objectivity which is compulsory and a sine qua non for it, easily leads us to disregard the precedence of the person and the value of the person. It easily reduces us to things and alienates us from our inner world, from 'the person hidden in the heart.' And when we succumb to this temptation it is not possible to think and act properly, either regarding oneself or others. We become spiritually moribund and emit the stench of death to our surroundings. We have tangible evidence of this phenomenon today not only in the state of society, but also in the natural environment. The pollution and

destruction which have occurred in the natural environment reflect the pollution and destruction which preceded, in the human mind.

The extension of the methodology of the natural sciences into the whole fabric of all others, not excepting even the social sciences, has opened up a slippery path for science and scientific research. This methodology, though not in itself bad since it serves our needs, marginalizes the really important issues of life, such as love, pain and death. All of these are functions beyond objectivity, because they have to do with people as persons and their relationships with other people and the world.

