

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



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Christ is Risen! Christos Voskrese! Al'masir Qam! Christos Anesti!

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2nd Sunday of Holy Pascha+St. Thomas Sunday

Sunday April 26, 2020



Today we continue to celebrate the glorious resurrection of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ on the third day. He is our Pascha, our Passover, from death to life, for Hades and the grave could not contain the God-Man Who shares with us His victory over death. He has made even the tomb a pathway to the glory of life eternal. As

He said to Martha before He raised Lazarus, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live." (John 11:25)

The Savior was able to rise in glory because He was born, lived, and died with a human body just like ours. When He rose from the dead, He did so as a whole person with a glorified body which still bore the wounds His crucifixion. Thomas doubted the news of the resurrection because he was not present when the Risen Lord first appeared to the disciples and said that he would not believe unless he saw and touched His wounds. When the Savior appeared again eight days later, He told Thomas to do precisely that. Thomas responded by recognizing Him as "My Lord and my God!"

This exchange with Thomas reminds
(continued p. 3)

Belief must be Lived, by Fr. John Abdallah

If we consult a Bible concordance for the words "belief" and "faith", we find many pages of Biblical references. So very much has been said in the Scriptures and by the Fathers, yet these words are still misused and misunderstood. In the Western Churches, debates on "faith alone", or "faith and works", have caused division and strife.

Today, in our consumer-oriented society, as we look at the Scriptures, we tend to want to know

what is promised, what we deserve, and what we can get from our faith and belief. Certainly, "all things are possible to him who believes"; but only from searching the whole of the Scriptures and the mind of the Church, can we come to understand what is revealed to us by God.

Our understanding of faith cannot be limited to a belief in the existence of God. Satan knows that God is God, the demons recognized and knew Jesus Christ, and many

devil-worshippers recognize, yet wish to deny, what God reveals to us.

One aspect of faith is trust: to trust that God will take care of all that we can not; to trust that God in His Wisdom will bring us all to salvation. Nevertheless, knowing about God and trusting in His might is still not enough. We are called to believe and to trust, and this belief leads us to experience God in the Church that He established, guides, and lives
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*** St. Thomas Sunday ***

* 2nd Sunday of Holy Pascha *

Epistle: Acts 5: 15-20

Gospel: John 20: 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.

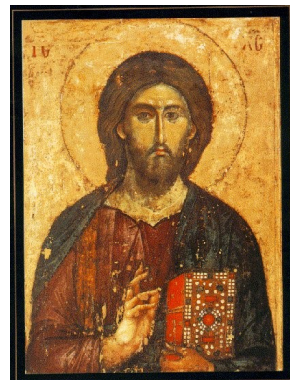
We worship God in Trinity - Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

We are dedicated to 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.*

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, Evan, Ryan, Kathleen, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Bonnalee, Vicky, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Words of Wisdom by Metropolitan Seraphim-New Martyr of Russia

We are forgiven, we are saved, we are redeemed. Christ is Risen! These words say everything: they are the foundation of our faith, hope, and love; of our Christian life; of all our wisdom and enlightenment; of the Holy Church, heartfelt prayer, and our entire future. These words destroy all human calamity, death, and evil; they give

life, blessedness, and freedom! What miraculous power! Can one grow tired of repeating them? Christ is Risen! Can we ever have enough of hearing them? Christ is Risen!

Likewise, the reply "Truly He is Risen!" alone does not demonstrate that we have the Resurrection of Christ in us and in our hearts. It is confirmed by joy in the Lord and demonstrated by love for Christ. Whoever loves, remembers God's love and has no doubt in it. But remember, beloved brothers and sisters, how in your recent confession you repented for sometimes murmuring against God and for doubting His mercy; remember how you accused the Lord for your undeserved sorrows and unbearable sufferings; and even for the unwillingness to hear your prayers! Do you recognize that He is a God of love and mercy, and not of punishment? If you have indeed recognized this truth, then you have undoubtedly understood God in His designs and loved the Lord with a pure heart. Then Christ is risen in you, and you can now consciously reply to the joyful Christian greeting "Christ is Risen!"

Belief must be Lived, (cont'd from p. 1)

within. Our God "rests in His Saints", and abides in His Church.

"I believe", we say in the Creed, "in the Father ... the Son ... the Holy Spirit and the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church." When establishing the Holy Church, Christ promised to send to His Disciples the Holy Spirit. Greater miracles than were performed by Christ would be performed by the Church of God, greater not in quality, but rather in time and magnitude. Christ, who heads His Church, will by the grace of the Holy Spirit, reach the whole of His Creation. What is impossible to man, is possible to God, and if all of our lives can be in the Holy Church of God, and if we allow God to live or rest within us, then all things are possible to us.

Belief is not belief unless it is lived. When we believe, we accept and live what God has revealed. You, as leaders and members of the community of God, with God as your head, are challenged by God to come to know what is revealed by living, learning,

praying and working within the Church. This is not the Church as an organization, but the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church of Christ as revealed to us by God; the Church of Christ, with Christ as the head, not us. We who are baptized into Christ, it is we who are challenged.

Our belief must be belief in what is true. Truth is not relative, but is what is. God is the Lord and has revealed Himself to us. We who claim to be God's people, who are the must accept our calling to preach and to act as His Church. We must spread the word of God, since this is the commission given by God to those who believe.

All is possible to those who believe within God, because no power can stand against God. But God alone is all-powerful. Belief will not exempt us from suffering. It will not make us popular, nor will it make our earthly life easy. At times, the Orthodox believers of today will be, as many were in the past, called to witness Christ by martyrdom or sufferings. But belief

in God gives us power. Belief in God gives us life in God Himself.

God has revealed Himself to His people. His people have lived within God for over 6,000 years. We are His people, and as such we must continue to live with God as our head. We know where we are coming from and where we are going, because God reveals Himself through His Church. Our Church must not be governed by our vote or our will, but by our obedience to God as revealed by the Scriptures and the Holy Fathers and Mothers.

We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. All things will take place, by the grace of God, through those who believe, because all things are possible.



us of the profound importance of Christ's bodily resurrection to the Christian faith. Indeed, it is impossible to give a plausible account of the origins of the Christianity apart from the reality of the Lord's rising from the dead. He certainly died on the Cross, as Roman centurions were professional executioners who knew what they were doing and would lose their own lives if they let a victim escape. The disciples fled in fear at the Lord's arrest with Peter, the head disciple, denying Him three times. The women showed greater love and courage by going to the tomb in order to anoint Christ's dead body.

It is clear, however, that they all acted in response to His death and showed no hope of His resurrection. Remember that the idea that someone would rise from the dead was as outrageous, if not more so, in that time and place than it is in ours. No one associated being the Messiah with dying on a Cross and resurrecting. Since the apostles later died as witnesses to their belief in the Lord's rising, it is absurd to say that they had concocted the story. Countless generations of martyrs have likewise made the ultimate testimony to the Lord's victory over death with a strength and peace that are not of this world.

As St. Paul taught, "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is worthless, and so is your faith." (1 Cor. 15:14) The Savior proclaimed His divinity by forgiving sins and saying that He and the Father are one (John 10:30) and that "before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58) The high priest asked Him at His arrest, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Christ responded, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Mark 14: 61-62)

The Savior foretold His death and resurrection many times, though the disciples never got the point. If One Who claimed to be God was wrong in predicting His resurrection and simply decayed in the tomb like anyone else who died, the Christian faith would never have appeared. There would be no Church and no reason for anyone to remember Jesus Christ as anything but a failed Messiah with grandiose delusions about being divine.

Our faith is not in warm feelings or sentimental memories about someone who lived a long time ago. It is not in a vague notion of a dead person being with us in spirit or in the abiding relevance of ancient moral teachings for our lives. To proclaim that "Christ is Risen!" is to confess the reality of the God-Man's victory over death as whole Person, of His bodily resurrection which is our

hope for "the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come," as we confess in the Nicene Creed. To quote Saint Paul again, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied." (1 Cor. 15: 17-19) If Christ did not rise from the dead, then St. Paul was a fool for dying out of faithfulness to Him. He became a Christian only after the Risen Lord miraculously appeared to Him in blinding light on the road to Damascus. It is impossible to make sense of this Pharisee who zealously persecuted Christians becoming one without belief in the reality of the Savior's resurrection.

Hope for eternal life is not reserved only for the coming fullness of the Kingdom, but also concerns how we live in the world as we know it with our bodies and in relation to others. Having been empowered by the Risen Lord through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the apostles ministered by healing the suffering bodies of the sick as they bore witness to the restoration of the whole human person through His resurrection. Even the pagan critics of the early Christians marveled at how they risked their lives to care for people with contagious diseases during plagues. They rescued infants abandoned by their parents to death, slavery, or other terrible fates, which was a common practice among the Romans to dispose of children they did not want to raise.

In a time when desperately poor people had no more dignity than so much garbage left on the side of the road, the early Christians shared their resources sacrificially with them. In a culture where a master could abuse the body of a slave literally however he chose, the Church knew that in Christ "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28)

Because "Christ is Risen!," we must unite ourselves to Him in holiness in every dimension of our being, including especially how we live in our bodies. The more that we do so, the more that we will learn to see our neighbors, no matter who they are or what they believe, as persons called to find the fullness of their humanity in Him every bit as much as we are. Let us not, then, simply sing Christ's resurrection, but become living icons of the holy joy He shares with us through His risen and glorified Body.

Christ is Risen. Al'masir Qam. Christos Voskrese.



The Life of St. George the Great Martyr-Patron of our Church (Feast day April 23)

This great and wonderful athlete of Christ was the son of a wealthy and high-ranking Cappadocian family. George having lost his father at the age of ten, his mother Polychronia, who had become a Christian without her husband's knowledge, returned to Palestine, her homeland, and brought up her son in the evangelical virtues. Handsome, intelligent and refined in manner, George embarked on a military career at the age of eighteen. He pleased his superiors and was quickly promoted to the rank of tribune in the imperial guard, and then, it would appear, to that of prefect.

Returning to Cappadocia after a victorious campaign and passing through the region of Attalia in Pamphylia, he freed the king's daughter, who had been left at the mercy of a dangerous dragon, and killed the beast with a divine strength that he was given by his faith. Marveling at this demonstration of the strength given by Christ to His faithful ones against the forces of evil, the local pagans were all converted to Christianity.

At the time of the Great Persecution unleashed by Diocletian (c. 304), when the Emperor had summoned all the Eastern governors to Nicomedia to make them privy to his decrees against the Christians, Saint George, sensing that the moment had come for him to make public confession of Christ, gave all his goods away to the poor, freed his slaves and went to court.

He appeared in the midst of the assembly and reproached the sovereign for unjustly shedding the innocent blood of Christians. Diocletian in stupefaction ordered his second-in-command Magnentius to interrogate this insolent young man about his faith. George replied that it was because he believed in Christ the true God that he had come without fear to reproach them. Having recovered from his amazement, the Emperor, fearing a tumult among those present, offered to heap honors on the Saint on condition that he sacrifice to the gods of the Empire. George replied: "Your reign will become corrupt and will quickly disappear at no gain to you; but those who offer a sacrifice of praise to the King of Heaven will reign with Him for all eternity!"

At the sovereign's orders, the guards beat the Saint on the stomach with their lances. His blood flowed down but, at the first blows, their weapons became twisted as though they were made of some soft material. Christ's

soldier was then thrown into prison with a heavy stone on his breast. The next day, he appeared once more before the tyrant and showed the same firmness. They therefore tied him to a wheel suspended over sharp instruments, so that, when the wheel was turned, the Saint's body would gradually be cut to pieces. Overcoming the pain with his overflowing love for God, Saint George unceasingly gave thanks to God. A voice was then heard from heaven, saying: "Fear nothing, George; I am with you!" And a white clad angel more resplendent than the sun descended to loose him and heal his wounds.

When he appeared safe and sound before the Emperor, two officers of the guard, Anatolius and Protoleon, confessed Christ with loud voices. They were beheaded at once. The Empress Alexandra (April 21) also declared herself to be a Christian, but Magnentius constrained her to withdraw to the palace. They then threw the Saint into a ditch filled with quicklime; but, like the Three Young men in the Babylonian furnace, he emerged unharmed after three days, greeted by the crowd with the cry, "Great is George's God!"

The Emperor, still remaining insensible before all these demonstrations of Christ's power, ordered that the martyr be forced to walk in shoes studded with red-hot nails. "Run, George, towards the object of our desire!" said the Saint, invoking the Lord's help. And once again he presented himself, whole and radiant with grace, before the

tyrant. Numerous acts of torture followed, but none of them convinced St. George to renounce his faith in Christ.

As he approached the executioner, he gave thanks to God for His benefits, and, begging His help for all those who would trustingly invoke his intercession throughout the centuries, bent his neck under the sword and went to carry off the trophies of eternal glory.

Carrying out the Saint's desire, his servant took his precious relics back to his country, to Lydda in Palestine, where innumerable miracles were worked in the great church that was built in his honor.

The veneration of Saint George continues throughout the Christian world, both East and West. He was chosen to be the protector of countries like Georgia and England; thousands of churches have been dedicated to him and every Christian soul sees in him the incarnation of the virtues of valor, patience in affliction and trust in the help of grace that Christ gives freely to all who call upon His name.

