

# 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!*

Volume 9 Issue 413

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Holy Pascha+ Man Born Blind

Sunday, May 24, 2020



It is usually a good idea to follow the old saying, "Look before you leap." We can get into a lot of trouble by acting before we have a good understanding of our circumstances and of what is likely to come from our actions. The blind man in today's gospel reading, however, was in a very different situation. Because of blindness, he

could not look at all.

Christ acted on him by putting clay on his eyes and telling him to wash in the pool of Siloam. This fellow did not know who the Lord was, but because his sight was restored after he obeyed that command, the man said that He was a prophet. It is not until the end of the passage that the Savior revealed Himself as the Son of God; then the man believed and worshiped Him. At that point, the eye of the man's soul was opened to know Christ in His divine glory.

The Blind Man in today's Gospel was focused on than the day-to-day realities of their lives when the light of Christ came upon him. It was surely just another Sabbath day for the blind man when the Savior's healing restored His sight in such a miraculous fashion that he found himself in the

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\*\*\* Man Born Blind \*\*\*

\* St. Symeon the Stylite of Syria \*

Epistle: Acts: 16: 16-34

Gospel: John: 9: 1-38

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.

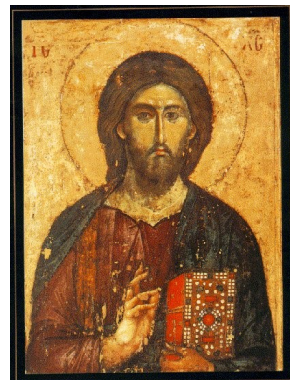
We are dedicated to living out Christ's commandment to, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, ad with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.*

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.



## The Call to Compassion and Mercy, by Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfejev)

"Very often we ask God questions, and it seems to us that the Lord either does not answer us at all, or does not answer the way we expect it from Him. Often it seems to us that we ask God for one thing, and He sends another. And often we, communicating with God, do not understand what He wants to tell us.

During these Paschal days, when we live in very special conditions and many of us are deprived of the opportunity to come to the church, to

partake of the Holy Mysteries of Christ, we ask God, "Lord! What do you want to tell us with all of this?"

Undoubtedly, God wants to tell us something: He would not have allowed it for us to be left without a church, without the Eucharist, if He did not want to tell us something through it. The Lord wants to say something to each of us. Let each of us now ask ourselves: what happened in my life that caused that I am now de-

prived of the church of God, of Holy Communion, of an opportunity to attend the Liturgy and to pray with my friends and relatives?

Perhaps, through this trial, the Lord reminds someone of the fragility of human life, and that our life depends on God. The Lord says, "Do not rely on your strength, do not think that you will be fine without My help. Turn to Me more often, ask Me, and even if it seems to you that I will

*(continued p.2)*



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.

In Times of Trouble like this:

In God's eyes, I'm sure He sees greatness in the countless unknown people who are quietly reaching out to their elderly neighbors, to those who are alone and afraid, to those who are afflicted and struggling, and who are offering to shop for them, check in on them, give them hope in humankind, and do whatever small act of love they can to let others know they are not alone, that

we are in this together! In God's eyes, I'm sure He sees greatness in all the people who are praying fervently day and night, who are sincerely and continuously asking for God's mercy and grace, pleading for His comfort and strength, seeking His peace to come upon our broken and lost world, upon all those who are suffering deeply from this pandemic!

Hopefully these days of crisis and uncertainty are helping us reevaluate and understand greatness from a new perspective. True greatness has little to do with money, fame, or power, it has little to do with one's athletic accomplishments, with one's celebrity, or with whatever wealth and positions of privilege we hold.

Remember, what the world often considers great, God looks upon as foolishness. Just think about the Parable of the Rich Fool who thought he was someone special to retire early with plenty of money to enjoy a comfortable old age. God calls him a fool for his egocentric and selfish worldview. Worldly greatness is often foolishness to God!

Miracle, Hope and Love, (cont'd from p. 1)

not answer, I will always come to your aid."

If we listen to what the Lord tells us through these difficult, mournful, complex and extraordinary circumstances of our lives, each of us will certainly hear His answer. Therefore, let us patiently wait for the opportunities to open up — and I hope that they will open up soon — for us to get together again at the church, to pray together and to partake of the Holy Mysteries of Christ." "Let us pray for those who are now suffering from the disease.

Today we have offered prayers for the clergy and laity who are ill, who are in difficult circumstances. There are those who need special prayers, such as Archpriest Alexander Shargunov, Rector of St. Nicholas Church, his mother Anna, and Archpriest Dimitry Smirnov, who is suffering heavily from this disease. These and many others that we have remembered today. Let us pray earnestly for them, because our prayers do not remain unheard.

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Worshipping God means that you worship nothing apart from Him. But also, according to the words of the Lord Christ, there are two inseparable commandments that cannot be fulfilled one without the other, and unless they are practiced, this worship is not sound: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40).

We do not need to be reminded the neighbor is not only our neighbor in the flesh, but every person we encounter in our daily life. Our neighbors are not only those who share our religion, our nation, our color, our race or our sex... Our neighbor is every person created by God in His image and likeness. The quality of being a neighbor increases the more this person needs us.

Worshipping God, then, first of all requires you to love your fellow man, not only in word but in deed. This means that you prefer nothing over him, not even your money. For this reason Christ indicated that the sole impediment preventing someone from loving his fellow man is his idolatrous attachment to his money. Christ made Himself equal to the needy

when He said, "For I was hungry, and you gave Me food... I was a stranger and you took Me in" (cf. Matthew 25:31-46). Truly loving God requires you to love the hungry and comfort those in need.



of a controversy so fierce that he was cast out of the synagogue simply for having a positive view of the Lord Who had healed him. He was shocked and disoriented by these events. The predictable life he had known was over and he found himself in unfamiliar, distributing circumstances. He asked questions as he came to faith. The formerly blind man asked Who the Son of God was so that he could believe in Him. This was not a theoretical question, but truly practical matters of life and death.

As we prepare to conclude our celebration of Pascha in the coming week, we must remember that the Savior's resurrection is neither a theological concept nor a reward that we receive for being religious people. The good news that "Christ is Risen!" is even more extraordinary than a man blind from birth gaining his sight. But in order to open our eyes to the shocking brilliance of the empty tomb, we need to ponder the examples of human beings who suddenly found themselves, through no fault or credit of their own, in the life-changing circumstance of encountering Jesus Christ. The formerly blind man had originally thought that Christ was a prophet who had worked a great miracle of healing. The Savior changed his life radically and in ways that he could neither predict nor control.

We will be guilty of trying to make God in our own image if we think we can calculate with precision why and how the brilliant light of the resurrection shines in particular ways in our world of darkness. Remember the conversion of St. Paul, who thought that his miraculous conversion, as "the chief of sinners," was merely a sign that "Christ Jesus might display His immense patience as an example for those who would believe in Him and receive eternal life." (1 Tim. 1:15-16) In other words, if the Lord could save Paul, then there is hope for us all. That was a very modest and humble affirmation on his part.

When Christ was asked whose sin was responsible for the man being born blind, He answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him. I must work the works of Him Who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." If we spend our time and en-

ergy obsessing about the effects of our sins or those of others, we will end up blindly focusing on ourselves and other people in a way that will only enslave us further to spiritual darkness.

Our Risen Lord is the Light of the world. He has illumined even the tomb, making it an entrance into the glory of His eternal life. Pascha teaches us that our participation by grace in the joy of His resurrection is no more a matter of what we deserve or even understand than was the healing of the blind man or the strange set of circumstances that led to the conversion of the jailer. Their stories are not primarily about them as particular people, but about how our Lord restored them to the sublime dignity of those who share in His life by grace.

The blind man did not respond with questions and reservations driven by fear about the future course of his life. He simply obeyed, washed, and saw, then he moved forward to encounter challenges he could never have anticipated. We must learn from his example not to get so caught up in our own thoughts, emotions, worries, and fears that we distract ourselves from doing what it takes to open the eyes of our souls more fully to the brilliant light of Christ. The question, "What must I do to be saved?" is not a one-time question with an abstract answer, but concerns the ongoing journey of becoming radiant with the divine energies of our Lord as we become more like Him in holiness. We must continuously discern the answer to that question through our full

participation in the sacramental and ascetical life of the Church as we enter more fully into the holy mystery of our salvation and turn away from habits of thought, word, and deed that tempt us to choose death over life. As faithful who have been illumined through the washing of Baptism, we must persist in turning away from the darkness in our souls as we embrace the light of the resurrection more fully.

Our Risen Lord has conquered Hades, death, and the tomb, and now nothing can keep us from shining with the brilliant light of holiness other than our own choice to persist in blindness. Like the man in today's readings, let us urgently embrace the Savior as we disorient ourselves from the darkness and turn toward the Light of the world, for Christ is Risen!



## St. Symeon the Stylite of Syria

Saint Simeon the Stylite was born in the year 521 in Antioch, Syria of pious parents John and Martha. From her youth Saint Martha prepared herself for a life of virginity and longed for monasticism, but her parents insisted that she marry John. After ardent prayer in a church dedicated to Saint John the Forerunner, the future nun was directed in a vision to submit to the will of her parents and enter into marriage.

As a married woman, Saint Martha strove to please God and her husband in everything. She often prayed for a baby and promised to dedicate him to the service of God. Saint John the Forerunner revealed to Martha that she would have a son who would serve God. When the infant was born, he was named Simeon and baptized at two years of age.

When Simeon was 6 years old, an earthquake occurred in the city of Antioch, in which his father perished. Simeon was in church at the time of the earthquake. Leaving the church, he became lost and spent seven days sheltered by a pious woman. Saint John the Baptist again appeared to Saint Martha, and indicated where to find the lost boy. The saint's mother found her lost son, and moved to the outskirts of Antioch after the earthquake. Already during his childhood the Lord Jesus Christ appeared several times to Saint Simeon, foretelling his future exploits and the reward for them.

The 6 year old Simeon went into the wilderness, where he lived in complete isolation. During this time a light-bearing angel guarded and fed him. Finally, he arrived at a monastery, headed by Abba John, who lived in asceticism upon a pillar. He accepted the boy with love.

After a time, Saint Simeon asked the Elder John to permit him also to struggle upon a pillar. A new pillar was raised by the brethren of the monastery with the blessing of the abbot near his pillar. Having completed the initiation of the seven-year-old boy into monasticism, Abba John placed him upon this pillar. The young ascetic, strengthened by the Lord, quickly grew spiritually, in his efforts surpassing even his experienced instructor. For his efforts, Saint Simeon received from God the gift of healing.

The fame of the young monk's deeds began to spread beyond the bounds of the monastery. Monks and laypeo-

ple began to come to him from various places, desiring to hear his counsel and receive healing from their infirmities. When he was eleven, Simeon decided to pursue asceticism upon a higher pillar, the top of which was forty feet from the ground. The bishops of Antioch and Seleucia came to the place of the monk's endeavors, and ordained him as a deacon. Then they permitted him to ascend the new pillar, on which Saint Simeon labored for eight years.

Saint Simeon prayed ardently for the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit came upon him in the form of a blazing light, filling the ascetic with divine wisdom. Along with oral instructions, Saint Simeon wrote letters about repentance, monasticism, about the Incarnation of Christ, and about the future Judgment.

From the rising of the sun until mid-afternoon he read books and copied Holy Scripture. Then he rose and prayed all night. When the new day began, he rested somewhat, then began his usual Rule of prayer.

Saint Simeon concluded his efforts on the second column, and by God's dispensation, settled upon the Wonderful Mountain, having become an experienced Elder to the monks in his monastery. The ascent to Wonderful Mountain was marked by a vision of the Lord, standing atop a column. Saint Simeon continued his efforts at this place where he saw the Lord, at first upon a stone, and then upon a pillar.

Future events were revealed to Saint Simeon established a monastery on Wonderful Mountain, where the sick people he healed built a church in gratitude for the

mercy shown them. The saint prayed for a spring of water for the needs of the monastery, and once during a shortage of grain, the granaries of the monastery were filled with wheat by his prayers.

In the year 560 the holy ascetic was ordained to the priesthood by Dionysius, Bishop of Seleucia. At age seventy-five Saint Simeon was warned by the Lord of his impending end. He summoned the brethren of the monastery, instructed them in a farewell talk, and peacefully fell asleep in the Lord on May 24, 596, having toiled as a Stylite for sixty-eight years.

After death, the saint worked miracles just as he had when alive. He healed the blind, the lame and the leprous, saving many from wild beasts, casting out devils and raising the dead.

