

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!



Volume 9 Issue 416

1st Sunday after Pentecost-All Saints

Sunday, June 14, 2020



Today's reading from Hebrews reminds us of the choir of saints-the great cloud of witnesses" who inspire us to "lay aside every weight" and to "run with perseverance the race that is set before us" as we look to the Lord "Jesus, the pioneer and perfection of our faith." In other words, the saints are living witnesses of Christ's healing

of the human person in the divine image and likeness. Instead of somehow distracting us, they inspire us to a life of holiness, for they show that it is possible to share so fully in the life of our Lord that we become radiant with His gracious divine energies.

That is true of the saints of the Old Testament, who had not yet received the fullness of God's promise in the coming of the Messiah, and it is all the more the case for those who have borne witness to Christ across the centuries by refusing to deny Him even to point of death. The root meaning of the word "martyr" is witness, and there is no more powerful way to give testimony to the truth of our Lord's victory over death than to offer up one's life out of faithfulness to Him.

From the first century to the present day, countless people have endured
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*** 1st Sunday after Pentecost ***

*** All Saints of the Church ***

Epistle: Hebrews 11:33-12:2

Gospel: Matthew 10:32-33, 37-38; 19:27-30

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.*

What is Prayer of the Intellect and the Heart, by Archimandrite Georgios

Remembrance of God demonstrates communion with Him and is therefore like prayer. Striving to invoke the holy Name of Christ continuously, through the prayer 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me', is a constant renewal within us of the remembrance of God and communion with Him.

This is why Saint Paul wrote to the Thessalonians that they should 'Pray without ceasing'. Through the remembrance of God and pray-

er, we reveal the true nobility of our nature, which stands at the threshold between the visible and invisible worlds and is that of a 'deified animal' [Saint Gregory the Theologian, Oration 38.11. This nature transcends physical necessity, expands our existence as far as God and has a sense of freedom from those things which hold us prisoner on earth.

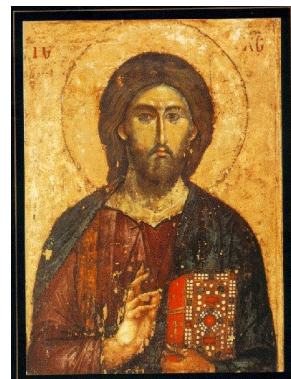
For prayer to be real, however, it must involve the whole person, not

only the lips, or the intellect or the heart. Perfect prayer is of the heart and intellect simultaneously. The intellect prays through the heart, which is the center of existence. In other words, the whole person prays from their depths and their center, thus fulfilling the Lord's injunction: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your soul and with all your heart and with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbor as
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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, Evan, Ryan, Kathleen, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Bonnalee, Vicky, Corella, Gail, Mike, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Words from St. Luke the Physician

1. Love the Cross of Christ, and love Jesus who was crucified on it. The more often and the more deeply you ponder on the Cross of Christ and His Passion, the clearer, better, and softer your heart will become. These thoughts will drive away all that is black and bad, which hinders the Spirit of God from establishing his dwelling in you.

2. All love is blessed, but there is the initial, the lowest kind of love, and we need to climb up from it to a much higher level of love for all people, for all the poor and the suffering. We have to rise up from it to the third degree of love – the divine love, the love of God Himself.

3. People who are truly pious are always deeply focused, self-absorbed, and look into their hearts. The chatty mouths, however, not only keep talking gibberish, but also spew the adders’ poison (Psalm 140:3), the venomous words of condemnation, slander, gossip, and disgusting curses. Meanwhile, the Lord Jesus Christ strictly forbade any swear words, even the least rude...

4. You should love the Lord with all your heart. You should be afraid of the slightest of your sins. You should strive to be like those holy ascetics who had no grave sins but spent their entire lives in penitence.

5. The mercy of God is limitless. It is immeasurably greater than an infinite ocean. It is in this divine mercy that one can easily drown all his mortal sins if he repents with all his heart.

What is Prayer of Intellect and the Heart, (cont’d from p. 1)

yourself’. The whole person is offered to God.

For this prayer we use the Jesus Prayer: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me’, which, with its short invocation, helps the mind to concentrate and the intellect to descend into the heart.

From their own experience, the holy Fathers wrote about the method and manner of this prayer. Some of the works by these holy Fathers are collected in the Philokalia [‘love for the beautiful’], a most apt name, since through prayer of the intellect and the heart, the faithful are united with God and are seen by Him, Who is most resplendent, supreme beauty. Since there’s a danger of confusion between prayer of the heart and the various forms of meditation and prayer practiced in Eastern religions, I think certain issues should be clarified.

1. Not only the Jesus Prayer, but every prayer of the Church, such as the fundamental, God-given Lord’s Prayer, the ‘Our Father’, should come

from the depths of our being, that is from the heart and the intellect.

2. For us Orthodox, acquisition of the gift of unceasing prayer of the intellect and the heart isn’t, in the main, a matter of method and technique, but has more to do with heartfelt contrition, that is a heart which repents, suffers over its sins and has become humble. Without such a heart, no method or prayer technique, such as the control of inhalation and exhalation, will bring true prayer.

3. Prayer of the heart and the intellect depends on our participation in the life of the Church, in its sacraments, in observance of God’s commandments and obedience to a spiritual guide. In other words, it’s not an individualistic/ personal approach to God. Through the Church, humble Christians receive God’s Grace and this Grace activates true prayer within them- naturally with their cooperation and consent.

People today are in particular need of prayer to prevent their being swallowed up by the modern, profoundly

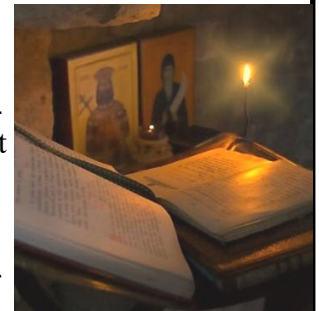
materialistic way of life. They’re in danger of losing sight of their divine provenance, that is the fact that we have a divine point of departure and a divine destination.

We also need prayer to retain our inner unity, balance and peace amid the terrible fragmentation of the modern world, its extroversion and lack of balance, so that, with the continuous sense of God’s presence and providence in our life, we don’t worry, despair and experience the world as a meaningless vacuum.

With the continuous invocation of the most sweet and holy Name of

Christ, we’ll feel Him in our heart, we’ll

avoid sin and we’ll cultivate feelings of love towards God and other people. We ourselves will become peaceful and our peace will spread to others around us.



death rather than deny their Savior. He said, "Many that are first will be last, and the last first." And who appears lower in the eyes of the world than those who abandon everything—family, reputation, possessions, and even life itself—out of faithfulness to One Who was rejected and condemned?

We surely do not know the names of all those who have made the ultimate witness for Christ to the point of shedding their own blood. Nonetheless, we commemorate them today together with all who have become beautiful living icons illumined with the divine glory like an iron left in a roaring fire. By the power of the Holy Spirit, it is possible for everyone created in God's image and likeness to become a saint, to participate personally in Christ's healing and restoration of the human person. Indeed, that is what it means to become truly human, for He breathed life into us from the dust of the earth in order that we might become perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.

Such perfection is an infinite goal and we should not think in terms of meeting some objective standard, but of sharing ever more fully in the life of Christ as the distinctive persons He created us to be. He calls us all to acknowledge Him before others. If we do so, He will acknowledge us before His Father. But if we deny Him, He will deny us. We acknowledge our crucified, risen, and ascended Savior when we take up our crosses and follow Him, which means putting faithfulness to Him above all else. Even those we love most in this life, such as our family members, cannot conquer death or heal our souls. If we look to other people for fulfillment in life, we will make them and ourselves miserable.

In a world that encourages us to seek wealth and power as standards of success, we must recognize that obedience to the Savior's call to acknowledge Him by taking up our crosses will never make us first in its eyes. He certainly took the place of the last when He ascended the Cross as One condemned as an irreligious blasphemer by the leaders of the Jewish authorities. Across the centuries, martyrs have endured the worst forms of torture

and abuse before literally losing their lives out of fidelity to Him. They became, and in some places today continue to become, the very last in the world as we know it in order to wear the crowns of the heavenly kingdom.

We must regain the ability to be awed by their profound witness. These are people who loved their families and children every bit as much as we do. They enjoyed the normal blessings of life and likely had the same hopes and dreams for contentment in future years as we do. But when the only way that they could continue pursuing conventional life goals was by denying the Savior and worshiping a false god of whatever kind, they steadfastly refused. The Lord was with them, enabling them to remain faithful

when it was well beyond normal human strength to bear up under the worst forms of torture and abuse, even to the point of death.

They made the ultimate witness to Christ not simply because they had a lot of will power and a high pain tolerance, but because they opened themselves to Him by the power of the Holy Spirit from the depths of their hearts. That is not a matter of magic or a fit of emotion, but of uniting ourselves to Christ in humble faith and repentance such that His life becomes present in ours. If we are truly in Him, then we will take up our crosses in faithfulness to the One Who ascended the Cross for our salvation.

If we wonder what cross we need to take up in order to acknowledge Him before others, a necessary place to start is with loving our ene-

mies. St. Silouan the Athonite saw the love of enemies as a clear sign of the healing presence of the Holy Spirit in one's life. He taught that when the soul "grows humble, the Lord gives her His grace, and then she prays for her enemies as for herself, and sheds scalding tears for the whole world." We must learn humility in order to pray for our enemies because of the strong temptation to self-righteous judgment.

Christ came not to destroy sinners, but to save them. As we commemorate all the saints who have borne witness to Christ, let us gain the strength to follow their righteous example by embracing the path of humble forgiveness



All Saints-The Great Cloud of Witnesses

The current feast of All Saints came to prominence in the 9th-century, under the patronage of Byzantine ruler Leo the Wise. Upon the death of the emperor's devout wife, Theophano, he wanted to build a church named in her honor, but was forbidden from doing so because Theophano was not a canonized saint. Instead, Leo dedicated the church to "all saints", therefore including the pious Theophano among their number. There was already a day dedicated to the Christian martyrs. The patronal day for Leo's All Saints church became this day, and the celebrations expanded to commemorate not just the martyrs, but all righteous Christians who were glorified in Heaven. Theophano, as it happens, eventually was counted among the Saints, and her feast day is the 16th of December.

The icons for this feast developed from the 9th-century onwards, and do not vary much. The setting of the icon is Paradise, identifiable by the abundance of trees and shrubery. In the bottom-left of the icon is Abraham holding a righteous soul to his chest, which also identifies the place as Paradise: the Bosom of Abraham is a name given to the place where the righteous dead rest until Judgement Day (Lk 16:19-31). To the right of the icon is Jacob, holding the "Twelve Tribes" in a cloth, whilst in the center is Dismas the penitent thief who was told by Christ on the cross that "*this day you will be with me in paradise*" (Lk 23:39-43). These figures at the bottom of the icon can be seen to represent the saints of the "old testament", before Christ's Resurrection.

Central to the icon is the great "cloud of witnesses" described by St Paul in his letter to the Hebrews (11:33-12:2). The Saints are gathered around Christ, Who is seated in glory on a rainbow. Beneath Him is the Throne of Preparation, before which Adam and Eve prostrate themselves, whilst the Cross is also present (sometimes supported by Ss Helena and Constantine). These are all images present in the Last Judgment. The Saints themselves are gathered into ranks according to their "type": martyrs with martyrs, ascetics with ascetics, holy fathers with holy fathers, Apostles with Apostles and so on. Some of the Saints are usually recognizable, but the idea is always that the number of Saints present is beyond counting, as was beheld by the Apostle John in the book of Revelation 7: 9-11

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude

which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,

The "four living creatures" can be seen in the icon, along with the various kinds of angels. The resemblance between the iconography of All Saints and the vision from Revelation is another clear reference to the Last Judgment. The Christian cannot escape such constant reminders of the need for repentance, even in triumphal

icons like All Saints. Often in the top corners of the icon are images of King David the Psalmist, and King Solomon. The psalmist writes "But to me, exceedingly honorable are Thy friends, O Lord" (Ps. 138:16), poetically describing one reason for honoring them with a feast-day. The writings of King Solomon are used for two of the readings for the feast of All Saints.

Of the Saints, the wise king says: "But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them... In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble;" and "the righteous live for ever, and their reward is with the Lord; the Most High takes care of them." Any of these verses could describe the scene observed by the two prophet-kings in the icon.

Surrounding the multitude of Saints is a mandorla of light. This

shows the communion of Saints: communion with each other and with God. The holy fathers describe how the Saints in heaven can hear our prayers through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Modern fathers like Silouan the Athonite and Theophan the Recluse explain especially well how the Holy Spirit envelops the Saints and allows them through grace to share the percipience of God in hearing the multitude of our feeble prayers. The cloud of light surrounding the angels, saints, and Christ not only show the unity of the saints with God, but the true depth of communion and shared conscience: real theosis. All Saints icon shows a circular mandorla of light surrounding the ranks of saints and angels around the throne of God. The circle is a perfect shape and does not look "unfinished", yet the potential is there for the circle to grow larger.

