

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 420

5th Sunday after Pentecost-Christ heals the Demoniacs

Sunday, July 12, 2020



We live in a time in which many people feel lonely and isolated, even if they are around others on a regular basis at home, work, and other settings. Sometimes that is because we hold ourselves back emotionally from the possibility of being rejected or harmed. Such separation is a symptom of the estrangement from God and

one another which Jesus Christ came to heal.

The demon-possessed men in today's gospel reading represent Gentiles who were enslaved to the worship of idols and false gods. Their deliverance shows that Christ's salvation is for all people, including those separated from others by the power of evil in their lives. When He set them free from their miserable isolation, the Lord required nothing of them in advance; instead, He graciously liberated them from the degrading forces of evil and restored them to a truly human existence.

Here we see an implication of St. Paul's instruction to the Romans, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to all who believe." At the very heart of our faith is not a requirement for meeting an objective standard
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A Brief Guide to the Psalms-Part 3

Also lost in translation are *acrostic* poems such as Psalm 118. This Psalm contains 22 stanzas of 8 verses each, where each of the 8 verses of a stanza begin with one letter of the Hebrew Alphabet, which is not easy task to accomplish and still have the Psalm flow with grace and meaning.

Something that is transmitted in translation, including in English, is the parallelism with similar thoughts given in sequence. One example is

given from Psalm 17:
The pangs of death compassed me (A)
and the floods of iniquity sore troubled me. (A)
The pangs of Hades compassed me about; (B)
the snares of death prevented me. (B)

The Psalter was historically divided into 5 sections. In the Church, for liturgical purposes, the Psalter is divided into 20 kathismata. Each kathisma is further divided into three stases. Each stasis contains between one and three chapters.

The exception to this is Psalm 118 which, due to its length, constitutes the entire 17th Kathisma. Each of the divine services contains fixed portions of the Psalter that are read in prayer or chanted each time the service is celebrated.

In addition, certain services of the Daily Cycle contain prescribed kathisma prayer readings. These prescribed readings rotate daily so that outside of Great Lent the Psalter is read through
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5th Sunday after Pentecost

* Martyrs Proclus and Hillary *

Epistle: Romans 10: 1-10

Gospel: Matthew 8:28-9:1

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.

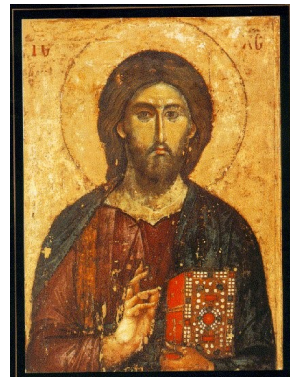
We worship God in Trinity - Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

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, Corella, Gail, Mike, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Words on Charity

And if there is among them any that is poor and needy, and if they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food. St. Aristides, 125 AD

On that day in which you fast, you shall taste nothing except bread and water. Of the foods which you were going to eat, reckon how much the food of that day

when you fast was going to cost, and give the amount to a widow or orphan or one in need. St. Hermas of Rome, (c. 90-140)

Abba Paphnutius is said to have seldom drunk wine but once on a journey he came upon a meeting-place of robbers while they were drinking. The chief of the robber band recognized him and knew that he would not drink wine. So he filled a cup with wine, held a naked sword in his other hand, and said, 'If you don't drink, I'll kill you.' Paphnutius knew that the robber chieftain was trying to obey the commandment of God: and in his desire to help him, he took the cup and drank. Then the robber chieftain did penance before him, and said, 'I'm sorry, abba, that I grieved you.' The hermit said to him, 'I believe that because of this cup my God will have mercy upon you in this world and the next.' The robber chieftain replied, 'I believe in God and from now on I'll harm no one.' The hermit won over the whole band of robbers, because for God's sake he let himself fall into their power. "Sayings of the Desert Fathers 4th Century AD"

A Brief Guide to the Psalms (cont'd from p. 1)

once in its entirety in a single week. During the Lenten fast, the kathisma prayers are accelerated so that the Psalter is read through in its entirety twice each week.

Christ and the disciples chanted the Psalms as well (Mt. 26:30). In the gospels this is done in the context of celebrating the Passover, the liturgical tradition of which would have associated the singing of Psalms 112-117 in Hebrew, called the Hallel Psalms. These were sung because there were 5 major themes in the tradition of the Jewish Church associated with these special Psalms for Passover: the Exodus from Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, the giving of the Law, revival of the dead, and the difficulties preceding the Messianic age, all of which were meaningful in type to Christ's life, baptism, teachings, miracles and crucifixion. Specifically, Psalm 114 and 115 say: *The pangs of death compassed me, and the perils of Hades came upon me. I found trouble and sorrow, and I called upon the name of the Lord:*

O Lord, deliver my soul...I will be well pleasing before the Lord in the land of the living...

What shall I render unto the Lord for all that He hath rendered unto me?



I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord...

I will pay my vows unto the Lord in the presence of all His people, in the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem.

Christ sung this immediately after he shifted the meaning of the Pass-

over from a lamb sacrificed yearly in the Temple to Himself as the eternal Lamb of God and as He shifted the Jerusalem Temple's thank offerings to the thank offering of the cup of his blood, the Eucharist. In a similar manner, Christ recognized, as did the apostles after him, other Messianic expectations in the Psalms that pointed to many aspects of Christ's incarnate life as the only Begotten of the Father. The resurrected Jesus said to his disciples, "Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

In a letter to Marcellinus, St. Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, wrote that the Psalms are the one part of Scripture that we can mimic in prayer and make it our own words. He explains in detail how each of the Psalms may be used on different occasions of spiritual need in the Christian life, to be read by all for spiritual edification and greatly benefit not themselves alone but also those who want to listen to them."

instead, the unlimited mercy of God is the very foundation of our life and extends even to demon-possessed Gentiles, as well as to you and me.

The Orthodox Church has many rules, many canons, traditions, and practices. But at the heart of our faith and common life is not the obedience of law, for we are not called to be like the Pharisees of old. Instead, we are called, as St. Paul teaches, to confess with our mouths the Lord Jesus and to believe in our hearts that God has raised him from the dead; if we do so, we will be saved. "For with the heart one believes unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

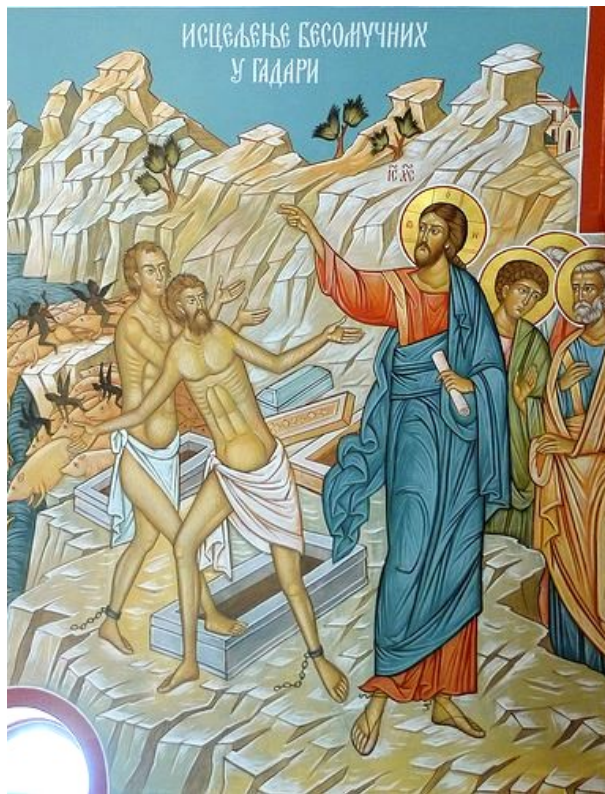
Instead of creating a new law, St. Paul points to the deep truth of what it means to commend all our life to Christ our God. It means that we trust in Him as whole persons. As we offer our lives to Him, our words, deeds, and thoughts will come to embody the new life that He has brought to the world. That is how we open ourselves to receiving His transforming grace. That is how, like the demon-possessed men in today's reading, we too may become living icons of the mercy of Jesus Christ.

Remember that He did not require the Gergesene demoniacs to earn their deliverance; neither does He require that of us. Instead, the Savior has graciously taken upon Himself the consequences of all human corruption and sin to the point of death, burial and descent to Hades so that He could conquer them all in His glorious third-day resurrection. He has ascended into heaven with full, complete glorified humanity and sent the Holy Spirit to empower His Body, the Church, of which we are members. He lives within our hearts by the Holy Spirit, casting out our demons, forgiving our sins, and enabling us to share in His eternal life even now as healed and transformed persons in relationship with Him and one another. By His grace, Christ restores us to the dignity and freedom of those who bear the divine image and likeness.

Those particular men were set free from the control of demons, but that was surely only the beginning of their lives in Christ. Even though their deliverance was quite dramatic, it was only a start and they surely had to press on from there to resist temptation, to grow in holiness, and to learn to love and serve Him in their neighbors. Our salvation is a process, an ongoing journey of sharing

more fully in the new life that our Savior has brought to the world. We must confess Christ more fully each day as we find greater healing, as we more fully manifest His victory over sin and death in our own lives.

If our religion were about meeting the requirements of a law, we could meet the standard and not think about it anymore. We could check off a box and move on to something else; perhaps then it would make sense to condemn others who did not measure up. But Orthodox Christianity is not about rules and regulations, but instead about growing in relationship with a Person, our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ. It is about sharing in His blessedness, about partaking in His divine nature by grace. And because God is eternal and infinite and beyond even our best attempts to define and control Him, there is no upward limit on what it means to unite ourselves to Him.



So we are constantly as much in need of Christ's mercy as were those demon-possessed fellows. The formerly demon-possessed men could claim no credit for their deliverance. They could only marvel at their great blessing and do their best to live lives worthy of what Christ had done for them. We all face the same challenge: to live in ways that reflect what our Lord has done for us, to bear witness to the healing and fulfillment that He has brought to our lives, and to continue to open ourselves more fully to His salvation.

That means that we must all continue to struggle against whatever evil thoughts, habits, words, and deeds threaten to separate us from the Lord and one another. We will not do that perfectly, for we get side-tracked and distracted

from fulfilling our vocation each day. That is precisely why we need to build holy habits—like attending services, praying daily, fasting regularly, and giving generously to the needy—into our lives. We need to wake up and stay alert, for the ultimate choice of our lives is an ongoing challenge. At stake is whether we will grow in relationship with Christ by faith, repentance, and humility. Our choice is not whether to obey a law, but whether we will embrace deliverance and healing. If we turn away from Christ, we do so as isolated individuals who prefer our own will to His, than share in the blessed banquet of the Kingdom. But if we offer ourselves to the Lord, we enter into eternal joy through His Body, the Church; we become members of Him through our life together.

Question: Saint Sophrony says that the Christian should have unceasing inspiration in his life. What does this inspiration consist of?

Answer: 'Those who are led by the Holy Spirit never cease going downwards, condemning themselves as unworthy of God,' says Father Sophrony (cf. 'On Prayer', p. 174). Being a humble God, the Holy Spirit teaches humility when He dwells within man, and this humility attracts a greater grace, which becomes true inspiration in him. Father Sophrony defines inspiration as 'the presence of the power of the Holy Spirit in the heart of man' (cf. 'We Shall See Him as He Is', p. 119), but according to the eternal law expressed in Scripture, 'he that humbles himself, shall be exalted' (Luke 18:14) and 'God resists the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble' (Jas. 4:6, 1 Pet. 5:5). Consequently, we have inspiration in our life, when we are inspired by the Holy Spirit to humble ourselves so as not to hinder Him from dwelling in us. And when the Holy Spirit dwells in us, we also become images of Pentecost, we speak 'strange words, strange teachings, strange doctrines' of the Holy Trinity (Lauds of Pentecost).

Inspiration comes when, receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, we love the humble Christ, Who then imparts to us His grace unto the end and makes us drunk with His endless divine love. Inspiration comes when the Holy Spirit teaches us humility and humility attracts grace, which unites us with Christ. Then Christ is able to take over the 'helm' of our life, that is, to govern our life and to establish the Holy Spirit as our guide, so that we may also say with Saint Paul: 'The Holy Spirit brought us to Jerusalem, to Troas, to Philippi or to Macedonia...' (Acts 20:22). Saint Paul expresses himself as if he had a Rider on him, the Holy Spirit, Who guided him from place to place. This happens when man learns the extreme humility that Christ teaches us. This utter humility is to hate ourselves in our wretched state, distorted and ugly as we have become because of our vile passions, to hate sin, to which we have been enslaved in this world, 'for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God' (Rom. 3:23).

True inspiration is to acquire the humility to acknowledge our corruption and alienation from God in the light of Christ's word; to hate everything that prevents Christ from dwelling in us, to render Him all glory and to take upon ourselves every shame for our spiritual poverty. We shall derive endless inspiration from the extremity of this

humility, which we are taught by the word of the Lord to Saint Silouan, 'Keep thy mind in hell and do not despair.'

Question: Can a Christian abstain from the eucharistic assembly for a long period?

Answer: The Body of Christ, this wondrous communion of the Saints, is formed in every eucharistic assembly, every time we gather for the Liturgy. Christ is never alone: since He is the One Who performs the Sacrament, wherever Christ is present, all His angels and all His Saints are present, too. Wherever the Liturgy is performed, all the triumphant Church of heaven is present in an incomprehensible way. Therefore, how can we abstain from such a eucharistic assembly where Christ is present with all His angels and all His Saints, and where we can find all the gifts of His elect on earth? This applies in normal conditions.

However, the situation is very different if there is a war and we are taken captive into a foreign country, and we remain without a Liturgy for one or two years, and we may never return to our country to see a Liturgy. Or like in our present times, this pandemic has forced us to isolate ourselves for a while in order not to spread the virus. Then, because of necessity, 'there is made... a change also of the law', says the Apostle (Heb. 7:12). That is, because of these special circumstances, God will give us other means to communicate with Him. Wherever we are, we will call upon the Name of Christ, bring to mind the words of His Gospel and live with them in the presence of God. Then, God will give us all the things that are needed for salvation.

We are living through a very strange period now, but many of the faithful we know have confessed to us that they have found a great measure of grace during these days, that they have found a way to perform their personal Liturgy at home. By reading the Psalms, saying the Jesus Prayer and making continual reference to the Gospel as well as other spiritual books, many faithful have lived their isolation as a feast. Due to the proscribed circumstances of the crisis and thanks to their desire for God, they found the power of indestructible life and a closer contact with Christ. God is above all things and if there is a need, He can even change His law. What He gives to us through Holy Communion in the Liturgy, He can give even more generously and abundantly in the imposed isolation of those who seek for His Face. However, we need to discern how things are under normal conditions and under special conditions. *(continued next issue)*

