

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 421

6th Sunday after Pentecost-Christ heals a Paralytic

Sunday, July 19, 2020



There are surely many people who have little interest in the Christian faith because the Christians they know do not seem different from anyone else. That can easily be used as an excuse not to believe, but it is also perfectly understandable when people are not attracted to something that does not appear to make much of a positive

difference.

St. Paul made clear in today's epistle reading that we must energetically use the gifts given us by the Lord, which is another way of saying that we must be actively faithful, regardless of what our particular abilities may be. Those who follow his advice will not simply blend in with the larger culture of any age, but will instead become vivid icons of what God's salvation means for human beings.

The Apostle calls us to be genuine in showing love, mercy, and honor to our neighbors as we cling to what is good and allow evil no place at all in our lives. He instructs us to respond to difficult challenges with hope, patience, and prayer. And just as Christ taught, St. Paul reminds us to "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them." Obedience to these that
(continued p. 3)

Abba Dorotheos on Humility

One of the Elders said: 'Above all, we need humility, to be ready to say "Forgive me" whatever is said to us. Because through humility, everything from the enemy and hinderer is destroyed'.

Let us see power of the elder's words. Why does he say that we require humility above all, instead of 'We need restraint above all'? For the Apostle tells us that 'those who enter games always show restraint' (*I Cor. 9, 25*)? Or why

does he not say: 'Above all we need fear of God'? For Scripture tells us that the beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord (*Ps. 110, 10*) And again that all those who fear the Lord depart from evil (*Prov. 15, 27*). Why does he not say: 'Above all we need alms-giving and faith'?

Holy Scripture tells us that 'By alms and by faithful dealings sins are purged away' (*Prov. 15, 27*), and Saint Paul says that it's not possible to be pleasing to God with-

out faith (*Heb. 11, 6*). If, therefore, it's impossible for us to be pleasing to God without faith, if alms and faithful dealings purge away sins, if the fear of God makes us depart from evil, if the beginning of wisdom is the fear of God and if those engaged in the struggle always practice restraint, why does he say that we need humility above all else?

And he omits all these other things which are which are necessary. The
(continued p.2)

*****6th Sunday after Pentecost *****

Fathers of the Ecumenical Councils

Epistle: Romans 12: 6-14

Gospel: Matthew 9:1-8

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.

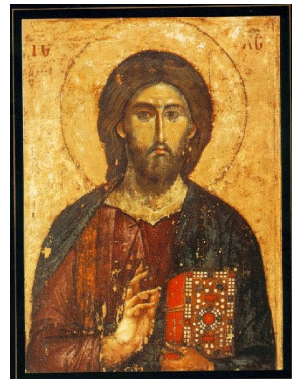
We worship God in Trinity - Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

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. Because of COVID-19, our social hour has been canceled until we receive further instructions from the Department of Health.

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.

Our Relationship with God

In our relationships with God, let us all place ourselves in such a position so as to hear what God says. And let us be constant in this position... And let us be still and quiet, even when we do not understand what God says.

It is not so much that you need to ask or,

supposedly, have things explained to you. What you need is to stand ecstatic before God, possessed with the fear of God, contrition and humility. Then, knowing will come as a result.

Whoever is not taught in his relationship with God like this (i.e. listening in the manner explained and accepting His will) doesn't learn because he supposedly uses his cleverness and supposedly wants to discuss things to supposedly understand them. This is not an intellectual matter. The point is for the word of God to reach deep in the heart. It is the heart that understands, it is the heart that sees, the heart that experiences; this is not a matter of the mind.

On my own I am not the Church, but together with you. All together we are the Church. We are all one and Christ is the head. The important thing is for us to enter into the Church – to unite ourselves with humanity, with the joys and sorrows of each and everyone, to feel that they are our own, to pray for everyone, to have care for their salvation, to forget about ourselves, and do as Christ did for us.

Abba Dorotheos on Humility, (cont'd from p. 1)

elder wants to show us that fear of God, alms-giving, faith, restraint or any other virtue cannot be acquired without humility. This is why the elder says 'Above all, we need humility, to be ready to say "Forgive me" whatever is said to us. Because through humility, everything from the enemy and hinderer is destroyed'.

You see then, brethren, the power of humility. You see the force of saying 'Forgive me'. Why is the devil called not only the enemy but also the hinderer? He's called the enemy because he hates people, hates good and wants to do evil. He's called the hinderer because he tries to impede us in everything. If people want to pray, he impedes them with wicked thoughts, constraint [of the mind] and sloth; if they wish to give alms, he impedes them with avarice and miserliness; if they want to keep vigil, he impedes them through idleness and lethargy.

And so he opposes us in every good thing we wish to undertake. This is why he's called not only the enemy, but also the hinderer. But through

humility all the things of the enemy and hinderer are destroyed.

Humility is a great virtue and each of the saints walked with it and shortened their journey through it. As it



says: 'Look upon my humility and labor and forgive all my sins' (Ps. 24, 28). We can enter [the kingdom of heaven] with humility alone, as Saint John of the Ladder says, though at a slower pace.

So let us be humble a little and we'll be saved. Even if we can't la-

bor, through illness, let us make sure we're humble. And I believe in God's mercy, that through that little which has happened by humility, we'll find ourselves in that place where there are those saints who labored extremely hard and served God. Yes, we're sick and can't labor, but can't we be humble?

Blessed are those, brethren, who have humility, because it's a great virtue. As one saint felicitously wrote about those who have humility:

'Humility neither enrages oneself nor enrages others'. Now this may seem a strange thing. Because humility is opposed only to vainglory and protects us only from this. People become angry over food or money. So why does he say that humility makes neither us nor others angry? As we've said, humility is a great virtue and has the power to attract the Grace of God to the soul. So when the Grace of God itself comes, it casts its protection over the soul as regards these other two grievous sins.

(continued next issue)

demands a deep commitment that extends from the depths of our souls to every thought, word, and deed. And that is not something we accomplish simply by our own power, but by responding faithfully to the merciful grace of our Savior.

Today's gospel reading gives us a clear portrait of what it means to encounter the Lord in this way. Christ did not rest content with forgiving the paralyzed man's sins. He also provided visible proof to the skeptics of His divine authority by enabling the man to stand up, carry his bed, and walk home. Christ's healing of the man's soul was not an invisible act somehow totally separate from the rest of his life. His miraculously renewed health was a visible sign of his restoration as a whole human being in God's

image and likeness. The Lord restored his freedom, his strength, and his integrity as an embodied person. And He commanded him to live accordingly by doing what he could never have done by his own power: to rise, pick up his bed, and walk home.

Whether we recognize it or not, that is the will of the Lord for each and every one of us. He comes to heal our corruption, to strengthen us so that we will not be enslaved in weakness to our sins and passions, and to enable us to share fully in His restoration of the human person in the divine image and likeness as the New Adam. Even as the Savior rose bodily from the tomb and ascended to heaven, He enables us to serve Him faithfully in our own bodies in the practical challenges of the world as we know it. He did not rest content with forgiving the paralytic's sins, but empowered and commanded him to embrace a new life. He does the same for us, calling us to pursue a life of holiness, a life that displays to the world the healing of every dimension of our humanity.

When the paralytic was brought to Christ, He did not tell him immediately to stand up. First, He forgave his sins. That is a key point because our salvation is not found in simply doing good deeds or obeying laws by

our own power. If that were the case, we would not need the God-Man to conquer sin and death on our behalf. Even as a paralyzed person lacks the ability to rise up and walk, fallen humans lack the ability to free themselves from slavery to sin, to raise themselves from the grave, and to participate in the eternal life of God for which He made us in His image and likeness.

Christ first forgave the man's sins, which means that He healed the corruption that reached to the depth of his soul and that kept Him from personal union with God. Our salvation is an infinite journey, for to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect is a calling with no upward limit. Christ told the paralytic to begin that journey by standing up, carrying his bed, and walking

home. By forgiving his sins, Christ graciously gave him the healing necessary for him to take a first step that would have otherwise been impossible for him. Then the man had to cooperate with the Lord, obeying His command as he moved forward in life, one step at a time.

Do you see how we are all just like that formerly paralyzed man, strengthened beyond our own power in Christ and commanded to move forward? That is not where our spiritual journey ends, but only where it begins. By virtue of our baptism and chrismation, we are all empowered to begin the pilgrimage to the Kingdom. Christ nourishes us with His own Body and Blood in the Eucharist and forgives us in Confession when we

stumble or wander from the path. We do not take this journey alone, but as members of His Body who participate mystically in the Heavenly Banquet in every Divine Liturgy. On a daily basis, we open ourselves to further strength and healing by prayer, reading the Bible, and studying the lives and teachings of the Saints.

It was probably a struggle for a formerly paralyzed man, who had been used to lying still all his life, to start walking around. It will definitely be a struggle for us to make progress in pursuing a holy life, but that is what is necessary for us to participate in the fullness of Christ's healing.



Question: How did Saint Sophrony use to live the Divine Liturgy?

Answer: Father Sophrony lived under normal conditions in his Monastery on Mount Athos, but he also lived under special conditions in the isolation of the desert, in the conditions of the Western world in France as a parish priest in a way, then as the founder of our Monastery, as an Abbot, and at the end of his life as a recluse. In the coenobium on Mount Athos, his life went from one Liturgy to another. Then he withdrew into the desert not in order to celebrate the Liturgy, but to deliver himself to deep repentance.

It would happen that for weeks he would not open the door of his cave to see if it was day or night. He was on his knees on the floor, lamenting inconsolably over his spiritual poverty, and the Holy Spirit would intensify more and more the awareness of his poverty, so that he might receive inspiration for even greater repentance. 'I had all my towels wet from weeping hanging on a rope stretched in the cave,' he told me.

This is how he lived in the desert, without frequent Liturgies. In the Monastery which he founded here, he found again normal conditions and then the Liturgy was the center of his life once more. When he would celebrate the next day, you could not approach him and not feel it: he was transfigured from the eve by his expectation to present himself before the altar of Christ.

This is how Father Sophrony lived the Liturgy. The sacrament of the Holy Eucharist was always the center of his life, for he knew that in this wondrous assembly of the Divine Liturgy man can say to God 'Thine own of Thine own we offer unto Thee in all and for all' and then hear the answer of God: 'The holy things unto the holy.' That is, man can make this exchange of his little life with the endless and incorruptible life of God. This was Elder Sophrony's vision concerning the Divine Eucharist. He underlined with great seriousness that the perfect grace which the hesychasts find in the desert can be received by the faithful in the Divine Liturgy if they approach prepared and adorned with humility and contrition.

Question: Do divine worship in the Church and private prayer replace each other?

Answer: The one prepares for the other and the other is the perfection of the former. Depending on the preparation we do in our cell, we will feel the comfort and the power of the Liturgy. For those who will give time to invoke the Name of Christ and shed abundant tears in their cells, the Liturgy will be a 'mighty, rushing wind' (Acts 2:2), which will take hold of them and bring them into the world of the true Liturgy of Christ. Father Sophrony used to say, 'Do not jump from your bed to the Liturgy, try and prepare, otherwise you will dry up.'

Of course, if we are ill or we had to do a lot of work for the needs of the Monastery, and exceptionally we cannot do the same preparation, I am sure that God will not deprive us of what He normally gives to us during the Liturgy.

Thus, our private worship, our private prayer is a preparation for the common worship, which will give us the perfection of spiritual life by leading us into the communion of life and the wealth of the gifts of all the Saints.

Question: There is a fear, an insecurity in the world today, especially because of the pandemic. How can we overcome this crisis?

Answer: A certain Abba Theodore says in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*: 'Even if the heavens fall down on the earth, I will not be afraid, for I prayed to the end to God to free me from every fear.' 'You have proved yourself strong with Me, and you shall also be strong in your relationships with men, and with all the phenomena of this world', the Lord said to Jacob when he wrestled with Him the whole night (see Gen. 32:28).

Once, a Presbytera asked Father Sophrony, 'How can I know if I am saved?' And Father Sophrony replied: 'It is very simple. We are sitting now in this room. If suddenly the door opened and Christ came in now, what would you do? Would you say, "My goodness, I am not ready!" or would you say, "Come, O Lord, glory be to You, O Lord!"?' If our reaction is to say, 'Yes, Lord, come and take the glory which belongs to You from the foundation of the world!' then we should have no fear.' Christ created us out of goodness and love, He preserves us in this life, again, out of love, He saves us through His awesome suffering and the shameful death of the Cross so that we, His enemies, may live. The same Christ continually takes care of us with the grace of His Name, with the illumination of His word and the power of His Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

(continued next issue)

