

# A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

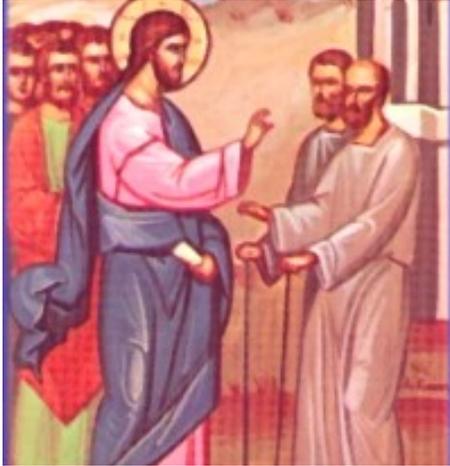


*Glory be to Jesus Christ!      Glory be Forever!*

Volume 9 Issue 422

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost-Christ heals a Paralytic

Sunday, July 26, 2020



In the book of the Prophet Isaiah it is written that, when the Messiah comes He will cure our illnesses. “Behold, our God renders judgment, and He will render it; He will come and save us. Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall hear” (Is. 35:4-5).

In today’s divine Gospel this proph-

esy has been fulfilled before us. Two blind men, as Jesus Christ was passing by, “followed Him, crying out and saying, ‘Son of David, have mercy on us’” (Matth.9:27). These men were deprived of the greatest gift from God, their sight, and for many years lived in darkness. They struggled to survive by begging in the streets of their home town and were unable to see even their beloved ones.

Although blind, they were not deaf. They heard about Jesus of Nazareth. They listened to the stories, which their fellow countrymen were saying, about the miracles that this young Rabbi was performing and within their hearts a great hope was building up. They listened to the loud voice, arising from the depths of their hearts, crying and saying to them: ‘He is the only One, Who can help you. He is the

*(continued p. 3)*

**\*\*\*7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost \*\*\***

**\*St. Jacob Enlightener of Alaska\***

Epistle: Romans 15: 1-7

Gospel: Matthew 9: 27-35

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.

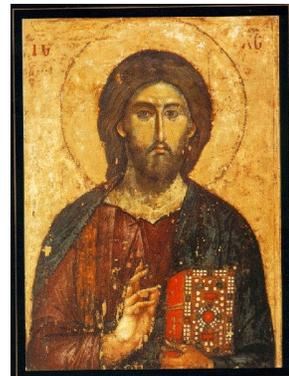
We worship God in Trinity - Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

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.



## **How to react to Doubts about Faith by St. Theophan the Recluse**

Almost everyone has doubts, on occasion, concerning God and faith. These can be resolved, however, with opposing thoughts which confirm the truth of divine revelation as regards human beings and the world: the order and harmony of the universe, the miracle of life, all the other supernatural and amazing wonders performed by the Lord and His saints.

And, above all, the testimony of the consciousness of well-disposed and pure souls.

The works of God, which bear witness to His existence and providence, have many facets. One is brilliant and therefore very obvious. Another is simply light and discreet. Another is faint and hard to identify. Another is dark and therefore invisible.

This last facet has to do with doubts. The Lord has arranged things in this way in order to test the sincerity of our soul’s search for Him, as well as our humility. You see, God and His works can

be approached and known only through humility. You believe that where God and His truth are- that is, everywhere- everything should be filled with light, should be perceptible to the senses, should inspire our souls in a powerful manner, should declare their divinity loudly.

Don’t you realize that, by thinking in this way, you’re trying to define how God should act? I’m sure you would agree that that’s unthinkable,

*(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. 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.

**How we should react to doubts about Faith, (cont'd from p. 1)**

because, were that to happen, the natural order of things would be shaken to the core.

In themselves, the works of God are, indeed, divine, but their divinity is shrouded in an invisible veil. Why? God wished it so- that's all I have to say. The judgments of divine wisdom and love are impenetrable. There can be no doubt, however, that there is inexpressible beauty and an abundance of light behind the veil, which prevents those who don't believe from seeing the truth. Saint Paul says: 'Ever since the creation of the world, his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made' (Rom. 1, 20). By whom, though? Only by those who believe and are well-intentioned. Not, of course, those who are merely formal believers, but those who live in a God-pleasing manner.

The Lord doesn't reveal His secrets to everyone, nor does He cast His pearls before the swine. This is why He spoke to people about His king-

dom in parables. Those who had the spiritual foundation were able to understand them and were enlightened by the truth.

When seeds fall into fertile soil, you think they rot and are lost. But with the strength with which God has imbued them, they flourish, multiply and produce a large amount of fruit. The same is true with the seeds of the divine word. They're sown in the hearts of everyone, though they flourish only in the fertile ones.

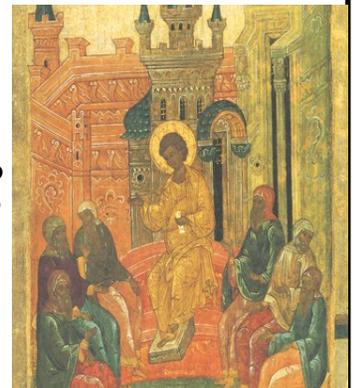
Faith isn't diminished at all by the fact that not everyone believes. Ignore unbelievers and focus on those who really believe and you'll see what they enjoy through faith. The Christian faith isn't a philosophical system, but a means by which Christ, as God and human, raises us who are fallen, through the Holy Spirit. So look at anyone who's following in the footsteps of Christ. You'll see how they gradually grow, how they mature spiritually and become great, however insignificant they may be for the rest of the world.

God often chooses those who are foolish in the world to shame the powerful; God chose those who are low and despised in the world, people of no consequence, to reduce to nothing those who think they're something (cf. 1 Cor. 1, 27-28). This is how divine grace transforms all those who surrender to it. The Lord calls us to faith. He wants our salvation. And you will be saved, if you listen to His voice and follow Him, unwaveringly.

For the sake of Him Who loves you so much, trample down any doubts.

.Humble yourself, because

God reveals Himself only to the humble. Pray, because your prayer surrounds and protects you from the attacks of the evil one.



One, Who all nations are waiting for.

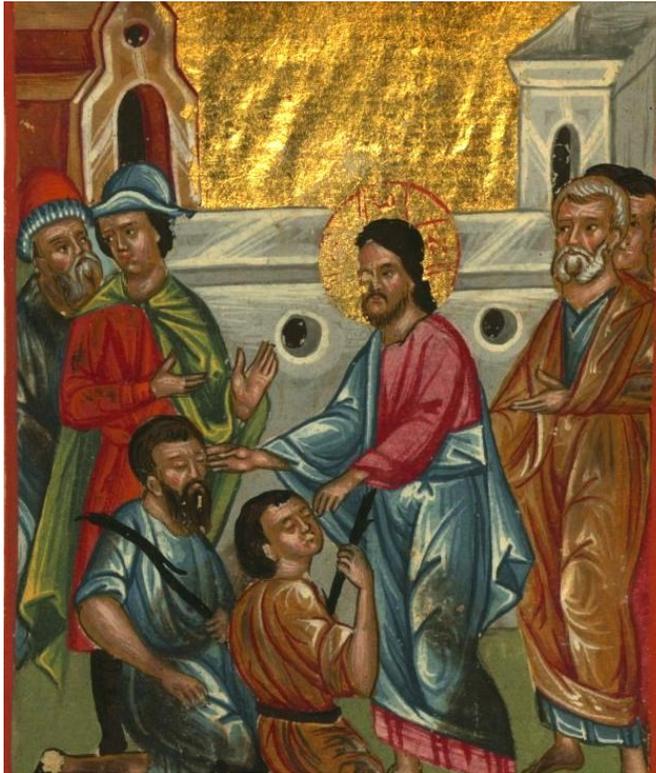
He is the Messiah of Whom the Prophets have spoken about. He is the Savior of the world, Whom God the Father has sent for the salvation of mankind. He is the true Physician of both soul and body. He is the only One Who can give you the light, because He is the Light of the world'.

With these thoughts they followed Christ and with faith cried out to Him: "Son of David, have mercy on us! Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God have mercy on us! Lord Jesus Christ, You Who came into the world to save Your creation from the darkness of sin, ignorance and death, show Your loving kindness to us sinners, and have mercy on us. You, Who are the only Philanthropic God and created us in Your "image and likeness", show us Your Love and philanthropy. The results of their faith was that "their eyes were opened" (Matthew 9:30).

In today's society, how many people walk around blind not because they are incapable of seeing, but because they refuse to see with their own eyes the problems of society today? How many have the gift from God to see His creation, remain blind and refuse to approach and believe in Him, Who created all things? How many refuse to open their eyes before the truths of God's Revelation and accept Jesus Christ, as the only Son of God and their Savior? How many times do we find people who, although believe in Christ, refuse to hear the real teachings and interpretations of the Church and remain blind and deaf in the darkness of heresy? How many have lost their spiritual sight, because they remain under the shadow of sin? How many people, who are blessed from God to have earthly riches, remain blind and deaf before the needs of their fellow man and refuse to give with their hearts? How many times have governments around the world become blind and they destroy the fruits of the Earth, in order to keep the stock market high and they do not see the true needs of the poor people of other countries?

The two blind men of today's Gospel reading, when Christ our God asked them to keep silent, "they spread the news about Him in all that country" (Matthew 9:31). As Orthodox Christians, we also have to approach Christ. We can only find the restoration of his spiritual sight, when he approaches Christ, the source of true

Light. He is the only One, who can heal our infirmities and our blindness caused by sin. He is the only One, Who can free us from the slavery of sin and death. The Prophet Isaiah spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit saying, "He bears our sins, and is pained for us; yet we accounted Him to be in trouble, and in suffering, and in affliction. But He was wounded on account of our sins, and was bruised because of our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and by His bruises we were healed" (Isaiah 53:4-5). "Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses" (Matthew 8:17). He is the One about Whom St. John, the Baptist, testified saying: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). He is the Paschal Lamb, who offers Himself for our deliverance from darkness and death (1 Peter 1:19).



In Jesus Christ we find our true health. We are healed by Jesus through the actions of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Sacraments of the Church the Holy Spirit acts and sanctifies the faithful who believe in Jesus Christ, as their Lord and Savior. We are restored to his original condition of health only within the Church, which Christ established. When we believe in the Lord Jesus and practices His Teachings, then we find our way in life. We see the needs of our neighbor not only with our eyes, but also with the understanding of our spirit.

As Christians we must never forget, that we should love our neighbors as we love ourselves. This is the Commandment of our Lord. Under this

light we should walk. Under this light we should see. Under this light we should cry out to the people, that One is He Who is Holy, One is the Lord; Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will come again in all His glory and power to judge the living and the dead. Let us open the eyes of our understanding now that we have the time. Let us approach Him, Who can heal all our infirmities and will restore our spiritual health. Let us testify to the world, that only in Jesus Christ man can find the true aims for life. Let us approach the source of true Love. Let us approach our fellow men and see to their needs. As the two blind men asked with faith for Christ to grant them their sight, let us also at this moment ask Him with faith to grant us our spiritual sight in order to lead a way of life according to His Teachings.

## *There is no Life without Faith by Archimandrite Touma (Bitar) (part 1)*

There is no doubt that talking about faith requires a great deal of explanation. Most of us say that he is a believer, while in reality he is not necessarily a believer in the way that faith must be. There are people who believe that if someone intellectually believes a certain thing, this means that he has become a believer in it. But faith is one thing and believing is something else. So let us see what faith entails.

In the New Testament, there is a definition of faith. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, faith has two fundamental elements: trust and faith in what is unseen. When we say “trust”, this means that there is a relationship. It is not rational for me to trust someone if I don’t know him and I have no relationship with him. Then, when someone is

certain about something, this means that he is convinced, without the slightest doubt, of the goodness and ability of the person with whom he has a relationship. So if faith requires trust and certainty in what is unseen, then realistically it is impossible for a person to believe! How can he believe in God if he does not know Him and has not had a relationship with Him? Of course, at the same time, for him to know Him and have a relationship with Him requires that he believe in Him. So the relationship requires faith and faith requires a relationship. So how can someone start when he has neither faith nor a relationship? Humanly, then, a person cannot believe on his own. But faith is a grace from God!

But why doesn’t the Lord grant for all people to be believers? This is because some people have preparation to believe and others do not have preparation. This is something ordinary. If we have, for example, water, it is very basic for there to be fertile earth. But water doesn’t act and doesn’t fertilize if there is no soil. So there is a need for soil. If we pour water on the desert, we do not benefit from anything. In this manner, someone is ready for faith if he has a heart that is prepared to benefit and be fertile when the grace of God, which is the grace of faith, comes upon him. The issue here is a person’s heart, whether it is ready to believe or not. Of course, this raises the question: when is the heart ready for faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? The heart is ready for faith in the Lord Jesus Christ when a person is upright, loves the truth, says that truth is true and falsehood false.

A person knows these things according to human na-

ture when he walks in the truth. There is no person in this world who does not distinguish, albeit within certain limits, between right and wrong, between acceptable and unacceptable, between truth and falsehood. A person who does not possess this distinction is either sick or has lost his mental faculties, since every person by nature has preparation, when he is raised in his environment, to know good from evil, even if it is to a limited degree. If he has walked in uprightness and loved the true and the good, then he becomes ready to accept the grace of faith that comes to him from the Father of Lights. While the person who is hypocritical, impure, twisted and not upright... it is impossible for him to believe. For this reason the devil, for example, knows but does not believe be-

cause he is twisted and impure and at the same time hypocritical, lying and murderous. The devil has extremely broad information, but this information does him no good because his heart is not upright.

The evil person who walks without uprightness, loves falsehood, is concerned with getting what he wants, does not testify to the truth in any way and is not concerned with the truth but rather is only concerned with himself and his own interests... such a person cannot believe and cannot be ready for faith. In this sense, faith isn’t for everyone!

Why do you think that the upright person who loves the true and loves the good is ready to accept faith in God? Because uprightness, truth and goodness are flashes of the Lord Jesus Christ who is truth, goodness and life. These are lights from Him, sown in the nature of man who, if he

walks in them, he is drawn close to God. When the Lord God wants to reveal Himself to him, then he (that is, this person who is upright in his path, a man of truth and goodness) sees that faith is something very normal and natural and he wants to believe but he cannot because of human weakness. It is impossible for someone to believe in God by his own powers. You remember that incident when a man came with his son who had an impure spirit and the Lord asked him, “If you believe, everything is possible for the believer.” The father replied, “I believe, O Lord, help my unbelief!” (That is, my entire being is drawn to faith, but I find in myself that I am not a believer. I am too weak to be able to believe in You. I need for You to grant me to believe.

*(continued next issue)*

