

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!

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11th Sunday after Pentecost-Christ's Enduring Forgiveness

Sunday, August 23, 2020



Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Thus Jesus taught His disciples to pray and in praying to forgive. Forgiveness is a gift little understood outside of the household of God. In the world an offense may be forgotten, but is rarely forgiven. Forgiveness is the language that God has given to us in order to

elevate us beyond our tit-for-tat fallen relationships in order that we may truly find healing and become God-like. In our earthly relationships, it's easy to begrudge and grow bitter, it's easy to want to write off those who've offended us. Forgiveness, on the other hand, takes great courage and trust in God to submit ourselves and our earthly relationships to Him.

Bitterness and grudges are like getting bit by a snake over and over again. Whatever the initial harm that's been done to us or another—whether real or perceived—our growing bitterness and holding a grudge against that person means that we continue to nurse the same old wound, over and over again. We keep that wound, we keep ourselves from healing, from loving. Often, whatever the initial offense or hurt, our dwelling on it, *(continued p. 3)*

We and Christ are One, by Metropolitan Seraphim of Kastoria

Interpreting the sacred texts of the Evangelists which refer to the Last Supper and the transmission of the dread mysteries, Saint John Chrysostom has this to say: 'Believe that now, too, it's the same supper as the one where Christ sat. That supper differs not in the slightest from the holy sacrament... Because it's He Who offers both' [Saint John Chrysostom, Homily on Matthew].

And the holy father continues, bringing his personal, Spirit-inspired

experiences to his flock: 'He Who worked the Mystery at the Last Supper is the same as performs the Sacrament of the Divine Liturgy... the holy altar is the same table as at the Last Supper and is not less in any way' [Saint John Chrysostom Homily on Matthew].

Allow me, then, to place in your loving hearts some wisdom from Patristic experience regarding the Sacred Mystery of the Divine Eucharist. There's a lot of talk today regarding

this Sacred Mystery. Impious lips have even spoken during the pandemic which has afflicted the planet, saying that, together with the Body and Blood of Christ, it's possible also to swallow the deadly virus.

Centuries of experience have shown that an infectious disease has never been transmitted in this way, since we believe and confess that what we receive is the Body and Blood of Christ, given for the *(continued p.2)*

11th Sunday after Pentecost

* Leave-take of the Dormition *

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 9:2-12

Gospel: Matthew 18: 23-35

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.

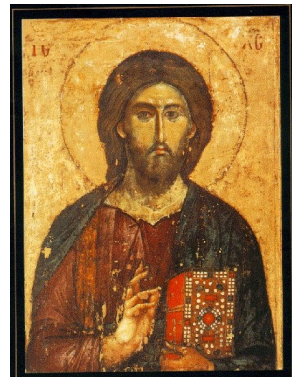
We worship God in Trinity - Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

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.





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

Words of Wisdom-St. Nilus the Ascetic

“Prayer is communication of the mind with God. In what condition, really, must the mind be in order to be able to spread and extend irrevocably to the Lord and to associate with him conversing with him without the intervention of any intermediary?”

“If, when Moses tried to approach the burning bush, he was prevented, until he untied the shoe of his feet (Exodus 3: 5), how can you, who want to see him beyond all senses and meanings and become a friend? of him, should not you solve and throw away from you every meaning tainted with passion?”

“Before anything else, pray to receive the gift of tears, to soften with mourning the savagery that exists in your soul, and, after accusing yourself of confessing your iniquities to the Lord, to achieve forgiveness. of sins on his part.”

“Use tears to make every request come true. Because the Lord is very happy when you pray with tears. If you shed abundant tears in your prayer, do not take it upon yourself at all, as if you were standing taller than many. Because your prayer has gained strength with tears, so that you can willingly confess your sins and appease the Lord. So do not turn into passion what is a precaution against passions, so as not to offend the one who has given grace more.”

cont'd from p. 1)

health of body and soul, for the remission of sins and life everlasting. Saint John Chrysostom is revealing on this point: ‘When you see the priest giving you the Holy Sacrament, don’t think it’s him who’s doing it. Believe rather that the hand being extended is that of Christ’ [Saint John Chrysostom Homily on Matthew].

First of all, what is Holy Communion? It’s the presence in our life of Christ the generous Giver. It’s the moment of our personal encounter with Christ Himself. When we approach to take the Spotless Mysteries, we imbibe immortal food, the Body and Blood of Christ. We don’t consume some of Christ’s gifts, but Christ Himself. We become one with His Body and Blood. ‘You embrace the Lord, you mingle with His Spotless Body, you’re kneaded together with the body which is in heaven... His most pure Blood is mixed with ours and transforms our soul so that the whole of our being becomes brighter than a flame and shines more than gold’ [Saint John Chrysostom Homily

on Colossians].

Precisely the same truth is stated by Saint Nikolaos Kavasilas: ‘And, indeed, the Sacraments are the Body



and Blood of Christ, and for the Church they are our true meat and drink. Partaking of them does not change them into the human body, as is the case with other food, but the latter is changed into them, since the superior triumphs... If we could see, as regards this alone- the fact that Church of Christ is united with Christ

and partakes of His flesh- we would see nothing other than the Body of Christ Itself [The Philokalia].

Saint Gregory Palamas also confirms this union between us people and God: ‘What an incomparable and exceptional wonder. He unites Himself with the human person, mingling Himself with each of the faithful. How then, will He not illumine with the divine radiance of His body, which is now within us, the souls of those who commune worthily, as once He illumined the bodies of His disciples on Tabor?’ [In Defense of those who Practice Sacred Quietude]. This is why the inexpressible Mystery of our union with God is described by Saint John Chrysostom in one phrase: ‘We and Christ are one’ [Saint John Chrysostom Homily on Matthew].

It’s the weapon, the nourishment and the power in our everyday struggle. If soldiers are to rise to our high expectations of them, particularly in crucial battles, they need to be fed. In the same way, the soldiers of Christ

(continued p. 4)

our cultivating enmity against the person, will grow the hurt or offense into something much bigger than it originally was; it will take on a life of its own, and become a means through which the enemy does us further harm. The truth is that when we're bitter, nursing a grudge, we turn someone else's sin into our own sin and it eats at us like some spiritual cancer; if unchecked, it grows, infecting our souls, and destroys our faith as it alters our sense of reality. We cannot be close to God, we cannot maintain and grow our relationship and communion with God, while holding onto bitterness, while withholding forgiveness.

For this reason, God in His great love for us, desires our freedom from this spiritual cancer, desires our healing from bitterness, grudges, enmity, and strife. So, when St. Peter asks the Lord how many times we must forgive, thinking maybe seven times would be sufficient, the Lord replies, "seventy times seven," symbolic of an infinite sum. The premise of this infinite forgiveness comes from God, Who grants forgiveness to us over and over and over again. And while we ourselves sin and then fight to forgive those who wrong us, God does not sin and yet He forgives us for our sins against Him and others.

To illustrate this truth, Christ gives us today's parable: One of the Master's servants owes him an incredible amount, ten thousand talents, an impossible sum. If we thought of God's forgiveness towards us in terms of a debt to be paid, we'd never be able to settle such an account, which is why we call God's salvation, "grace." The servant is forgiven as God forgives us our trespasses, our disobedience, pride, lustfulness, unfaithfulness. But the servant, having received that gracious gift of forgiveness of his debts immediately takes his fellow servant by the throat, demanding that he pay all his debts, which by comparison with his own debts, are a pittance.

So it is with us by comparison. We withhold forgiveness from our fellow man and yet we come to expect that no matter what, God will forgive us. We presume on God's grace. The Lord warns us that this shall not be. We cannot claim relationship and communion with God while withholding forgiveness from each other. When the Master finds out what the wicked servant has done, throwing his fellow servant into prison, failing

to forgive his debt, the Master grows angry. Jesus warns us, "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

And so, Christ teaches His disciples to pray, "forgive us our trespasses as we also forgive those who trespass against us." This teaching is at the heart of the Gospel; it goes to the core of what the Body of Christ is meant to be about: forgiving one another from the heart. The question we then have to ask ourselves is: How can we expect God to forgive us if we withhold our forgiveness of others? That would be hypocrisy. Yet, forgiving others can often be a deep struggle, particularly in the cases of abuse or other deep and painful wounds.

Forgiveness is not the same as forgetting. We may never forget a wrong, abuse, some grievous sin done against us, but we can with God's help, learn to forgive and practice ongoing forgiveness. In other words, we can make it a matter of prayer that God help us to forgive someone on an ongoing basis. We can pray that God heal us of our bitterness, our grudges, our enmity against others.

Indeed, if this is a struggle for us, we can pray this prayer as part of our daily prayers, even beseeching God to lift its weight from us. God's healing in this regard begins with the desire to want to learn to forgive others as God has forgiven and does forgive us. Along with active forgiving, we need to

strive to keep "short accounts." That is, rather than nurse wounds and build grudges and bitterness, withholding forgiveness, or spreading gossip or mistrust, we can learn to go to the person who has offended us to speak to them about it. We then give that person an opportunity to explain, ask forgiveness, and reconcile with us, and us with them. But even if the person doesn't offer to apologize, we still need to learn how to forgive. Similarly, if you're on the receiving end of someone else's anger, even if you can't figure out what you did wrong, or if the person has misjudged you or your intentions, it's still better to humble oneself and ask forgiveness.

In this way, we'll learn to combat bitterness and grudges before they start setting root. We'll demonstrate the love and forgiveness that's not of this world, but which is, rather, indicative of that higher calling of being a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven.



We and Christ are One, (cont'd from p.2)

are in need of the bread of life in the battles they wage against the principalities and powers of darkness. Our participation in the Spotless Mysteries is therefore not symbolic. We don't merely partake of blessed bread but the very Body and Blood of Christ, which guarantee us the toughness we need to engage in the warfare we're fighting on three fronts: ourselves, the world and the devil. This weapon has been used by all Christians, throughout the centuries in order to face their persecutors. This is what they wanted as their daily bread even when they were in prison.

This is what they received as provision for life eternal when they were led to the scaffold and places of execution. This is why, fearless, bold, with eyes raised to heaven they faced imminent death, which would unite them with the beloved Person of Christ the Savior. They behaved as real

Christians, because they understood the heart of the Divine Liturgy, that is the mystery of the Divine Eucharist [*Man and God*]. In other words, they really did experience what Patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem states in his wonderful 'Confession': that the bread is transformed into the true body of the Lord 'Who was born in Bethlehem of the Ever-Virgin, baptized in the Jordan, suffered, rose, ascended, sits on the right hand of God the Father and will come on the clouds of heaven... And the wine is altered in its essence into the very blood of the Lord, which was shed as He hung on the Cross, for the life of the world' [*Confession of Faith*].

It's the antidote to death and the medicine of life and immortality, according to Saint Ignatius the God-Bearer [*Epistle to the Ephesians*]. Saint Basil the Great calls it provision for eternal life [*Prayer in the Divine Liturgy*]. Saint Cyril of Alexandria assures us that the Lord 'hides life and has placed immortality in us, like a seed, completely removing all corruption from within us' [*Interpretation of the Gospel according to St. John*].

In his Dogmatics, Saint Justin, that confessor of the faith, makes the apt point: 'The blood relationship, the union of one person with another, is effected in the human and divine body of Christ, in the Church, and in a particu-

larly realistic and empirical manner, during the Divine Eucharist, as the partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ'

At these difficult times for the Orthodox, there's no need to bombard people with issues of lack of faith. We should be reinforcing their faith, which is reasonable and beyond reason, but not rational, as some would have it.

There's an event in the book 'Miracles and Revelations from the Holy Monastery of the Paraclete' which is related to our subject. It makes a telling point: 'There are Christians who don't want to take Holy Communion in case they catch germs! If this were the case, none of the priests would be alive, because at the end they drink the contents of the Holy Chalice, from which perhaps hundreds of the faithful have supped, many of them with various ailments. Yet no priest has ever been taken ill from that. The Body and Blood of the Lord are "consuming fire".'

One of the many instances which demonstrate this very clearly is the following. When Metropolitan Panteleimon of Chios († 1962) was a preacher in Attica, he once went to serve at the Tuberculosis Clinic. The nurses brought him a platter with lots of little spoons. He asked what this was for and was told that the doctors had said he was to give communion to the patients with

these, starting with the least affected and going on to the most gravely sick. He replied that this wasn't necessary, since he had the Holy Spoon.

He gave communion to the patients as normal during the Divine Liturgy and then emerged at the Royal Gate, where he finished the remnants in the chalice. He did so for all of them to see, and for the doctors to understand that Holy Communion is fire that burns up everything' [*Miracles from the Holy Liturgy*].

So it behooves us, first and foremost, to have eyes of faith and our personal experience of this God-constituted Mystery. And then we have to present it, unsullied and pure, to our blessed flock. We must urge our people, after confession and genuine repentance, to come with fear of God, faith and love to the Sacrament of the Divine Eucharist. Christ doesn't transmit germs, nor deadly viruses. Only life, light and the health of soul and body. To God be the Glory. Amen.

