

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 427

12th Sunday after Pentecost-Parable of the Rich Young Man

Sunday, August 30, 2020



In today's Gospel, we hear the story of the young man who comes to Christ asking Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Christ responds initially not with an answer to his question, but with a test of the young man's faith, saying, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God." And so,

the young man's encounter with Christ becomes, first, a question about who Christ is, and second, who we are and who we're truly called to be.

First, who is Christ? Who you believe Jesus Christ is will make all the difference in your life regarding your own identity, purpose in life, and ability to find a way out from all the common dead-end patterns of brokenness that result from sin and a life lived without knowing and following the One true God as He's revealed Himself—the Savior of the world.

We often hear people today making Jesus into something that He simply cannot be—friend, prophet, best human who ever lived, or, in the case of this young man, "good teacher." Many choose to reduce Jesus to something less than God because if He's just another man—however 'great' or 'good' (continued p. 3)

12th Sunday after Pentecost

Beheading of St. John the Baptist

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11

Gospel: Matthew 19: 16-26

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.*

Thanking God for all we have, by Abbess Domnica (Korobeinikova)

As I write this account, I would like to read an excerpt from a letter of St. Nikolai of Serbia. His spiritual daughter asked him: "Why does the Gospel say nothing about happiness?" This is what he replied: *My dear, why do you think it does not? It seems the Gospel talks about human happiness more than about anything else!*

I think the Gospel can be called the book of happiness, and the lesson Christ teaches us, a lesson about happiness. Are

you confused by the absence of the very word 'happiness' in it? But there are other words in the Gospel in its place, for example, joy, delight, Paradise, blessedness. Blessedness means supreme happiness.

Do you know what the main lesson is that Christ taught us? The lesson about happiness. The Orthodox Church repeats it to people during every Divine Liturgy by singing the Beatitudes.

This is what St. Nikolai answered to his spiritual

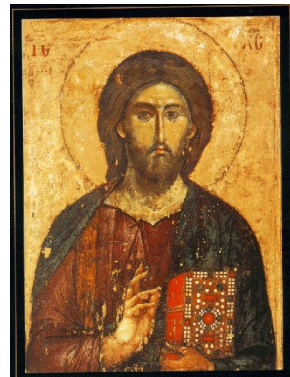
daughter. Indeed, can it be true that the Gospel didn't say a word about happiness and didn't give an answer to the question that interests human beings the most: "What is happiness and how is it acquired?"

The Lord Who came to earth began His preaching precisely by answering this question. And by His answer He made happiness very close to all humanity—it can even be said that He handed it to us. We often (continued p.2)

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 worshiping 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. Isaac of Syria

Love sinners but hate their sins, and do not despise sinners for their faults lest you fall into the temptation in which they abide.

When you want to start doing virtuous deeds, prepare yourself first for the temptations that will befall you, and do not

doubt the truth.

Do not separate the rich from the poor, and do not try to distinguish the worthy from the unworthy, and let all men be equal to you for good. It is in this way that you can attract the unworthy to the good.

He who is not grateful for something small is also dishonest and unjust in bigger things.

He who longs for the fulfillment of God's will shall have heavenly angels as his guides.

Be ignorant in your wisdom, and do not pretend to be wise when you are ignorant.

When one sees all people as good, and no one appears to him unclean and desecrated, then he is truly pure of heart.

A good thought falls into the heart only by divine grace; a wicked thought approaches man only for temptation and challenge.

If you pray to God for something, and He is slow to hear you, do not be sorrowful about it. You are not smarter than God.

The prayer of the one who does not consider himself a sinner is not acceptable to God.

Thanking God for all we have, cont'd from p. 1)

imagine happiness as something that is far away from us and won't come until external circumstances have changed. Some think: "If I change my job, I'll be happy"; others say: "If I have different neighbors, I'll feel good"; and others believe that in order to be happy they need to take a trip.

There are even people who think that if they change the shape of their noses, their lives will be completely transformed. And people do this. But in many cases when people get what they want, they find no happiness in it. People feel shock and sometimes even lose the purpose of life. This occurs every time someone chases his dream or idea. By this he guarantees his unhappiness. Elder Emilianos explains why it happens this way: *When something interests us, when we crave for earthly things and pursue them persistently, we become unhappy, thinking about our ambitions and the desires of our hearts and not about God.*

A person becomes unhappy when he

begins to chase the things that arise from his heart—that is, fantasies, passions... And that is his most tragic mistake. In pursuit of the products of



his imagination he overlooks true blessedness.

And seeing this agonizing problem that all people have, the Lord provided a solution to it. He said, "Don't search for happiness far away. You don't need to run, rush or hurry to obtain it. Blessedness is near at hand—it is within you." And then He

explained what genuine happiness is by giving us the Beatitudes. If we abide by them, we will attain blessedness.

Someone may argue: "How can I follow the Beatitudes? They are of such a high order and are so hard to live by!" In reality, it is quite possible to follow all of them. And this path is accessible to everyone. Here is what St. Paisios of Mt. Athos said about this: *Whatever happens to us, let it be a reason for gratitude and not something to dwell on.*

Everything that surrounds us or happens to us can become a theme to dwell on: "Why does he/she behave this way? Why are things going wrong again?" However, if we begin to give thanks, for instance, by saying, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, glory to Thee!"—not only by the tongue but with all our being—soon we'll feel blessedness. By giving thanks we express our deep humility, meekness, and our longing for purity of heart—that is, everything that Christ stated in the Beatitudes.

then, no response, no obedience, no accountability is owed Him or His life-saving revelation, His call for new birth, relationship and communion with Him. Then, we can make of Him whatever suites us and our 'lifestyle choice'.

If we make of Jesus only a "friend," a 'moral' figure, as some do today, if we make Him according to our likeness, our desires, our pre-conceived notions, then we'll struggle to submit ourselves to Him and the authority of His Church. If so, then we thwart our rescue from our fallen human nature, the healing of our sin-sickness, and, ultimately, our redemption; we'll prevent ourselves from becoming all that God wills us to be as godly men and women desiring salvation and eternal life with Him.

If we fail to recognize Christ's holiness, then we're likely to struggle to take seriously His calling for us to likewise become holy or to even understand what that means. If we fail to recognize His divinity, then how can we recognize our calling to deification/theosis, that is, union, through communion with Him?

All such revisionism and remaking of Christ into our likeness, our convenience, fails to account for the reality of Christ's own revelation as the very Logos (Word) of God. C.S. Lewis put it this way when it comes to the question of who Jesus is: He has to be one of the three: "liar, lunatic, or, Lord." "No man could do the miracles that Christ did in plain sight before countless eye-witnesses, unless He were also God. No man has power over the elements of nature, unless He is also the Logos (the Word of God), who is the Creator of those elements. No mere man, who is only man, can raise the dead on his own command. A lunatic would talk and speak of amazing and strange things, but his witness wouldn't be true; alone, he would work no miracles."

The only true response is to see Christ as He's revealed Himself through the mystery of the Incarnation: the God-man, who enters into human nature as man and redeems it as God, He who calls us to enter into that renewed human nature through water and the spirit, Baptism and Chrismation, the sealing of the Holy Spirit by which He gives us all the tools we need to continue our journey further up in His Kingdom, that is, to be deified.

The young man in today's Gospel comes to Jesus, relegating Him to the status of a "good teacher." Ironically, while at the same time addressing Jesus as a mere man, however 'good,' he asks Jesus a question that only God can ultimately answer: "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" Only God can tell us what we need for eternal life.

The young man's failure to submit himself to the reality of who Christ is, explains Jesus' pointed response, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God." Jesus is not suggesting He's not fully God. No, Jesus is convicting the young man of his error, as if to say something along these lines: "you can't have it both ways: If I'm merely 'the good teacher' and not your Lord and God, then I can't tell you what your soul lacks. But, if you can see Me with the eyes of faith, then know that I am the Messiah, God incarnate, who sees into your soul."

As Romanian confessor of the faith, Fr. Iustin Popovic of blessed memory, puts it, "No one is sufficiently good to be able to give the greatest good: eternal life. Only the Perfect Good—and that is God, the God-Man—knows and has the Perfect Life, Eternal Life, and can give it..."

Having set the record straight, Jesus gives the man instruction, referring him to what every faithful Jew would know: to keep the commandments. But in his youthful pride, the young man tells Jesus he's done all this "from his youth." Then, he dares ask the Master, "what do I still

lack"? In his youthful pride, he still doesn't realize Whom he's addressing. Here Jesus reveals further His true identity to the man as the Messiah, the God-Man who is Eternal Life: He looks into the man's soul as to where his true loyalties lie: his wealth. The young man is looking for legitimacy, looking to be told he's 'arrived,' looking to be affirmed on his terms, to see Jesus made in his image, as one who's followed the externals of the Law.

But Jesus reveals this to him, showing the man who his true god is, his wealth, saying, "Go, sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow Me." We read that he went away dejected; for he loved his wealth more than he loved God. For this reason, Christ gives us this warning:

(continued p.4, column 1)



(Homily on Christ and the rich man, cont'd from p.3)

"I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."

Brothers and sisters, this is a warning to us as well. All of us are "rich" by world standards. The heart of the Lord's message here is this: "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Almost a fourth of the Gospel is dedicated to lessons concerning the dangers of divided loyalties and how easy it is for mammon, money, to become our master.

In the Old Covenant, we read that God commanded (yes, commanded) His people to give a tithe (ten percent) of our income. The New Covenant teaching is not that we're to give a tithe to the Lord, but rather, that everything we have is to be offered up to God as a 'first fruit', hence Christ's invitation here, "Go, sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven..." One thing we can do to help us with this temptation to entrust ourselves and those whom we love to our finances instead of to the Lord our God, our rightful Master, is to at least follow this Old Covenant teaching, which has been widely practiced in the New Covenant Orthodox Church as well.

God doesn't demand of all of us that we sell everything we have and give it to the Church, but He does teach us here that it's incumbent on each one of us to deny ourselves, to give up whatever tempts us to put our trust in materialism, whatever could cause us to make of Jesus something other than the God-man, the Logos (Word) of God, He's revealed to be.

We don't need a 'watered-down Jesus' or a Jesus conforming to our likeness. As Orthodox, we reject all such historic and modern revisionist efforts to "re-imagine" Jesus Christ or proclaim a different Gospel. As Orthodox Christians, we affirm that Christ is our Lord and God, the only Savior of mankind, as all generations before us in the Church have also affirmed.

Christ God sees into the heart of the young man in today's Gospel. He sees what he's still lacking. And Christ God sees into our hearts as well with a desire to heal us and save us. Today, Christ gives us an opportunity to relinquish our vain attempts to follow Him on our terms, to make of Him what we desire. Instead, He invites us to build up treasure in heaven, grounding our identity in Him, entrusting ourselves, all that we are, all that we have, to Him who is Eternal Life, the God-Man who became incarnate to save us. He offers us the way we continue to become the men and women of God He's called us to be in His great love for mankind. Amen.

Do You wish to be first?

Many people base their life on their position in society and spend much of their time climbing the social ladder. The criterion of well-being is to occupy the highest possible step of that ladder. Many are seduced by money and power. With the help of wealth, one can buy opportunities and comfortable life, while power opens the way to an increased personal ego. The mixture of pride and vanity is the main motivation for many human actions: to feel your own superiority over another human being is such a sweet feeling!

Some people make colossal efforts to achieve a high position in society and gain wealth only because they want to show someone in particular or the whole world that they are exceptional and talented. The problem is not power per se (it is called upon by nature to ensure law and order, to protect the country from falling into chaos) and not wealth (work must be paid for a good and consistent work). It is the motivation.

When the distribution of future positions in the Kingdom of Heaven among the Apostles took place before the eyes of the Savior, He explained to His disciples that God is beyond the pagan understanding of power. There is no submission of the weak to the strong, and no welfare distribution based on some societal scale of worth.

Our Lord said, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28). During his earthly ministry, the Savior came to people in different cities and villages, preached about achieving eternal happiness, healed and raised them from the dead, and finally suffered martyrdom. This is the way of life of the One whom Christians call the Lord, that is, the Master. Our Master was serving people; He continues to serve them now and will serve them in the future.

How dramatically this model of superiority in Christ contrasts the ideology of leadership in human society. People seek power in order to subjugate others and revel in their power. Meanwhile, God, as a self-sufficient Being, is the fullness of all things; He both rules and serves because of His abundant love. It is only by serving people that you can achieve what the disciples asked Christ for – a high position in the Kingdom of God, whether you are an ordinary worker or a high-ranking official.

We are called to serve people wherever we are equipped to do so. Mercy should become our personal ideology and habit. Do we want to be the first in the Kingdom of Heaven? Let us focus all our efforts on helping and serving. Imagine how the world would change

