

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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24th Sunday after Pentecost– Parable of the Rich Fool

Sunday, November 22, 2020



Have you ever thought about the similarities and differences between barns and temples? Usually when we think of barns, we think simply of places to house farm animals or to store crops. We normally do not think of them as having much spiritual significance. The rich man in today's gos-

pel lesson thought of his barns only in terms of his business, which was so successful that he looked forward simply to relaxing, eating, drinking, and enjoying himself. Unfortunately, he did so to the point of making his possessions an idol. He was rich in things of the world, but poor towards God. He was ultimately a fool, for he based his life on what was temporary and lost his own soul. His barn became a temple only to himself.

We live in a culture that constantly tempts us to follow this man's bad example. More so than any previous generation, we are bombarded with advertising and other messages telling us that the good life is found in what we can buy. Whether it is cell phones, clothing, cars, houses, entertainment, food, or medicines, the message is the same: Happiness comes from buying
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***24th Sunday after Pentecost ***

Sts. Archippus, Philemon, & Apphia

Epistle: Ephesians 2: 14-22

Gospel: Luke 12: 16-21

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.*

The Road to the Interior, by Vasileios Tatakis

St. Gregory of Nyssa has this to say about human nature: 'But because we are poor in the good, our nature always impels us towards the deficiency, and the appetitive disposition of our nature [i. e. 'what we desire'] is to seek what is lacking' (*On the Soul and the Resurrection*).

This brief passage represents a profound diagnosis of our nature. 'We are poor in good' isn't merely a statement of the fact; it also presupposes that we are aware of our

'poverty'. It also means that 'the good' is what gives substance to us as people, that it's what completes our nature. This is why people, as hunters of the good, always rush towards it. But we always capture it in an incomplete manner.

So the path to the satisfaction of our poverty is always interminable; 'the good' is always beyond reach for us in its entirety. But our life acquires its true meaning when that which we desire is an inclination towards

good, though, at the time we taste it, we also become aware that we're lacking it.

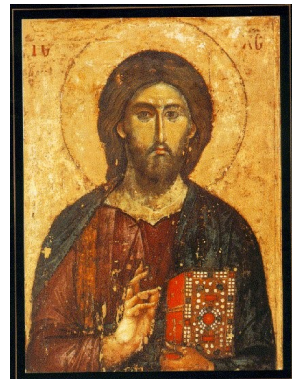
Here we have a metaphysical foundation of the spiritual nature of human beings. Its root and essence is an inclination towards good. And, because it represents a search for what we're lacking, this metaphysical foundation is based on the productive sense of our impoverishment.

Awareness of our poverty as regards 'the good'
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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, Evan, Ryan, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Paula, Andrea, Matthew, Corella, Mike, Ron, Renee, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

A Prayer against COVID-19

Forbearing and merciful, loving and compassionate, Almighty Lord, who brought our nature into being and having fallen once again raised us. Who sent Your only-begotten Son, Savior and Redeemer, and Benefactor healing the passions of body and soul. Look down upon

us and hearken to our entreaty in our day of sorrow. Safeguard us from the Corona virus. Lord, take away affliction and fear. Remember Your innumerable acts of compassion; reveal to us the depths of Your mercy; be not mindful of the multitude of our sins. Harken unto the voice of our prayer from deep within us as it cries out to You. Do not turn Your face away from us nor turn away from your creatures in wrath. Be our aid and deliverer. O our God and Savior, do not reject or abandon us but come and redeem us. Draw near and Crush the power of the illness-bearing virus; remove the pain and dejection, transforming it to joy. Preside over calm for humanity. By Your power greatly aid those serving in the field of health. Raise us from our bed of pain and from our bedding of affliction. Grant health to those who have contracted the illness. Give rest to those who have surrendered their lives to the virus. Grant consolation to their families. For You are the physician of our souls and bodies and to You we offer glory, Father Son and Holy Spirit, now and always and unto ages of ages.

The Road to the Interior, cont'd from p. 1)

is the one and only thing which spurs us on to hunt down what's always lacking. In this way, blessed impoverishment opens the way to glorification. We attempt to become like God Who is, of Himself, all that is beautiful and good.

If we now turn to people today, it's not difficult to see that they're entirely taken up with looking into material things, inventing gadgets and finding ways to satisfy their desires. These desires aren't aimed at 'the good', but rather at affluence. People today are typically finer hunters at stalking prosperity. What we lack is a turn towards our inner self, which would bring us to a metaphysical understanding of our nature as one which has a lack of good. In other words, we have a deficiency of the most essential element for the well-being of our spiritual nature.

If people today are to escape the quagmire, or rather the chaos, of the nihilism which leads to the facile pursuit of affluence, they'll have to turn inwards again and discover the meta-

physical depth, to find the spur for good, which purifies and saves. That's when science and technology will be justified, when people will



once again experience themselves as a metaphysical awareness, not as propositions in a transcendental argument, as Kant would have us be. The light of our spirituality will shine again within us.

May I be allowed to stress that the

most important task of this spirituality must be considered to be philosophy, the disconnection of people from their achievements, making us free and independent of them, making us the determiners of our own spiritual progress. Only then can people begin to conceive the spiritual profundity of their being. This was stated, in his own way, by the great atomic physicist Oppenheimer who said: 'We don't need scientists, we need philosophers. Truth belongs to wisdom, not to science'.

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What is the fear of God?

The fear of God is a gift to the person who turns to God through faith. It is a type of enlightenment, and a reflection of faith. It is the result of Divine Grace. A person who has this fear of God in their heart stands in reverence before God's greatness, and realizes their own spiritual poverty. It is this profound respect and awe (the fear of God) that motivates the soul to devote one's whole being to God, the Creator of All.

(Homily on the Foolish Rich Man, cont'd from p.1)

the latest new product. During the weeks leading up to Christmas, this message is particularly strong. We do not have to become Scrooges, however. It is one thing to give reasonable gifts to our loved ones in celebration of the Savior's birth, but it is quite another to turn this holy time of year into a free-for-all of materialism that obscures the very reason for the season.

The rich fool became wealthy by investing himself entirely in his business to the neglect of everything else. In contrast, the Theotokos invested herself so fully in the Lord that she was able to fulfill the most exalted, blessed, and difficult calling of all time as the Virgin Mother of the Savior. In order for us to follow her example by becoming better temples of Christ, we also have to invest ourselves in holiness.

The hard truth is that holiness does not happen by accident, especially in a culture that worships at the altar of pleasure, power, and possessions. So much in our world shapes us every day a bit more like the rich fool in our gospel lesson, regardless of how much or how little money we have. Many of us are addicted to electronic screens on phones, computers, and televisions. What we see and hear through virtually all forms of entertainment encourages us to think and act as though our horizons extend no further than a barn. In other words, the measure of our lives becomes what we possess, what we can buy, and whatever pleasure or distraction we can find on our own terms.

Over time, these worldly distractions can neither save nor satisfy us. The barn of the rich fool was also a temple, a pagan temple in which he basically worshiped himself. If we are not careful, we will become just like him by laying up treasures for ourselves according to the dominant standards of our culture and shut ourselves out of the new life that Christ has brought to the world.

We cannot control the larger trends of our society, but we can control what we do each day. During the Advent Season, no matter the circumstances of our lives, we can all take steps to live more faithfully as members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles

and prophets, with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone. In other words, we can intentionally reject corrupting influences and live in ways that serve our calling to become better living temples of the Lord. Yes, we can stop obsessing about our barns and enter into the temple of the one true God.

The first step is to set aside time for prayer. If we do not pray every day, we should not be surprised that it is hard to pray in Church or that we find only frustration in trying to resist temptation or to know God's peace in our lives. We also need to read the Bible. If we fill our minds with everything but the Holy Scriptures and the

lives of the Saints, we should not be surprised that worry, fear, and unholy thoughts dominate us. Fasting is also crucial. If we do not fast or otherwise practice self-denial, we should not be surprised when self-centered desires for pleasure routinely get the better of us and make us their slaves.

We should also share with the poor. If we do not give generously of our time and resources to others in need, we should not be surprised when selfishness alienates us from God, our neighbors,

and even our loved ones. This is also a time for humble confession and repentance. If we refuse to acknowledge and turn from our sins, we should not be surprised when we are overcome by guilt and fall into despair about leading a faithful life.

None of us will do that perfectly, but we must all take the steps we are capable of taking in order to turn our barns into temples. Remember that the infant Christ was born in a barn, which by virtue of His presence became a temple. The same will be true of our distracted, broken lives when—with the fear of God and faith and love—we open ourselves to the One Who comes to save us at Christmas.

In the world as we know it, that takes deliberate effort, but it remains the only way to be rich toward God. And that is why Christ is born at Christmas, to bring us into His blessed, holy, and divine life which is more marvelous than anything we can possibly imagine. As the Lord said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."



The Feast of the Presentation of the Theotokos into the Temple

The second great feast of the Theotokos is the celebration of her entrance as a child into the Jerusalem Temple which is commemorated on November 21. Like the feast of her nativity, this feast of Mary is without direct biblical and historical reference. But like the nativity, it is a feast filled with important spiritual significance for the Christian believer.

The texts of the service tells how Mary was brought as a small child to the temple by her parents in order to be raised there among the virgins consecrated to the service of the Lord until the time of their betrothal in marriage. According to Church tradition, Mary was solemnly received by the temple community which was headed by the priest Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist. She was led to the holy place to be “nourished” there by the angels in order to become herself the “holy of holies” of God, the living sanctuary and temple of the Divine child who was to be born in her.

There is no doubt that the verses of the Old Testament Psalm 45, used extensively in the services of the feast, provided a great inspiration for the celebration of Mary’s consecration to the service of God in the Jerusalem Temple.

Hear, O Daughter, and consider and incline your ear; forget your people and your father’s house, and the king will desire your beauty. Since he is your Lord, bow to him . . .

The princess is decked in her chamber with gold-woven robes, in many-colored robes she is led to her king, with her virgin companions, her escort, in her train.

With joy and gladness they are led along, as they enter the palace of the king.

Instead of your fathers shall be your sons; you will make them princes in all the earth. I will cause your name to be celebrated in all generations, therefore, the peoples will praise you forever and ever (Ps 45.10–17).

The Orthodox Church understands these words of the psalm to be a prophecy directly related to Mary the Theotokos. According to the Gospel of Saint Luke which is read at the Vigil of each of her feasts, Mary herself speaks the following words:

My soul magnifies the Lord and my Spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden. For behold, hence-forth all generations

shall call me blessed; for He who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation (Lk 1.47–50).

The main theme of the feast of Mary’s entrance to the Temple, repeated many times in the liturgical services, is the fact that she enters the Temple to become herself the living temple of God, thus inaugurating the New Testament in which are fulfilled the prophecies of old that “the dwelling of God is with man” and that the human person is the sole proper dwelling place of the Divine Presence (Ezek 37.27; Jn 14.15–23; Acts 7.47; 2 Cor 6.11; Eph 2.18–22; 1 Pet 2.4; Rev 22.1–4).

Today is the preview of the good will of God, of the preaching of the salvation of mankind. The Virgin appears in the temple of God, in anticipation proclaiming Christ to all. Let us rejoice and sing to her: Rejoice, O Divine Fulfillment of the Creator’s dispensation. (Troparion of the Feast).

The fortieth chapter of Exodus about the building of the tabernacle is read at Vespers, together with passages from the First Book of Kings and the Prophecy of Ezekiel. Each one of these readings all end with exactly the same line, “for the glory of the Lord filled the house [tabernacle] of the Lord God Almighty” (Ex 40.35; 1 Kg 8.11; Ezek 44.4).

Once again on this feast, the Old Testament readings are interpreted as symbols of the Mother of God. This “glory of the Lord” is referred to the Mother of Christ and it “fills” her and all people after her who “hear the word of God and keep it” as the Gospel of the festal liturgy proclaims (Lk 11.37–28). The epistle reading at the

Divine Liturgy also proclaims this very same theme (Heb 9.1–7).

Thus, the feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple is the feast which celebrates the end of the physical temple in Jerusalem as the dwelling place of God. When the child Mary enters the temple, the time of the temple comes to an end and the “preview of the good will of God” is shown forth. On this feast we celebrate—in the person of Christ’s mother—that we too are the house and tabernacle of the Lord.

. . . We are the temple of the living God, as God said, “I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (2 Cor 6.16; Is 52.11).

