

# 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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26<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost—Jesus heals 10 Lepers

Sunday, December 6, 2020



As we just heard in today's Gospel, ten lepers appeal to Christ God for healing that He alone gives. While all ten were healed, only one came back to Christ, prostrating himself before Him who gives life to all people, and thanking God for the healing he has received.

Brothers and sisters, you and I are like one of those lepers: we've received the greatest of gifts—something even greater than physical healing: new life in Jesus Christ, participation even now in His eternal Kingdom through the Sacraments of His Church, forgiveness of our sins and prayer, the possibility to converse with God. He blesses us, ministers healing to us through His Church, calls us to a greater, and brings eternal purpose to our otherwise temporal lives.

He invites us to receive Him inside ourselves, to feed on Him with our eternal souls. He heals us from the passions and destructive vices of the world to the extent that we're willing to cooperate with His work in our lives. He receives us as we are but always with the objective of transfiguring us into the men and women of God  
*(continued p. 3)*

**\*\*\*26<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost \*\*\***

**\*\*St. Nicholas the Wonderworker\*\***

Epistle: Ephesians 5: 5-19

Gospel: Luke 17: 12-19

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.*

## God Revealed

The perquisite for approaching God the inaccessible is the knowledge that it is impossible for us to reach and know Him via the intellectual route. God is inaccessible in His essence, but, despite this, is known and revealed to us through His uncreated energies. We do not understand God; we experience Him.

The path which leads to Him is empirical, it is a progression which has deification as its destination. In this way, through

the non-rational, we arrive at God's glorification.

God is inaccessible, then, in His essence. He is accessible to us, however, through His energy: through His uncreated energies by which He is revealed to us. In reality, there is no contradiction but rather a dialectical synthesis.

We begin with the question: 'What is God?' God is, by definition, completely inaccessible. It is an utterly senseless question to ask what God

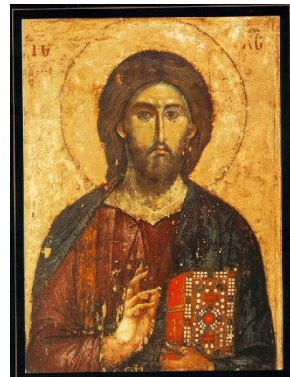
is. It has no meaning, since God is that which we cannot ask about, which we cannot define, because He simply is. God is being. This is why He is beyond our understanding. When Moses asked God at the bush in flames: 'Who shall I say I have these commandments from? What's your name?', he received the reply 'I am who I am', (Ex. 3, 14). This was translated in the Septuagint as 'I am the being'.

*(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, Jack, 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, Daniel, Frankie, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

**Show Faith-Show Trust**

We can't expect to see the light of God unless we are seized by the reality that God exists, that everything is His and that we are His little creatures; therefore, our whole life has to depend on God, has to be illuminated and fed by Him. In other

words, we have to let God breathe into our lives.

There are two good things that come out by saying the prayer "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me". The first one is that, as you cry out, you put yourself in the hands of God. The second is that, once you ask for the mercy of God, it starts to act, little by little it transforms your soul, and it changes your life.

The Lord says to you: "Show faith, show trust". Let's say, for example, that you have patiently endured much yet, nothing has happened. Never mind, start to endure again there and then. You receive the command from Christ, but you also receive strength. That's a truth. Here is the whole secret of spiritual life.

When the soul is troubled, our logic gets blurry and we cannot see clearly. Only when the soul is calm, the logic gets illuminate and then we can see clearly the cause of every situation. If we will let Christ dwell in our soul, then the light will turn on and the darkness will go away on its own.

**God Revealed, cont'd from p. 1)**

This 'the being', the one who exists, transmits the meaning somewhat of the Yahweh of the Hebrew text. So Yahweh means 'I am'. When in Holy Scripture, in the New Testament- and in particular the Gospel according to Saint John- Christ says the words 'I am', this is Yahweh. It was John's purpose to demonstrate that Jesus is Yahweh. Each of the Evangelists had a particular theological aim and this was John's. Whenever Jesus said 'I am', He meant that He is Yahweh, which is why John writes: 'I am the way, truth, life'; 'I am the light of the world'; 'I am the gate'...

Christ, then, is the Word of Yahweh, He is the person through Whom Yahweh is revealed. Christ is the revelation of Yahweh, through Whom we can go to Yahweh: 'I am the gate'; 'I am the way'; 'that you may know that I am'. Unless you know, you cannot interpret this 'I am the being'. When the soldiers went to the garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus He asked them: 'Who are you looking for?' When they replied 'Jesus

the Nazarene', He said 'I am' [i.e. 'I am he'.

When they heard this 'I am', the members of the arrest party went



backward and fell to the ground, as if they had been pushed by a great force, because they had heard the phrase which no-one could say. When Jesus said to them: 'I am', He was really saying: 'I am Yahweh'. This is the essence of the revelation of God.

To be able to speak about God, to understand each other, we use two ways. One is the apophatic, that is awareness that we know nothing about God. God is invisible, inconceivable, unfathomable. All of this is the apophatic way. By saying that God is invisible, impalpable, inaccessible, in fact we are saying what He is not. We say what He is by saying what He is not. The other way is cataphatic. We say God is just, or, in the prayer in the Divine Liturgy ('For you are God ineffable, incomprehensible, invisible, inconceivable...', 'ever existing, eternally the same.'

Here we are speaking cataphatically. But even when we talk cataphatically about God, we still are not saying anything about His essence. We say things about God's properties: 'what is God's has been formed from what is ours'. We exist in time, God is ever existing; we change, God is eternally the same. In the 1st Epistle to Timothy, chapter 6, God 'alone is immortal and dwells in unapproachable light'

*(Homily on Jesus healing 10 Lepers, cont'd from p.1)*

He's made us and called us to be.

So yes, we're like one of the ten lepers who have been healed and given new life: We've all been offered deification; we've all been set upon the journey of healing that is life with God. But, the question is: are we like the leper who returns to God, prostrates himself before Him and thanks Him, or, are we like the other nine, who receive from God but take His work, healing, and salvation for granted? Do we avail ourselves of His life, of His healing, of this deification? Or, are we focused on ourselves to the extent that we forget those around us and their needs?

Whatever our sin struggle, there's healing: no one's beyond God's healing power. With God, all things are possible. But how can we find healing if we're set on going our own way, in making our communion with God through Christ, only a tangential part of our busy lives, in taking Christ and His Church on "our terms," or filling our days with other priorities beside our life in Him? In all these ways, we can be like those other nine lepers.

So ask yourself: Are you like the leper that returned and gave thanks to God, falling on your face before Him in thanksgiving or have you been like the other nine who were healed but took God's work in their lives for granted? Is there anything you are taking for granted with God and His Church now? Do we see ourselves as unworthy of His bounty, healing, and salvation and, therefore, recipients of grace and mercy? Do we see His reception of us as a right or as a gift of grace and love? Do we appreciate what we have, or are we focused on what we don't have, both personally and as a church family? Do we love our brothers and sisters in this Mission and give ourselves sacrificially to the building up of the Body as a whole? These are some of the questions that are worth asking ourselves as we confront this Gospel.

The reality is that you and I have much to be thankful for in our church, including and especially the brother or sister sitting next to you, who is important for your salvation; he or she is someone to pray for, someone to learn to come outside yourself to love, to build up, to

encourage, to give to, and to receive from. We're all members of the same Body. We're reconciled together to God, knit together, built up together, saved together—just like those ten lepers were. We build up our church not just for ourselves, but for each other, because your brother or sister's growth also affects your growth in faith and the love which bonds us together in Christ means that I also care about my brother and sister's healing and growth as I do my own.

The difference between the one leper who came back to Christ and the other nine, who received healing, but forgot about Christ is thankfulness. Many times, our forgetfulness of God, our taking Him and our church for granted or on 'our terms', comes from a lack of a spirit of thankfulness, of remembrance of God's grace and

mercy or recognition of His ongoing work in our lives, deifying us, forgiving us, feeding us, healing us, saving us.

As fasting is a reminder to pray and prayer begets more prayer: so too we see this same dynamic at work with thankfulness. The more you and I take time to thank God, the more we can give thanks, focus on what we have, rather than what we lack, and make ourselves more open towards God to receive more of His grace and love into our souls.

Now, as we begin in earnest to look toward Christ's coming (in His Incarnation and glorious Second Coming), it's a propitious time to make a change, to renew a right and thankful spirit, to thank

God for this church and our brethren in this church with whom we're being saved and with whom we work out our salvation. Now, in this holy Advent season is the time to act: to beseech God for healing and strength to live more faithful lives to God's glory. Embrace God's love and healing as it comes to you this Nativity Fast, take the Fast, your praying, your worshiping seriously, learn from the amazing Saints commemorated, beseech God for more faith, surrender yourself more to Christ and His holy Church, and, therefore, to the work He's doing in you and through you to make you into the man or woman of God He's called you to be. Take part in striving to cultivate a spirit of thankfulness to God this holy season.



## St. Nicholas the Wonderworker-A Saint for all the Ages

St Nicholas was born (c. 270) in the the region of Lycia (southern Asia Minor), in the city of Patara. His parents, Theophanes and Nonna, were both pious Christians, and being childless until his arrival, consecrated Nicholas to God at his birth. His birth considered by both an answer to their prayer, and especially the prayer issued during Nonna's illness, his mother was said to have been healed immediately after giving birth. Nicholas would always remember his parents' love and devotion to God, and in his later years promised to come to the aid of those who remembered them in their prayers.

St. Nicholas approached his duties as priest and teacher of the faith with the same fervor his uncle had witnessed in him during his childhood.

Despite his youthfulness, many of the faithful considered him an elder, and his ability to respond to questions of the faith in love and wisdom earned him the deep respect of those in the city. He was noted in particular for the fervency of his prayer and kind-hearted nature, and the attention to charitable work that characterized his priestly ministry. Following the injunction of Christ, Fr Nicholas sold his possessions and, following his parents deaths a few years after his ordination, distributed his inheritance to the poor and afflicted, who would often seek him out for assistance.

Nicholas was consecrated to the episcopacy during a tumultuous time in the life of the Church in Lycia. The persecutions under the emperor Diocletian (284-305) effected that region deeply, and for a time, Bishop Nicholas was imprisoned with other Christians for refusing to bow down and worship the idols of the imperial cult. He was remembered later for the exhortations he delivered to his fellow prisoners, urging them to endure with joy all that the Lord lay before them, whether chains, bonds, torture or even death. Living his life in ascetic labor and zealous ministry, St Nicholas fell asleep in the Lord at an old age (d. 6th December 343), by some accounts quite ill.

St Nicholas' title 'wonderworker' comes from the multitude of reports of miracles that issued forth at his intercession, both during his life and after. The renown of his miraculous acts was widespread in his own lifetime. As he

had secretly delivered gold, many years before, to the father of three destitute daughters, so he secretly delivered gold to an Italian merchant (by some accounts, this gold was left miraculously by an apparition of the saint appearing to the merchant in Italy), convincing him to sail to Myra with a shipment of grain. And so by his prayers and deeds, his city of Myra was rescued from a terrible famine.

One miracle, particularly widely known, was Bishop Nicholas' conversion of the local governor, who had been bribed into unjustly condemning three men to death. The saint approached the executioner, who had already raised his sword to issue the death-blow, and swiftly removed it

from his hands. He then approached the governor and denounced his unjust action. This latter, convicted by St Nicholas' words, repented and asked the saint's forgiveness.

This episode is remembered as connected directly to another: for three officers of the imperial military were present to see St Nicholas stay this execution, who were later slanderously accused before the emperor, who condemned them to death. St Nicholas appeared to Emperor Constantine in a dream and urged him to reverse this sentence, which the emperor did.

Many times, the saint's prayers were said to have saved those drowning in the sea (just as his prayers had calmed the sea on his own journey, as a young priest, to Jerusalem). Prisoners unjustly condemned prayed to him and were delivered. The poor prayed to him and were provided for. And so

Nicholas' reputation as *Wonderworker* was established during his life. It continues to this day.

A church was built in his honor by the residents of Myra, in which his relics were kept for many centuries. However, in 1081, Asia Minor suffered various attacks and threats of barbarian invasion. St Nicholas' relics at this time remained in his city of Myra. However, a priest in the Italian city of Bari soon beheld a vision in which Nicholas appeared and informed him that he did not wish to remain in a city as barren as the defeated Myra. He instructed the priest to remove his body from the city. After informing the residents of Bari of his vision, three ships were sent to Myra to retrieve the saint's relics. The saint's relics remain in the Church of St. Nicholas in Bari.

