

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

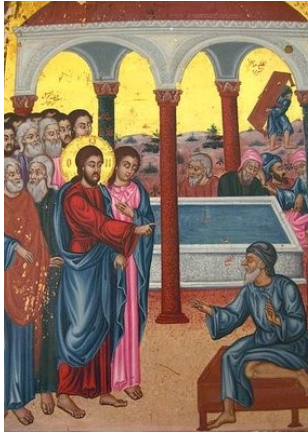
Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!



Volume 10 Issue 461

4th Sunday of Pascha— Sunday of the Paralytic

April 25, 2021



Our Faith teaches us that healing is miraculous by whatever means it occurs—whether through medical science or through prayer and anointing, or both. We know that it all comes through Christ by the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.

In the two examples of healing in today's Scripture readings, we see that true healing comes from Christ, from

the Creator of all life. It is St. Peter's communion (*koinonia*) with Christ God that enables him by the Holy Spirit to be the means through which God conveys healing to the paralytic and then to the woman of God, Tabitha. He says to the paralytic, "Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you." In the Gospel, it is, of course, Christ Himself in person who heals; in the second, it is Christ through Peter who heals.

In many of the healings recorded in the New Testament, Christ's healings are preceded by forgiveness of sins. This is so natural, so fitting. Only God can forgive sins. Our ultimate problem is not the weakness and infirmities of our physical bodies, as distressing, saddening, and limiting as they may be. Rather, it's our sin, our willful removal of Life, from communion with God.

(continued p. 3)

**** Sunday of the Paralytic ****
Holy Apostle & Evangelist Mark

Epistle: Acts 9:32-42

Gospel: John 5: 1-15

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 Holy Doors in the Church by John Nichiporuk

The altar barrier called the iconostasis (the icon screen) separates the church from its Holy of Holies, where the altar table is located. It also serves as the hallmark of any Orthodox church. The Royal or, rather, the Holy Doors form the central element of the iconostasis. What is the origin of the Holy Doors? What symbolism do they carry and what is their function during worship?

As we know from Scripture, the Early Church did not celebrate

its divine services in dedicated temples. Instead, Christians gathered in private homes and catacombs to "break" the Bread of Life on the Lord's Day. A designated place, usually in the form of a table situated on a dais, on which the bread and wine were placed, already existed, but this altar was not separated from the congregation by any barriers.

The first altar barriers in the form of low gratings began to appear in the 4th century, when the church came out of the

underground and began to build and receive its buildings from the state. The appearance of traditional iconostases with Holy Doors dates back to an even later date (the beginning of the 2nd millennium). Before that, the altar space was separated by a ciborium and an altar curtain, which was rolled up each time during divine services so that people could be "eyewitnesses of the Divine Mysteries" (St Herman of Constantinople, *On the Sacraments*).

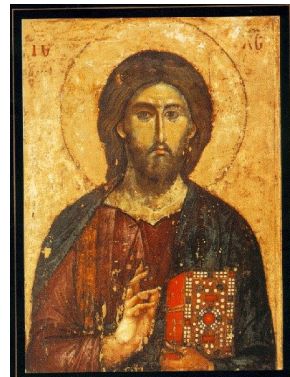
(continued p.2)

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)

Please keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Louise, George, Evan, Ryan, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Laura, Elizabeth Matthew, Corella, Ron, Daniel, Frankie, Pat, Kathleen, Terena, Loretta, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

On the healing of the Paralytic

In the paralytic, all the Gentiles are brought to Him to be healed. He accordingly is brought by the ministry of angels; he is called son, because he is the work of God; the sins of his soul are forgiven, which the law could not forgive. For faith only justifies. Then he manifests the pow-

er of the resurrection, when, by taking up his bed, he teaches that in heaven bodies shall be without infirmity.

St Hilary Bishop of Poitiers

... Let us say again what we have said before: That anyone who is sick should seek the help in prayer of others, that they may be restored to health; that through their intercession, the enfeebled frame of our body, the wavering footsteps of our deeds, may be restored to health by the remedy of the heavenly word. Let there be therefore be certain helpers of the soul, to raise the soul of man, even lying indifferent in the weakness of the outer body, so that by their assistance it may be easy for a man to raise himself and lower himself again, to be placed in the sight of Jesus; worthy to appear in the Lord's sight. For the Lord looks with affection on the humble: Because "he hath regarded the humility of His handmaid" (Lk 1:48)

St Ambrose, Bishop of Milan

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

The Holy Doors, continued from p.1

A noteworthy fact is that the term "Royal Doors" (or the Red Doors, which can still be seen in the Athonite churches) was originally used not for the central gates of the iconostasis, but the main entrance from the narthex into the nave of the temple. When attending the divine services, the emperor would solemnly enter the church through these gates, taking off his diadem and bowing his knees to Christ. The first mention of the altar gates and the local monastic tradition of closing them after the Great Entrance is found in the works of Nicholas of Andida, 12th century. However, Simeon of Thessaloniki (mid-15th century) does not yet have clear evidence of any barrier other than chancel.

The symbolism of the Holy Doors is rooted in the Old Testament, and is also reflected in the icons that are usually placed on them. Many symbolic explanations of the church phenomena appeared much later than the actual phenomena. For example, the liturgical fans appeared with the pur-

pose of driving away insects from the Holy Gifts, but later they received an allegorical explanation with the celebration of angels at the Liturgy.



Similarly, the Holy Doors first appeared simply as the main opening between the columns leading to the altar. The Church however continues to follow her theological intuition and creatively finds parallels between li-

turgical details, the truths of the faith and the sacred history. It is not surprising therefore that the Holy Doors soon received the significance of the entry point of the entire congregation (represented by the clergy) into the heavenly glory and the presence of God.

The Epistle to the Hebrews is filled with liturgical symbolism. It says that Christ, the high priest of the church, has entered "into that which is within the veil" (see Hebrews 6: 19-20), and therefore the church, celebrating His death and Resurrection and performing the saving sacrament of the Eucharist, also secretly introduces all the baptized into the kingdom of God, which is still being awaited, but at the same time is already open in the Liturgy to the eyes of our faith (see Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, the Sacrament of the Kingdom), when the believers partake of Christ Himself "entering" through the Holy Doors during the Eucharist.

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(Homily on Sunday of the Paralytic, cont'd from p.1)

Sin itself is understood in the Orthodox Faith as sickness. Our sin and disobedience, our rejection of God's communion, His life, as individuals and as human beings, means that we turn away from that life, and we in as sense, embrace death.

Adam and Eve removed themselves from communion with God through their willful disobedience, their departure from the way of life. They chose death instead of life with the Creator. We too, in our sinfulness, our rebellion against God, our thinking *we* know best, our lack of faith, etc., perpetuate the sin of Adam and appropriate its consequences in our own lives. Thank God, there's a remedy! Thank God, there's healing!

As I stated at the outset, healing in whatever form it comes, is given by Christ the Author and Giver of Life—the Word through which the Father spoke creation and life into being. Our healing and recovery from sickness is a reminder of the healing of our souls that is the ongoing work of our repentance and co-operation with the Holy Spirit.

The paralytic in today's Gospel laments, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up..." God doesn't leave us alone to fend for ourselves. God offers Himself, His life, new life, that is, the cure for our sin-sickness, to all men. God pours out His grace and love upon us through His holy Church. He gives us the medicine of immortality in the Eucharist. He gives us the means of our healing through our struggle against our sinful passions, He teaches us His truth through the divine services and prayers, He gives us much-needed accountability in the Church and our participation in the Sacrament of Repentance, Confession, and through our daily prayers, as we strive to appropriate the Orthodox Faith in our daily lives.

It's the teaching of the Church that as we know God in this life, so we'll experience Him in the next. This should give us pause. We should ask ourselves, "What place do I put my communion with God?" Am I striving to bring Christ into all aspects of my daily life so that I may be further deified, that I may continue to heal and grow in my participation in the Life of the Holy Trinity?

We often use excuses to hold ourselves back from growth and healing: I'm too busy, I've got too many other responsibilities, I'm afraid, I'm too prideful: "God can help others, but He can't help me." The truth, the reali-

ty, is, that we don't have to stay stuck in the same dead-end patterns of sin-sickness and enslavement to passions that drag us away from Him who is Life. Thanks be to God, through Christ, physical sickness, disease and death can be transfigured. "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" (I Cor. 15:55) In the same way, our spiritual sickness finds healing in Christ. Through the tools of the Church, we find the means to struggle with our passions by bringing Christ into the midst of that struggle—and that struggle is transfigured into a means of deification through our repentance and prayers.

Too often we may take the Church with a capital "C" for granted; we treat her casually. We fail to see that this Body of which Christ is the head, is here to teach us, grow us, minister His presence to us all. The more we avail ourselves of the tools entrusted to us in the Church:

the Sacraments, the divine services, the teaching (a new Bible study will be starting up in a couple weeks), fellowship, serving one another, building up the Body, the more opportunities we have to heal, to grow in our relationship and communion with God in Christ likeness.

Church is meant to be more than just a once-a-week experience for us. We're meant to incorporate the Church, that is, the life in Christ, into all aspects of our life. There

is for the faithful Orthodox Christian no distinction or separation between our relationship and communion with God and our participation in the Church. For us as Orthodox, there's no such thing as 'having Jesus' without the Church; Jesus is manifested to us through the Church, through the tools of salvation He imparts to us through His Body in His great love for us.

When Christ is kept on the periphery, on the side, we may wonder where the growth and healing is and it reinforces our doubts and fears. When we're physically sick, we need to avail ourselves of the medicine faithfully. So too, our spiritual sickness demands that we avail ourselves faithfully of the spiritual medicine of the Church. Avail yourselves of what Christ imparts to us through His Holy Church, its worship, fellowship, service, and Sacraments. In this way, our souls, like the body of the paralytic will be lifted up, will be strengthened, and as he took up his bed, so we will be able to take up our cross, and press on toward the Kingdom of Heaven, life with God.



On Repentance by St. Gregory Palamas (part 3)

Saint Gregory, who really did live Godly repentance and who said that his deep sighs “illuminated my darkness” rightly could not see how anyone could pass from the life of sin into “real life” without remorse and repentance. He said that when the faculty of direct perception, the “nous”, is liberated from every perceptible thing, it rises above the maelstrom of earthly things and can see the inner person, since it is able to perceive what he calls the “hateful mask” which the soul has acquired through its vagrancy among worldly things.

At this point it hastens to scour the defilement with tears of repentance (Discourse on Peter the Athonite). The more people distance themselves from worldly cares and return to themselves, they more receptive they become as regards divine mercy. Christ commended those who mourn for their sins and for the loss of their salvation, which is caused by sin. This is, in any case, the reason why this remorse is called “blessed”.

While, according to the Patristic and ascetic tradition, mourning is a fruit of God, it still presupposes the co-operation of people themselves, and this requires humility, self-censure, mortification, fasting, vigilance, and, above all, prayer. And this persistence in cultivating the virtues and striving to achieve Godly remorse is reinforced by the experience of hesychasm, which testifies that this “mourning” does not cause debility and hopelessness, but creates in people the conditions to experience spiritual gladdening, comfort and, according to Palamas “the procurement of sweet joyfulness” (To Xeni). And when it assists the nous to lift the veil of the passions, it softly introduces it into the true treasures of the soul and habituates it in the prayer “in secret” to the Father.

There are many reasons which should cause the faithful to mourn. Just as the Lord’s disciples were saddened when they were deprived of the “truly good teacher, Christ”, so we, who experience the same deprivation and absence of Christ from our lives, ought to have within us and cultivate this same sorrow (Homily 29, PG, 151) But there is also another reason to mourn: the ejection from the realm of truth in paradise to that of pain and passions.

This fall is so painful because it contains the whole drama of the banishment from God, the withdrawal of the “person to person” discourse with Him, of eternal life and co-glorification with the angels. Saint Gregory asks who has ever completely realized the deprivation of all these things and not mourned? And he urges all the faithful who live “in awareness of this deprivation” to mourn and to wash away with Godly remorse “the stains of sins” (Homily 29, PG 151). This exhortation on the part of the saint is completely in accord with the exhortation and experience of the Church, which, in the hymnography for the Sunday of Cheese-Week calls upon Christians, on the eve of the Great Fast, to remember their banishment from forfeited Paradise and to mourn this loss.



According to Saint Gregory, mourning is the most natural and spontaneous expression of the soul wounded by sin and coming to repentance. The saint uses a wonderful simile to prove that it is people’s wounds that cause the pain, not the fact of repentance itself, which brings only joy and comfort to the soul. Just as, if someone’s tongue has suffered damage, honey might seem tart to them and they need to be cured in order to taste the sweetness, the same is true of the fear of God: in souls where it is engendered, on hearing the message of the Gospels, it causes sorrow, since these souls are still surrounded by the wounds of their sins; but as soon as they cast these off, through repentance, they feel the joy of the good news (Homily 29). This is, in any case, why Godly sadness is also called “joyous”.

Investing the Lord’s second beatitude, which refers to mourning, Palamas justifies Christ’s placing of it immediately after the beatitude about spiritual poverty by the fact that mourning co-exists with spiritual poverty. A typical attribute of those who mourn in a Godly way is the refusal to transfer or pass off the responsibility for their sins onto other people. It is a basic principle which Palamas sets out, in discussing Godly remorse, that we should flay ourselves for our sins and avoid transferring the responsibility for them onto others (Homily 29). In any case, it was Adam and Eve’s transfer of the responsibility for ignoring God’s commandment that deprived them of the salvation of penitential mourning (Gen. 3, 12-13).

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