

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be Forever!



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7th Sunday after Pentecost-Christ

July 11, 2021



We witness through the Gospel today the healing of two blind men. And through this life-changing encounter in which Christ's power is in full evidence, we're presented with the opportunity to grow to a fuller understanding of our own healing and salvation. Responding to their plea for mercy, the God of mercy, Jesus Christ, receives the two blind men into His

presence and He heals them. But Jesus doesn't perform this great miracle randomly. Rather, like the healing of the paralytic last week, we're taught a lesson in faith and healing that is also applicable to our own need for Christ's healing touch.

Sometimes we assume that it's God whose withholding growth or healing from us. But what we learn over and over again through the witness of the Scriptures and the lives of the Saints is that it's us who have to be ready and willing to accept God's healing, to get ourselves into Christ's near presence, to have the faith to present ourselves to Him for the healing we need.

To paraphrase St. John Chrysostom, Christ doesn't run after those in need of healing everywhere, lest anyone think He's healing out of vainglory. No, there's more at work: Christ's
(continued p. 3)

+ 6th Sunday after Pentecost +
+++ Great Martyr Euphemia +++

Epistle: Romans 15: 1-7

Gospel: Matthew 9: 27-35

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.*

Let us commend Ourselves to Christ, by Metropolitan Sotirios

The most frequently heard exhortation of the Church which the faithful who attend daily Services hear is, "Let us commend ourselves and one another, and our whole life to Christ our God." The Celebrant says this multiple times (as many as ten during Matins and the Divine Liturgy), and some may wonder: Why is this repeated so much?

The answer to this question is simple, in that its repetition shows how important it is for a person to entrust their whole life to our Lord and God Je-

sus Christ. This desire to do so is also expressed elsewhere in the Divine Liturgy, in the Prayer just before the Lord's Prayer: "We entrust to You, loving Master, our whole life and hope..." By expressing this commitment to the Lord with these words and more, we acknowledge that we have nothing of our own.

As St. Paul the Apostle writes, all that we are (body, spirit and soul) belong to God (see 1 Corinthians 5:15-20). We are God's creatures, and even when humanity

turned against their Creator, it was the Son of our God again who, as the illumined St. Paul repeats, brought us back with the price of His own Precious Blood (see 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 and 7:23). Just because we belong to God, this does not mean that God forces us to be close to Him. He wants our relationship with Him to be freely chosen, in that we make the decision (and act accordingly) to entrust "our entire life" to His omnipotent and caring hands.

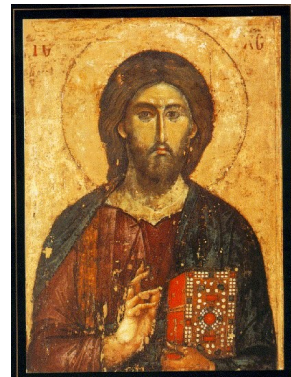
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

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. We are also happy to announce that coffee social has resumed out on the church lawn following the Divine Liturgy.

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, Joan, Terena, Loretta, Bill, Mike, Carol, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

"To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men but chosen of God and precious, You also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2: 4-5).

In truth, without Christ, mankind has always been and will always be like dead

stones. But Christ is like a living stone. Only adhere to Him, and you will become as living stones. In building a house, the builder chooses only those stones that are chiseled into shape and prepared to fit easily with the other stones in the wall.

The builder rejects the unchiseled, the unprepared, the unpolished and the fragile stones. Building the home, or a temple, of His Immortal Kingdom, Christ chooses men as the builder chooses stones, with one characteristic--life, spiritual life. The Lord rejects spiritually dead men as bad building blocks, and accepts only those who are alive, who resemble Him and who fit into place with the other living stones. These other living stones are the angels, prophets, apostles and saints. Brethren, let us endeavor to be a holy material for the holy house of the Kingdom of Christ--which He is building day and night, and which He will finish completely in the fullness of time.

O Lord Jesus, Builder of the Kingdom of Heaven, enliven us with Your Holy Spirit, and build us also, as living stones, into the house of Your eternal glory.

Let us commend ourselves to Christ, continued from p.1

Sadly, it often happens that we forget God in the difficulties we have in our lives. Instead of turning to Him, humanity tries to face the adversity and sorrows of life alone. This only increases suffering, and when resolution or relief cannot be found, they lose hope. For those Christians who have put their faith and trust in the benevolent Lord, doing all that they can in every situation, a different result can be seen. By giving ourselves over completely to the divine will of God, we find peace instead of despair. Our All-Loving God will always be at our side!

The Lord loves humanity deeply, and is not indifferent to our problems. Holy Scripture, both Old and New Testament, is full of God's miraculous intervention in the lives of human beings who faced danger, hunger, drought, injustice, enemies and every other kind of trial. Let us remember the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites and the five loaves of bread and two fish, which our Lord Jesus Christ blessed and multiplied to

such an extent that five thousand men (along with innumerable women and children) ate and were filled, with some even being left over! All of this was done, not by the request of the people, but because the Lord saw on His own the needs of His people, doing so because "He cares for us".

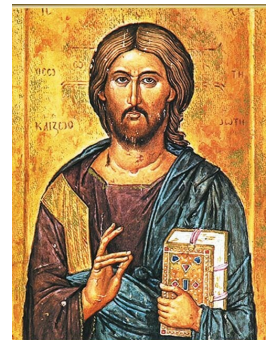
To commend "Ourselves and one another" not only means ourselves, but also those around us and have a connection with, which includes children, family and neighbors. It means that we have complete trust in God's love and providence, having faith that Christ our God will lead us through any storm. When we take refuge in the All-merciful God, our suffering is removed, and He settles everything in the best possible way.

It must be said, however, that it is often necessary for us to show patience and be attentive to what the Lord is doing for us. When God delays in freeing us from a difficult circumstance, this does not mean that He has forgotten us. Unlike human beings, God never forgets. What is

happening here, is that God is waiting for the appropriate time to intervene, when it will have the most benefit to us. When our troubles seem overwhelming, we should not be anxious, but instead remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

Nothing is difficult for Almighty God.

If we start to have the thought that God has abandoned us and is doing nothing, then we have to look inward, reflecting on whether it is our own lack of faith and confidence in God that is hindering the action of His Grace. "Let us commend ourselves and one another, and our whole life to Christ our God", let us make sure that we are entrusting our own selves to Christ.



(Homily on Christ healing the blind men, cont'd from p.1)

healing presupposes a participation, a cooperation, from those who are healed. Just as our relationship and communion with Him necessitates a participation on our part, by definition: a return of love, an act of repentance and an abandonment of self-will when it is in disobedience to Christ and His Church; our healing bespeaks a reciprocal relationship.

In fact, in most of the healings we see in the Gospels, those in need of healing personally seek out that healing from Christ. In other words, they desire that healing, they desire for Christ to touch them and heal them, they desire cleansing from their sins. They desire His visitation enough to seek Christ out, to entrust themselves to Him, to acknowledge their need for Him. They desire healing enough to step forward in faith, recognizing that God alone is worthy of their trust, that He alone is the Great Physician of our souls and bodies.

The two blind men seek out Jesus; they follow Him, crying out to Him, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" These two men know the Source of mercy; they know that God alone can give such a mercy, such a miraculous healing.

To test their faith further, Jesus asks them even after such a demonstration of faith, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" And they say to Him, "Yes, Lord." But note what Christ says in response, "According to your faith, let it be to you." Do you see the involvement of their souls here, the relationship which Christ God develops between them and Him? Their volition, their will, was to be healed of their physical infirmity, their blindness, but it demanded the 'eyes' of faith and the strength of soul.

Even still, Jesus doesn't heal everyone today; not everyone receives physical healing. It remains a mystery. To some, like St. Paul, who petitioned God to remove the "thorn in his flesh," God's response was, "My grace is sufficient for you for My power is made perfect in weakness" (II Cor. 12). In other words, there was something about that 'thorn' that St. Paul 'needed' if he was to trust in God for his strength, to be humble before Him, to serve God to the amazing extent he did, converting whole nations to the truth of God and His salvation.

While our physical healing necessarily involves our

will, our souls, the inverse is also true: the spiritual healing of our souls involves our bodies, our participation, our presentation of ourselves before God, our getting to the divine services, to Confession, to properly prepare for the Eucharist that it can work spiritually in our souls for our deification, healing, salvation.

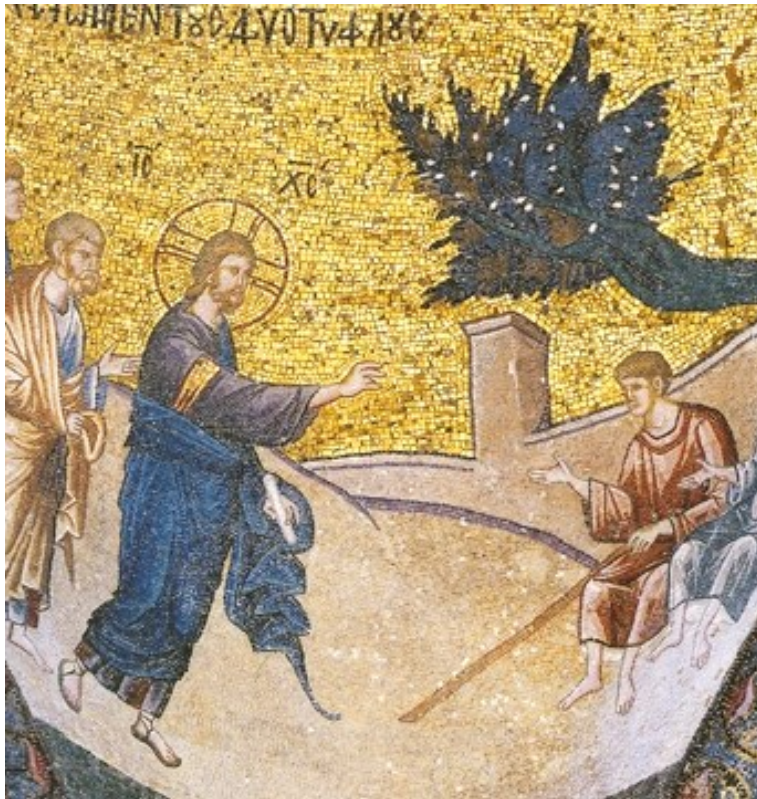
When it comes to healing our eternal souls, we know that God desires this above all: He calls all to salvation from sin-sickness, spiritual sickness. The truth is that all of us are to one degree or another sin-sick, that is, we're 'works in progress;' as St. Paul says, we must "work out our salvation with fear and trembling," (Phil. 2:12) if we're to grow in our relationship and communion with God, be deified, and find spiritual healing, that is, salvation in Christ.

And God gives us a sure and prescribed path toward our healing, our growth, and salvation through His Church. He teaches us how to pray and fast through the Church, and so, we pray daily the prayers of the Church and attend the divine services, following the fast as much as able. He gives us Confession through the Church as a means to be freed of our passions, and so, we take seriously our preparation for Confession and reception of the Gifts of Christ at the Divine Liturgy. Christ feeds us with His Body and Blood in the Eucharist, so we take seriously our preparation through prayer and fasting to receive those greatest of Gifts, that is, Christ Himself,

so that they may have a deifying affect on us for our healing. Through all these 'tools' we progress in our knowledge and love of God and our salvation.

Our ongoing willingness to be healed, to progress in our healing, is an integral part of our salvation. We're saved through our faith that manifests itself thru our actions and deeds, the living out of that faith, the pushing of ourselves to live for Christ and prioritize the life in Him above all else. Faith and works go hand in hand. Christ asks the blind men, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" We've been shown the way if we would make use of it.

May we each cultivate the attitude of soul and the cooperation of body to follow Christ with all that we have, all that we are, crying out to Him as did the blind men, "Lord, have mercy on us," knowing that He is the Lord who loves us and indeed has mercy on our souls.



“My soul shall rejoice in the Lord, for He has clothed me with the garment of salvation; He has covered me with the robe of gladness; as a bridegroom He has set a crown on me; and as a bride adorns herself with jewels, so my God has adorned me.”

With these words from Isaiah, the priest begins the ritual of dressing prior to the Liturgy. With each item of his priestly garments, another verse from the Scriptures (Old Testament) will be recited. The verse not only relates to that item of clothing, but offers both a mystical explanation as well as a meditation for the priest himself. The priest begins the Divine Liturgy by *becoming an allegory*. To understand such a statement, reflect with me on this passage from Galatians:

“It is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are an allegory. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar—for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children—but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.” (4:22-27)

St. Paul is doing nothing strange in his treatment of the Old Testament. Jews and Gentiles would be familiar with this manner of reading. It is interesting that some English translations will render this as “which things are figurative...” or “which things are symbolic...”

Clearly showing that we have a hard time expressing what is going on here. In modern usage, “allegory” has come to be confined to a particular form of literary symbolism, one where one thing is meant to stand for something else.

CS Lewis’ childrens’ book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, is an example of such allegory. Aslan stands for Christ. This, however, is not what St. Paul means. St. Paul is using the term in its very broad, ancient sense, in which allegory means the use of one word in order to convey another. It is an understanding that there is a meaning hidden beneath and within a text. Indeed, it would not have been uncommon for such an approach to suggest that the hidden meaning is the “true” meaning, visible to those with “eyes to see.” It is similar to Christ’s declaration that God has *purposely* hidden certain things

for the sake of our salvation. He does not “cast his pearls before swine.”

This same hiddenness is common throughout the Scriptures and across the history of the people of God. When God speaks with Moses on the mountain, He shows Him the heavenly (here we can say “real” and “true”) tabernacle. He then gives instructions that the earthly tabernacle is to be constructed “according to this pattern.” That structure is described in great detail in the Scriptures. However, it is clear that what is being built is important and true, *because* it is a reflection of the heavenly tabernacle which Moses himself saw. When Israel gathers at this earthly tabernacle, they are not there merely to be reminded of something Moses saw. Rather, the earthly representation makes present and participates in the heavenly. It is a sacramental understanding.

We may also say that it is an allegory (in St. Paul’s sense). If it is seen as “merely” a human construct, it is not rightly seen. The Ark of the Covenant could be read as nothing more than a human construct, but such a reading would be deadly, as in the case of Uzzah, who wrongly touched the Ark and died.

It is impossible to read the Book of Hebrews and not see this. There, the whole of the Old Testament pattern and practice of worship is described as a shadow of something heavenly and true that is now fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Christ. Christ is seen as the true High Priest who has entered into the “tabernacle not made by hands.” There He offers the perfect sacrifice of which every previous sacrifice was only a figure. What had been

hidden, as St. Paul tells us, has now been made known in Christ.

This way of doing and seeing, quite importantly, is not confined to the pages of Scripture and the practices of the past. It is engrained in our faith and our Orthodox way of life. Seated with His disciples, Christ takes bread, blesses, breaks, and gives it to them saying, “This is my Body...” The pattern is being maintained and will become and remain the heart of the Church’s worship.

The simplest way to express this sacramental revelation is: “This is that.” This is not a mere reminder of that, or a figure, or a symbol (if by that we mean something that stands in for something else). Rather, “this” truly and really is “that.”

(continued next issue)

