

# 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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11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost-Feast of the Holy Transfiguration

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Seeing is believing. It is one thing to hear an interesting story or to entertain a bright idea. It is far different, however, to encounter an event or to participate in a situation such that we know its truth and are changed as a result. That is precisely what the apostles Peter, James, and John experienced on Mount Tabor when they

were enabled to behold the divine glory of Jesus Christ, Who shone brightly with light as the voice of the Father identified Him as His beloved Son.

St. Peter writes in today's epistle reading that he did not proclaim "cleverly devised myths" about Christ, for those who beheld the Transfiguration "were eyewitnesses of His majesty." The gospels make clear that the disciples were not looking for a Messiah Who was truly divine, but for a righteous national leader like King David. Peter famously rejected the Lord's prediction of His crucifixion and denied Him three times.

He was restored as the chief apostle and went to his death as a martyr, not because he had made up stories about a crucified and risen Lord, but because the Savior had revealed Himself to Peter as truly the Son of God. And he  
*(continued p. 3)*

+ 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost +  
+ Martyr Euplus of Cantania +

Epistle: 2 Peter 1:10-19

Gospel: Matthew 17:1-9

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.*

## ***What is a True Christian, by Metropolitan Nicholas***

We'll end with another such characteristic: being prepared to suffer. All of these disciples were martyred. They stamped their call with the martyrdom of blood. They showed such hardihood that, while the beginning was easy- they 'immediately' received the message and invitation of the Lord- the end was just as easy: they gladly shed their blood for him. \

They gave him their life and, as lightly as they followed him in his earthly ministry, so they willingly accompanied

him to his kingdom, eternally united with him. The authenticity of the experience isn't identified with any grandiose expression, any exaggerated sensationalism, sudden shock, surprise or worldly admiration.

The Christian experience is mystical, it's profound and internal. The experience of the Canaanite woman who accepted the Lord's comparison of her to dogs, Zacchaeus, who publicly confessed his misdemeanors, and the woman with the issue of blood

who furtively withdrew power from God are all examples of authenticity.

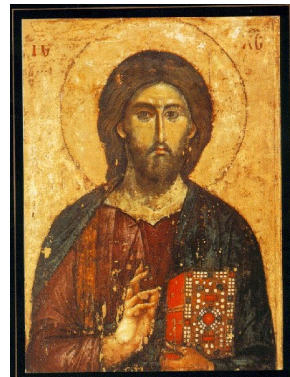
Nobody paid any attention to these people. Not even the disciples. But the Lord heard the cries of the Canaanite woman, he himself saw and called Zacchaeus, and he felt the touch of the woman with the issue of blood. This is why he distinguished the Canaanite woman, by-passing the disciples in so doing; how he discerned Zacchaeus in the midst of the crowd; and how he felt  
*(continued on 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 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

### **Walk with Christ**

It is so very easy to get lost in unfamiliar territory. Whether traveling in a large city or walking in the woods, we can easily become disoriented and lose our way. Distractions are everywhere, and only when we refocus our attention can we find our way.

In our spiritual lives, it is easy for a per-

son to get their focus on the “ground” (the world) and find ourselves disoriented. Somehow, we managed to take our focus off the things that keep us on the right path. When we finally look up, we find ourselves disoriented. We suddenly realize that for quite some time we have not been to church, or we have not been praying, or that we haven’t read a verse of Scripture. If fact, we have not been focused on our spiritual life at all. What should we do?

When that realization washes over you, don’t panic. Remember that you are not lost; you are just taking longer to get back to the right path. Start right where you are by asking the Lord for forgiveness and to help you get back on the right track. Make the decision to go to Church the next Sunday. Take a few minutes and read the Scriptures for the day. Soon, you are calm and heading in the right direction.

It is important to understand that becoming disoriented once in a while is very much a part of our spiritual journey. It happens to almost everyone. You are not “lost”. It is simply taking a little longer to get back to where you ought to be.

### **What is a Christian, continued from p.1**

the touch of the woman with the issue of blood as being separate from all the others. An authentic experience is persuasive and conclusive even in the most difficult and fraught circumstances. It draws God’s gaze to itself, it picks people out even if they’re partially hidden by a crowd, by the world’s indifference or their own insignificance.

A true Christian is secure, fears nothing, trusts easily, sympathizes, understands and gives off an air of certainty and a sense of purity. To God be the Glory. Amen.

\* \* \* \* \*

### ***Hope for all Christians-Prayer***

Where is our hope my brothers and sisters? Where was the hope of the early Christians? Did it matter if the authorities were unjust to the Christians? They were also unjust with the Lord Jesus. What did it matter if the Christians were persecuted and killed, if the authorities could not break their spirits and kill their souls?

Everything in life is turned on it’s head by the death and resurrection of

Jesus Christ. Everything in the life of a Christian is turned on it’s head and given new meaning by entering into and living within the reality of Christ’s death and resurrection. Your life is not your own, it belongs to Jesus Christ. You have nothing to fear if Christ is with you. But without Christ in your life, you will fear everything, even your own shadow.

As Christians we are not guaranteed peaceful and comfortable lives. We have mostly lived in comfort but we should always be ready for trials and difficulties. Perhaps that is one of the lessons the Church teaches us through the ascetic disciplines. Yet St. Paul has a word for us in case we do run into trials and difficult circumstances. He says we should be “patient in tribulation.”

But how can we possibly do this? How can we go on when we feel great difficulties in our lives? How do we manage when we feel that we are under a cloud and unable to lift our heads? St. Paul tells us the answer and it is so simple that I think we of-

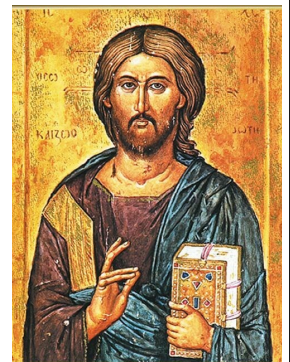
ten take it for granted, “continue steadfastly in prayer.”

Prayer is our bridge to God and God is our only source of strength and hope. St. Joseph of Optina writes “Prayer is food for the soul. Do not starve the soul, it is better to let the body go hungry.”

When we are at our weakest, it is easiest to give

up. Some turn to the computers and smartphones and others turn to drugs or alcohol. But these are all thieves and robbers. Let us trust God and have hope that we will be victo-

rious with Him. Be courageous in hunting for pure prayer with Christ. Everything else will pass away but what we have cultivated between us and God will remain forever. This is our hope and in this hope we will be conquerors with Christ.





*(Homily on the Holy Transfiguration, cont'd from p.1)*

surely did not understand the full meaning of the Transfiguration when it occurred, as it was not until after the resurrection that Christ “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.” (Lk 24:27) Indeed, the Lord said to Peter, James, and John, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is risen from the dead.” It was only from the perspective of the resurrection, which no one anticipated, that the disciples could understand what it meant for Christ to be the Son of God.

The truth revealed at the Transfiguration may not be conveyed simply in words or ideas. It had to be seen, heard, and experienced in a way that made Peter, James, and John participants as whole persons in the divine glory. The Lord graciously opened the eyes of their souls, filling them with the divine energies such that they could catch a glimpse of His holy majesty. He enabled them to hear the voice of the Father, and like Moses before the Burning Bush, they fell on their faces “and were filled with awe.” As is shown by the disappearance of Moses and Elijah, He enabled them to see His superiority to the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament. They did not simply have thoughts or feelings about Christ; no, they truly experienced Him from the depths of their souls as the Son of God.

The change that occurred that day was not in the Lord Himself, Who is eternally radiant with the divine glory in a way beyond our comprehension. The change was in the disciples, for Christ opened the eyes of their souls to behold His infinite holiness, to the extent that they were able as human beings. If we observe this feast simply by celebrating the doctrinal teaching of Christ’s divinity or the great mystical experience of the apostles, we will have excluded ourselves from the full meaning of this event.

For as in all feasts of the Church, the point is not simply to look back at what happened long ago. It is, instead, to enter into the eternal truth that is revealed. And on this great day of the Transfiguration, the only appropriate way to celebrate is to cooperate with the gracious

divine energies of our Lord so that we also will behold His divine glory. That means that we too must become transfigured through personal union with the Son of God such that His eternal majesty permeates our existence, making us shine brightly like an iron left in the fire.

As with Peter, who rejected the Lord’s prediction of His death and then denied Him three times, we might well prefer another kind of religion with expectations not quite so high. Shining with the uncreated light may be more than we want to pursue. It may be more appealing to follow an imaginary King David in waging war against those we consider our enemies and to set up a social order that rewards those we think are righteous like ourselves. Maybe we would prefer someone pretending to be Moses or Elijah who would provide in-

structions that we think good people like us can easily follow on how to live differently from those we like to condemn. Such sentiments are terrible misinterpretations, of course. These Old Testament saints never pointed to some easy kind of self-serving religion, but were misinterpreted in first-century Palestine by those who worshiped an earthly kingdom or their own self-righteousness. If we go down that path, we will end up repudiating Christ as surely as did those idolaters.

The only fitting way to celebrate the Transfiguration is by embracing as fully as possible the countless opportunities that we have to grow in holiness as we open the eyes of our souls to par-

ticipate in the glory of God by grace. I have a warning for you, however. If the thought ever occurs to you, “Gosh, I’m becoming really holy now,” pay it no attention at all and instead say the Jesus Prayer or at least focus your mind on something other than your own deluded thoughts until it goes away. The more transfigured we are in holiness, the more aware we will be of our sinfulness and the infinite distance between our current spiritual state and the perfection to which our Lord calls us.

The path to shining with light begins with a humble,  
(continued on p. 4, column 1).



honest acceptance of the darkness in our lives. The path also continues along that route. That is precisely why we need to be transfigured so that we, who are filled with darkness, will become radiant with the brilliant light of the Lord. But we must be prepared: the more you step into His light, the more obvious the spots of darkness will be. The better focused the eyes of our souls are, the more we will be aware of our need for His healing and strength.

A very common temptation, then, is to give up. Why pray, when our minds wander? Why fast, when we become obsessed with food? Why try to do anything pleasing to God, when it does not give us what we want?

Well, that is the problem. As long as we think about getting the spiritual results that we want on our schedule and in our own way, we will not be transfigured in holiness. We will, instead, remain captive to some form of idolatrous spiritual pride that will blind us to the truth of where stand before the Lord.

If we want to enter into the joy of this great feast of our salvation, we must persistently walk into the light by opening the eyes of our souls to the blinding glory of our Savior. We will often not like what we see in ourselves as a result, but by constantly calling out for His mercy, the Lord will change, strengthen, and purify us. In ways that we cannot yet understand, He will make us “a lamp shining in a dark place” that gives light and hope to a world that so desperately needs to be healed by union with His gracious divine energies. The message of this feast is not to lose heart, but to press on in faithfulness. For the darkness is simply the absence of light and a sign that we have yet more room to embrace the blessed life of Christ.

We celebrate the Transfiguration of our Lord already knowing of His resurrection, by which He has illumined even the tomb. Let this sink in: There is no darkness in our souls or in our world that our crucified and risen Lord cannot make radiant with His gracious divine energies. We must, however, do our part by opening the darkness in our lives to His healing light. Even as we stumble and fall, we must continue to do so with abiding trust in His mercy for blind sinners such as ourselves. For though we do not yet have the eyes to see it, that is how our gracious Lord will make us shine with holy light for our salvation and that of the entire world. Let us join St. Peter, then, in living as “eyewitnesses of His majesty.” For seeing is believing. Amen.



But if, on the other hand, they are destitute of sense, you convict them of this fact, while you worship them with blood and the smoke of sacrifices. Let any one of you suffer such indignities! Let any one of you endure to have such things done to himself! But not a single human being will, unless compelled to it, endure such treatment, since he is endowed with sense and reason. A stone, however, readily bears it, seeing it is insensible. Certainly you do not show [by your conduct] that he [your God] is possessed of sense. And as to the fact that Christians are not accustomed to serve such gods, I might easily find many other things to say; but if even what has been said does not seem to any one sufficient, I deem it idle to say anything further.

### Chapter 3. Superstitions of the Jewish Faith

And next, I imagine that you are most desirous of hearing something on this point, that the Christians do not observe the same forms of divine worship as do the Jews. The Jews, then, if they abstain from the kind of service above described, and deem it proper to worship one God as being Lord of all, [are right]; but if they offer Him worship in the way which we have described, they greatly err.

For while the Gentiles, by offering such things to those that are destitute of sense and hearing, furnish an example of madness; they, on the other hand by thinking to offer these things to God as if He needed them, might justly reckon it rather an act of folly than of divine worship. For He that made heaven and earth, and all that is therein,

and gives to us all the things of which we stand in need, certainly requires none of those things which He Himself bestows on such as think of furnishing them to Him. But those who imagine that, by means of blood, and the smoke of sacrifices and burnt-offerings, they offer sacrifices [acceptable] to Him, and that by such honours they show Him respect, — these, by supposing that they can give anything to Him who needs nothing, appear to me in no respect to differ from those who studiously confer the same honor on things destitute of sense, and which therefore are unable to enjoy such honors.

### Chapter 4. The other observances of the Jewish Faith

But as to their scrupulosity concerning food, and their superstition as respects the Sabbaths, and their boasting about circumcision, and their fancies about fasting and the new moons, which are utterly ridiculous.

(continued next issue)