

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!



Volume 10 Issue 477

14th Sunday after Pentecost—Parable of the Wedding Feast

August 29, 2021



Many people I meet these days make it clear when it comes to faith in God, that whatever they believe or do, doesn't matter; God will accept them anyway. There is no need for communion or relationship to or with God, according to these people's thinking, but rather an expectation that God has no right to judge them based on the

criteria that He's established. And if He doesn't grant them life with Him, well, that's God's fault. He must be capricious or just plain wrong. Those of us who do have faith are often ridiculed or even rejected in today's society.

The attitude is similar to those in today's Gospel who reject the invitation to attend the wedding of the King's Son: The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready.

Come to the wedding. The response to the wedding invitation to participate
(continued p. 3)

+ 14th Sunday after Pentecost +
Beheading of St. John the Baptist

Epistle: 2 Cor 1:21-2:4

Gospel: Matthew 22:1-14

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 Paradoxical Logic of Christianity, by Fr. Georgios Dobarakis

The logic of the Christian faith is often so paradoxical and strange, especially for Orthodox Christians today, that we need to delve into the texts of the Fathers in order to have a feel for it and attune ourselves to it.

Though it must be said, of course, that the acceptance and gradual familiarization with this reasoning leads to the 'jolt' of the taste of the other way of life which was brought by Our Lord Jesus Christ- to the opening of the eyes and spiritual senses so that the

faithful can see and feel eternal life even in what's considered this narrow and wretched life. So that they can see the unseen and eternal, as Saint Paul says.

To be more precise: temptations and sorrows, for example, are part of our life but we all see them as negative or avoidable, to such an extent that even the Church, by concession to our weakness, continually prays that we may not encounter them in our life.

And yet, when we see

them from the point of view of faith, as the saints do, they're regarded as stepping-stones leading us to an ascent in the spiritual life, which means a more personal and vital relationship with God. They tell us: 'Take temptations out of life and nobody'll be saved'. Because through temptations, sorrows and tribulations we're clearly called upon to struggle with our self, to overcome our weaknesses, to make room for God to abide within us.

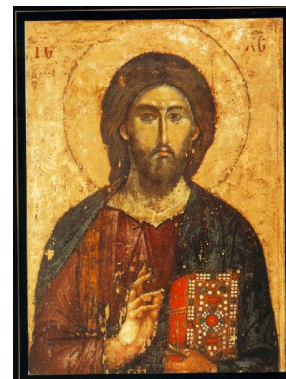
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

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, Pam, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

Faith Endures

In truth, how many storms and how many headwinds has the Church encountered over the course of its history so far? When there's a lack of faith and trust in its head, then it's in danger of sinking in the billows of compromises, retreats, and betrayal. The episode with Peter, the always

spontaneous and impulsive, though sometimes less than steady disciple demonstrates precisely this. As long as he looked to Christ in trust, he was able to walk on the sea; but when he became afraid of the wind and the likely danger- reasonably and justifiably- he began to sink.

In other words, the less you're aware of the Lord's presence and the more you doubt his power, the more you're susceptible to fear and danger. But if you turn to God you're assured of help. When Peter cried 'Lord, save me', he was immediately provided with aid. There's no room for trials and experiments in matters of the faith.

There's no need to walk on the water in order to believe in Christ. The Lord says: 'Take heart, it's me. Don't be afraid', we should recognize this as an express promise on the part of Jesus to the members of his Church that, in the persecutions, the sorrows, other trials, he'll be at their side. As, indeed he confirmed with his declaration at the end of the Gospel of Saint Matthew: 'Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age'.

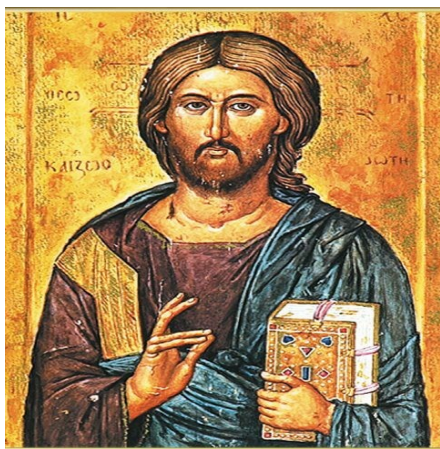
Paradoxical Logic of Christianity, continued from p.1

Saint Isaac the Syrian is one of the ascetic fathers who introduces us into the mysteries of the logic of the faith in the most graphic terms: 'The further you progress on the road to the Kingdom of God and you draw closer to him, take it as a sign that you'll encounter the power of temptations. The further you go, and progress, the more the temptations increase and arise against you... Because God brings the sorrows of temptations to your soul commensurately to the amount of divine grace'.

So temptations and sorrows are a sign that you're on the right path. But he also tells us something equally important: before the temptations and tribulations befall us, God strengthens us with his grace. It's as if he measures our strength in some way and allows whatever we can bear in order that we may ascend higher.

Why? Because the essential thing for Christ our God- and this is where the logic of faith is best shown- isn't whether we undergo sorrows and trials. That's a given, because human-

kind fell into sin. What's essential, the enduring desire of our Creator and Father, is for us to be with him and to maintain our living relationship with him, with his help. He wants us to be one with him. Gods within his godhead. He 'ignores',



though without ignoring or pretending not to see, although he does see and suffers our tribulations along with us. It's the balm we need to be cured.

Let's listen to Saint Isaac again: 'Temptations won't come unless the

soul first secretly receives some power over and above its own through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Proof of this is the temptation of the Lord and the temptations of the apostles, who weren't really tempted until they received the Holy Spirit. Because those who receive good things have to undergo the temptations of those good things. Good things are accompanied by sorrows. It's our all-wise God's good pleasure to deal with all his works like this. And if the bestowal of grace precedes the temptations, the feeling of temptations precedes the sense of the presence of grace. This is in order to test our freedom. Because grace isn't felt before we taste the bitterness of temptations. Grace actually precedes, but its action isn't felt until later'.

These are secrets of our faith which, the more we know them, the more we're moved by God's love; the more we understand his Passion, which he submitted to for our sake; the more we accept patience as the only road to our salvation.

(Homily on The Wedding Feast, cont'd from p.1)

in the culmination the King has hoped for His Son, is, of course, an apt analogy that Christ gives us to understand the mystical relationship between Christ and His 'Bride,' the Church.

In much the same way that those in Christ's parable make light of the King's offering to participate, so do many in today's society. Elsewhere in the world the servants of God are beaten, beheaded, terribly persecuted, just like the servants of the King in Christ's parable: But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them.

The King in Christ's parable did not stand for this, but

instead destroyed those who would do such evil against His own servants who were innocent of any wrong, but simply were inviting the King's guests to the wedding banquet. But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy.'

'Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good.

And the wedding hall was filled with guests.

Not only is there a parallel in this parable with the Jews, who rejected the prophets, beat, and killed others, but also with those in the Church, who take Christ and His holy Church for granted, who see themselves as "in the club" of Orthodox Christianity, but reject the call to repentance, healing, and growth in communion with God.

Christ God gives the Church the command to "make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have com-

manded you..." (Matt. 28:19-20). In other words, people from every tribe and nation are called into life and communion with God through the new birth of "water and the spirit" (John 3). But not all those who come and experience the truth of Christ and His holy Orthodox Church, remain; not all those 'born into the Faith,' act upon and choose to own that Faith. All are called, but not all choose to live their lives for Christ and His Bride, the Church.

For this reason, the end of the parable is sobering to our ears: But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in

here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen.

As Christians we affirm that "Christ is coming again to judge the living and the dead." The calling, the invitation to life, to participation in the life of the Holy Trinity is real and so are the consequences of those who reject this life. Why? Because God is not only the Author of Life, but the Sustainer of all life. In Him and in Him alone is eternal life. God in His great love and mercy for us offers us paradise; He offers

us communion and relationship with Him, but love can never be forced.

We are invited to the wedding banquet of the Lamb, the culmination of all that God has prepared for mankind. Will we accept His gracious offer? Will we avail ourselves of life with Him? Will we now prepare to participate in that Great Feast of the Wedding of Christ with His Church at the end of the age? Christ is coming again to judge the living and the dead. Christ invites us to live with Him and all the Saints in the glory of His near presence, in the new heaven and the new earth, in the Eden that will once again be open to all.



Do you not see them exposed to wild beasts, that they may be persuaded to deny the Lord, and yet not overcome? Do you not see that the more of them are punished, the greater becomes the number of the rest? This does not seem to be the work of man: this is the power of God; these are the evidences of His manifestation.

Chapter 8. The miserable state of men before the coming of the Word

For, who of men at all understood before His coming what God is? Do you accept of the vain and silly doctrines of those who are deemed trustworthy philosophers?

Of whom some said that fire was God, calling that God to which they themselves were by and by to come; and some water; and others some other of the elements formed by God. But if any one of these theories be worthy of approbation, every one of the rest of created things might also be declared to be God.

But such declarations are simply the startling and erroneous utterances of deceivers; and no man has either seen Him, or made Him known, but He has revealed Himself. And He has manifested Himself through faith, to which alone it is given to behold God. For God, the Lord and Fashioner of all things, who made all things, and assigned them their several positions, proved Himself not merely a friend of mankind, but also long-suffering [in His dealings with them].

Yea, He was always of such a character, and still is, and will ever be, kind and good, and free from wrath, and true, and the only one who is [absolutely] good; Matt. 19:17, and He formed in His mind a great and unspeakable conception, which He communicated to His Son alone. As long, then, as He held and preserved His own wise counsel in concealment, He appeared to neglect us, and to have no care over us. But after He revealed and laid open, through His beloved Son, the things which had been prepared from the beginning, He conferred every blessing all at once upon us, so that we should both share in His benefits, and see and be active [in His service]. Who of us would ever have expected these things? He was aware, then, of all things in His own mind, along with His Son, according to the relation subsisting between them.

Chapter 9. Why the Son was sent so late?

As long then as the former time endured, He permitted us to be borne along by unruly impulses, being drawn away by the desire of pleasure and various lusts. This was not that He at all delighted in our sins, but that He simply endured them; nor that He approved the time of working iniquity which then was, but that He sought to form a mind conscious of righteousness, so that being convinced in that time of our unworthiness of attaining life through our own works, it should now, through the kindness of God, be vouchsafed to us; and having made it manifest that in ourselves we were unable to enter into the kingdom of God, we might through the power of God be made able.

But when our wickedness had reached its height, and it had been clearly shown that its reward, punishment and death, was impending over us; and when the time had come which God had before appointed for manifesting His own kindness and power, how the one love of God, through exceeding regard for men, did not regard us with hatred, nor thrust us away, nor remember our iniquity against us, but showed great long-suffering, and bore with us, He Himself took on Him the burden of our iniquities, He gave His own Son as a ransom for us, the holy One for transgressors, the blameless One for the wicked, the righteous One for the unrighteous, the incorruptible One for the corruptible, the immortal One for those who are mortal.

For what other thing was capable of covering our sins than His righteousness? By what other one was it possible that we, the wicked and ungodly, could be justified, than by the only Son of God? O sweet exchange! O unsearchable operation! O benefits surpassing all expectation! That the wickedness of many should be hid in a single righteous One, and that the righteousness of One should justify many transgressors! Having therefore convinced us in the former time that our nature was unable to attain to life, and having now revealed the Savior who is able to save even those things which it was [formerly] impossible to save, by both these facts He desired to lead us to trust in His kindness, to esteem Him our Nourisher, Father, Teacher, Counsellor, Healer, our Wisdom, Light, Honor, Glory, Power, and Life, so that we should not be anxious concerning clothing and food.

(continued next issue)

