

# 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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21<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost—Parable of the Sower

October 17, 2021



Today, beloved, the Gospel parable was read about the Sower and the seed, about the unequal quality of the land upon which the seed fell, and about the varying fates of the seed. At the end of the Gospel reading the Lord Himself, at the request of His disciples, explained the parable (Luke 8:5-15).

Pitiful man! Poor man! How many obstacles he has in this most important matter, that of saving his soul! In that he himself treads upon the saving seed of the word of God, which can make him wise unto salvation, treading upon it either intentionally, consciously, and sneeringly, or out of frivolity, neglect, and ignorance; in that the universal malefactor and blighter of the human race, the devil, snatches away the saving word; in that his hardened and obdurate heart does not permit him to be saved; in that thorns – or the various cares, passions, and pleasures of life, along with riches – set before him insurmountable barriers to salvation.

Only a few, who with honest and goods hearts and true reason value their salvation as they should, patiently making use of the means for salvation given to us, are saved. Many are  
*(continued p. 3)*

+ 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost +  
+Fathers of the 7th Holy Council+

Epistle: Galatians 2: 16-20

Gospel: Luke 8: 5-15

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 Vision of Christ in the Life of Saint Silouan by Fr. Zacharou***

Christ is the miracle that astounds us. He is the sign that God gave to all generations of all times. In His Person, every problem, every impasse, every tragedy received its solution. Being imitations of Christ and bearing Him in their heart, the saints are also the sign of God for their generation.

They become tangible examples of the love of God in a world plunged into the darkness of ignorance and despondency. Through their word and prayer, the saints give an answer to the questions

of their contemporaries and a solution to their problems.

It is rather God Himself that speaks through His closest friends, which are the saints, to every generation. And it is this word, coming either directly from God or from His saints, that will judge us on the last day.

St. Sophrony of Essex, England was a spiritual father to many. For those who had the blessing to know him, but also for those who came into contact with his word of divine wisdom which he

left us as a legacy, it is evident that he had divine wisdom. His own elder, Saint Silouan, is recognized as 'a prophetic and apostolic teacher of the Church.' For many, however, his spiritual stature is hidden behind the simplicity of his words.

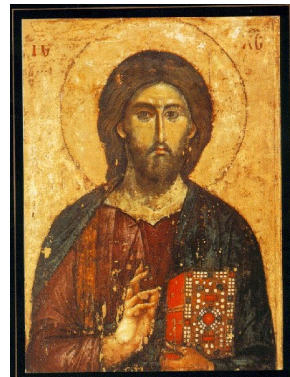
It was with this in mind that Saint Sophrony published the writings of Saint Silouan, accompanying them with his own introduction, explaining for the more refined intellectuals of his time the word of his Father in God  
*(continued on p.2)*

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, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Laura, Elizabeth, Matthew, Corella, Ron, Daniel, Frankie, Pat, Bill, Loretta, Carol, Pam, John, Gladys, Anthony, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

### **A Second Chance for Salvation**

Some are often overwhelmed by doubt when they see evil-doers prosper, while those trying to stay true to their conscience are often taken by the Lord at an early age? The parable of weeds among the wheat (see: Matthew 13: 24-30) explains this situation well.

Sometimes it is very difficult to distin-

guish the weeds from the wheat. It is also true that a person can improve in his life-time. The Lord is patient and hopes for a person to correct his ways until He sees that this person is incorrigible. Only then the Lord calls him to His judgement. On the other hand, sometimes a person is ready for the Kingdom of God, and the Lord calls him before his state of mind worsens.

Very often people live to an old age before they come to know God, repenting and correcting their inner state. Of course, they cannot change their past, but they do revise their lives in many ways. Their repentant sighs matter to God and accompany their souls on the way to salvation until, when a person is ready, the Lord calls him to enter into His eternal joy.

There is therefore no need to be perplexed and lament about God being unjust. Quite on the contrary, He is ever so just and very merciful, wanting salvation for everyone. The Lord saves those who are ready, giving those who aren't an opportunity to be saved. So the Lord gives us a chance for salvation.

### **St. Silouan of Mt. Athos continued from p.1**

which is holy and pure, but yet 'incomprehensible precisely because of its simplicity'.

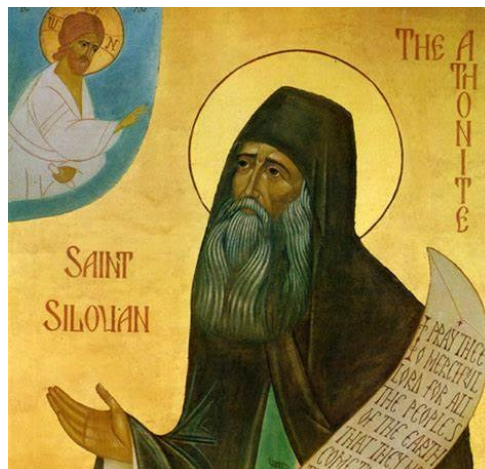
The writings of Saint Silouan may be resembled to the Gospel according to Saint John, which is the poorest from the linguistic point of view, but contains perfection of meaning and revelation.

Externally, the life of Saint Silouan does not present any particular interest. He was an illiterate Russian peasant who lived in the Monastery of Saint Panteleimon on Mount Athos. Time does not allow us to go into more details concerning his monastic manner of life. There were, however, two milestone events that sealed his spiritual journey.

His biographer describes him as 'a man of insatiable yearning for God'. Indeed, his thirst for God consumed him even from before going to Mount Athos until the last day of his life. From the moment he came to the monastery, he lived with extreme spiritual tension. He was persistently striving to be exact in every aspect of

monastic life, such as unceasing prayer, services, toilsome chores, vigils, fasting, brotherly love and of course, above all, obedience.

After six months, thinking that he had fulfilled all human righteousness,



he became exhausted to the point of despair. He even accepted the thought that God does not hearken to his prayers, that He is inexorable. Yet who is man, this fleeting creature, to address such a word to God? The mind of the young novice was blurred

and his spirit was thrust into unbearable anguish and the darkness of hell. Nevertheless, he still went to church, where the brotherhood was gathered, and as he was venerating the icon of the Lord, he found the strength to call upon His Name: 'Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me a sinner.' Then he received the ineffable blessing of seeing the living Christ in the place of His icon.

At that moment, all his being was filled with divine grace and even his flesh longed to suffer for Christ's sake. We know from the words of Saint Silouan that a great divine Light shone about him, that in the spirit he was transported to heaven, where he heard unspeakable words, that in that instant he received a new birth from on high. Although he had heard since his childhood: 'Glory be to the Father and the Son and to the Holy Spirit,' it was at that moment that he became aware of the existence of the Holy Spirit.

*(continued next issue)*



called, but few are chosen. Astonishing! What is ultimately happening here? Who is to blame for this absurdity, for this voluntary perdition of men? Man himself is to blame, for treading upon – and often learning to tread upon daily – the wondrous, great, and countless gifts of God.

The Lord God, Who created him in His image and likeness, in righteousness and holiness, granted him every opportunity, every means and strength, for life and piety. Man, in his laziness and ignorance, his negligence and obstinacy, his unreasonable predilection for the here and now, is like a shadow passing through life, rushing headlong towards perdition while pushing aside the saving hand of God.

Who is to blame for this perdition, if not man himself?

You will say: it is impossible, or at least difficult, to be saved!

But, in fact, countless multitudes of men like you have been saved; they are even now being saved, though not many. “Being saved is difficult!” But do you really want to obtain eternal life – in blessed union with God, the Mother of God, the Angels, and all the Saints – without labor? Without the labor of self-purification, assisted by grace, without the labor of prayer and vigilance, without almsgiving, without meekness, without humility, without abstinence?

In the acquisition of earthly goods we do not judge labor to be superfluous, and we often work at this with all our strength; but when it comes to obtaining eternal blessedness, we throw up our hands. It is not as though the matter of salvation were extremely difficult: “For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light,” says the Savior (Matthew 11:30). Yes, with God’s help it gradually becomes easy, though at first it is hampered by the persistent warfare with sin. But is not sin itself a matter of extreme difficulty, since it is unnatural and alien to our divine nature? Is sin not torturous? If we labor in sin, how then can we not labor in righteousness, in saving our soul from sin? There, the end is death; but here, eternal life. “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life” (Romans 6:23).

The present parable of the sower and the seeds was given not only to encourage listeners with honest and goods hearts to fulfill the word of God more zealously or unto greater perfection in virtue, but also so that people who are dissolute, neglectful, hard-hearted, and filled

with passions might be prompted to take heed, listen attentively to the word of God, and work out their salvation with fear. The grace of God can change any heart for the better, accomplishing the miracle of salvation in any man, if only he would believe, desire to be saved, seek salvation, and admit the abyss of his sins, as well as the abyss that his sins have created between wanton sinners and God; if only he would submit himself to God’s saving grace and not push aside the saving hand of God.

There were, and are, thousands of examples of men being saved who were previously dissolute, frivolous, hard-hearted, and subject to all manner of passion. They heeded the word of God, did not resist it, followed it – and they were saved, and are now in the blessedness of the Heavenly Kingdom. Nothing is impossible for God:

He can save an inveterate sinner; He can raise him from the pit of hell to the height of His Kingdom and eternal blessedness – like the wise thief, like Mary of Egypt, who was drowning in the abyss of sin.

Man himself must simply desire, ask for, and earnestly seek salvation; for the Lord does not desire to draw us unto salvation forcibly, so that salvation, like something forced upon us, would not become repellent to him: for we hold dear and pleasing to us only that which we ourselves have come to love and to which we have grown akin, which has become our treasure and, as it were, our nature. And such precisely is Christian virtue, such is the Kingdom of God: one must come to know it, to love it with one’s whole heart, to assimilate it here on earth, to root it in one’s heart in such a way that it wholly penetrates one’s entire soul, leaving no place in the heart

for pernicious and insidious sin.

Christian! Cast aside your perilous dissipation, your unbelief, negligence, and sloth, your laziness for salvation; do not trample upon the wondrous gifts of grace; earnestly read or listen to the word of God, which opens unto you the path to salvation; accomplish it with the utmost understanding and strength; conquer your hard-heartedness and obdurateness; soften your heart like wax with the flame of the grace of the Holy Spirit and with tears of repentance; cast from your heart the thorns of sin, even though this be grievous and painful, for they have become second nature to you. You cannot, you say; but God’s grace is omnipotent: it will help you easily accomplish the whole work of your salvation.



When the warmth of fervor grows cold in a struggler, they then secretly, having prepared some net, come again and lay them out and try to catch him. In all the paths of virtue, the devils establish their nets and hindrances when we fulfill heedfully every deed for our salvation and not out of pleasing men, or from some other idea. But if in virtue there is hidden some kind of impurity, pride, vainglory, and high-mindedness, then in such a matter the devils do not hinder us, but they even inspire us, so that we might labor without benefit. The demons strive for nothing so much as by every crafty means to steal time and make it idle. In everything that the demons do, they strive to dig three pits for us. First of all, they act against us and hinder us so that there will be no good in all our acts of virtue. In the second place, they strive so that the good will not be for the sake of God.

That is, having no opportunity to bring us away from good, they make efforts through vainglory to destroy all our labors. In the third place, they praise us as if we turn out in everything to be God-pleasing. That is, being unable to confuse us by vainglory, they strive by high-mindedness to destroy our labors and deprive us of rewards. Every demonic battle against us is in three forms. First, the devils darken our mind and a man becomes forgetful and dispersed in all his works. Then they introduce an idle thought, so that through it we might lose time.

Finally, they bring various temptations and afflictions. Therefore, of us it is demanded that at all times we should be very sober of mind, for the enemies ceaselessly are making tricks and acting against us. If one struggles for many years, the enemy seeks a convenient time, so as in a single hour to destroy his labors. Not many men see the numberless traps, devices, and tricks of the demons. As a fleshless spirit the demon does not require rest, and through a long life he has learned to catch men. Therefore, no one can escape the tricks, the ruinous nets, and pitfalls of them, except one who remains in bodily infirmity from constant struggle, and who lives in spiritual poverty, that is, with a contrite heart and in humble

thoughts. Such a one will conquer them.

Most of all, the Divine Help cooperates with us. However, in us, as we have said previously, is the beginning of all passions, attachment, weakness, and negligence, because we do not renounce in soul and thought and do not cut off the first impulse of every passion that comes. And the demons add yet more. Seek within yourself the reason for every passion, and finding it, arm yourself and dig out its root with the sword of suffering. And if you do not uproot it, again it will push out sprouts and grow. Without this means you cannot conquer passions, come to purity, and be saved.

Therefore, if we desire to be saved, we must cut off the

first impulse of the thought and desire of every passion. Conquer small things so as not to fall into big ones. It is evident that God allows one to be overthrown in battle by the demons or some stubborn passion because of our pride and high-mindedness, when one considers himself to be holy, or strong, and trusts in himself, and exalts himself above those who are weak. Let such a one acknowledge his own infirmity, acknowledge the Help of God, and be enlightened. Let him understand that without God's Help he can do nothing, and thus he will humble his thought. Or again, this is allowed as a chastisement for sins, so that we might repent and be



more experienced in struggle. Or it is allowed for the sake of crowns of victory. However, in that in which you are conquered and from which you suffer, before all other passions you must arm yourself against it and for this use all your fervor.

Every passion and suffering is conquered by undoubting faith, by labor of heart and tears, by warm fervor and quick striving to oppose the present passion. This is a high and praiseworthy struggle, as taught by the Holy Fathers. Every warfare of the demons against us comes from and is reinforced by four causes: from negligence and laziness, from self-love, from love of pleasure, and from the envy of the demons. May the Lord preserve us by His Grace from all nets of the enemy and passionate works, unto the ages of ages. Amen.