

# 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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22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost—Parable of the Sower

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Today's gospel reading describes a man who found the meaning and purpose of life in rich food and expensive clothes. He was so absorbed in gratifying his self-centered desires that he had become blind to the humanity of poor Lazarus, a miserable beggar who wanted only crumbs and whose only comfort was when dogs licked his

open sores. There could be no greater contrast than the difference in life circumstances between these two men.

After their deaths, their situations were reversed. The rich man had spent his life rejecting the teachings of Moses and the prophets about the necessity of showing mercy to the poor. As such, he had done his best to turn away from God and weaken himself spiritually. In life, he had made himself unable to recognize even the basic humanity of Lazarus as one who bore God's image. Consequently, after his death he was blind to the glory of God and perceived the divine majesty as only a burning flame that tormented him. When the rich man asked Father Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers to warn them of the consequences of living such a life, the great patriarch responded,

*(continued p. 3)*

+ 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost +  
+Martyr Arethas & 4,299 others+

Epistle: Galatians 6: 11-18

Gospel: Luke 16: 19-31

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***

His heart was enlarged and Silouan, who lacked worldly education and had probably never seen a geographical map of the earth, began to intercede for the salvation of the whole world and desire for every human being the same good portion of grace that he was vouchsafed to receive.

For a certain while after the vision, his life was a Paschal feast. Yet his nature was not yet conformed to the grace he had been given and soon he began a long and relentless war against

thoughts, especially the thoughts of vainglory.

Because of these thoughts, the demons sometimes appeared unto him in visible form, tormenting him. He fought for 15 years with courage and patience. He would barely sleep, pray with great tension and fervor, and work tirelessly.

One night, as he was trying to make a prostration before Christ, a demon appeared in front of him ready to receive his worship for himself. Disheartened, the saint sat on his stool and with pain of

heart asked the Lord to instruct him what to do in order to humble his spirit, so that the demons might no longer trouble him.

Then he heard the voice of God answering in his heart: 'Keep thy mind in hell and despair not.' The Lord offered him hell, but the saint accepted the word with gratitude. He began to practice the injunction of the Lord and, as he himself gives witness, 'His mind was cleansed and his soul found rest.'

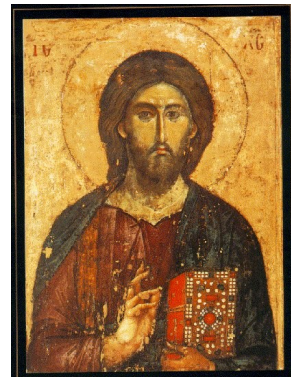
As the words of Christ  
*(continued on p.2)*

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

### ***Patience and Persistence***

One day a pagan Canaanite woman approached Jesus Christ and cried, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon!" She repeated this many times to Christ, Who remained silent until the disciples lost their patience and said, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us". Jesus

was firm, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel". But the woman continued beseeching Christ with blind, unreasonable hope, "Lord, help me". Then the Lord said something even more severe, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs".

Hearing such words would make most people walk away with shame and resentment. But the Canaanite woman replied, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table". After that the Lord exclaimed, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish". At the same moment her daughter was healed. This woman was able to overcome the wall of religious and national alienation almost instantaneously.

In a similar way, those who wish to enter the Church founded by Christ need to realize that they need to overcome an invisible wall, behind which are God's children, whose 'crumbs' are more valuable than the worldly treasures. Let us ask ourselves, would we be able to stay faithful to the end like this woman?

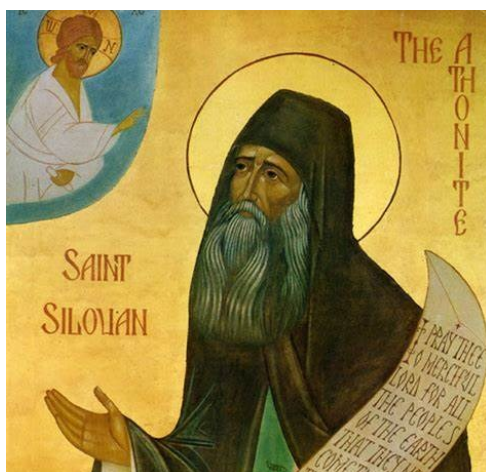
### **St. Silouan of Mt. Athos continued from p.1**

in the Gospel also reveal, perfect knowledge of God does not consist of intellectual fabrications, but of the vision of His Face in the Holy Spirit and in the resounding of His voice in the heart. In order to show the Jews that they did not truly know God, the Lord told them: 'Ye have neither heard His voice (of the Father) at any time, nor seen His shape.' God is known through personal communion with Him. As Saint Sophrony would say, knowledge of God and theology as a state of the spirit is 'communion in being.'

Many claim that they had a vision of Christ or of the Mother of God or of the angels. Yet in the Church, there are firm criteria that verify the authenticity of the vision. In the particular case of Saint Silouan's vision of Christ, both its immediate effects and the rest of the life of the Saint bare witness to the genuineness of his experience.

Let us examine some aspects that seal the truth of Saint Silouan's vision and the perfection of this holy man.

A) Grace is imparted to the body too  
First, the grace he received was not a figment of his imagination, it was very palpable. Just as he felt the flames of hell roaring around him during his ascetic struggle, afflicting



his whole being, body, soul and spirit, he also felt grace permeate his being to the marrow of his bones. His heart was kindled with such love for the Saviour Jesus, that he longed to suffer martyrdom for His sake.

B) The word of the perfect

When a holy ascetic from Caucasus, Saint Stratonikos, visited Saint Silouan for spiritual benefit, the Staretz asked him the question: 'How do the perfect speak?' He gave himself the answer that, 'The perfect never say anything of themselves. They only say what the Spirit inspires them to say.'

In reality, through his answer, he revealed his own manner of speaking and writing. Although his word is simple and unassuming, it opens new horizons. It glows 'as unto a light that shineth in a dark place.' It gives the solution to burning matters and shows the ways of life. It is the fruit of his prayer and hope 'that even one soul may come to love the Lord, and be turned to Him by the fire of repentance.'

c) Spiritual humility

When Saint Silouan beheld the meek, peaceful and loving gaze of Christ, he knew in his heart the 'indescribable' divine humility, to which he sang ever since a hymn in his writings.

*(continued next issue)*



*(Homily on the Rich Man and Lazarus cont'd from p.1)*

"If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead."

It would be hard to overstate the importance of that response. We all have the ability to make ourselves blind to the most obvious teachings about how we are to treat our neighbors. Since every neighbor is an icon of God, how we treat them reveals our relationship to the Lord. Christ taught that what we do "to the least of these," to the most wretched people, we do to Him. If we spend our lives hating and disregarding the people around us, we will become those who hate and disregard our Lord. That way of life is so corrupt that it will make us blind to the good news of our salvation, to our Lord's victory over the power of sin and death in His glorious resurrection on the third day. It is a way of shutting ourselves out of the joy of the Kingdom.

If we want examples of where that path leads, just look at those who have become so spiritually blind that they think it is good to despise and kill others in the name of God. They are not that different from the rich man in the parable, who stepped over starving, bleeding Lazarus every day as he served only his desires for pleasure and gratification. He had lost the ability to see Lazarus as a neighbor and lived accordingly.

Terrorists and murderers may seem very different from self-centered people who ignore the needs of others, but the roots of their spiritual problems are the same. They lie in the passions, in our slavery to the distorted desire to find meaning, purpose, and fulfillment in anything other than God. It is impossible for us to have spiritually healthy relationships with anything in creation if we make idols out of them.

Since we are all made in the divine image and likeness, we will never find peace or satisfaction when our lives revolve around pleasure, possessions, power, revenge, or anything else but the Lord. The more we give our lives to them, the more we will be their slaves and the more we will justify doing anything to gratify them. The resulting spiritual blindness leads only to more blindness, more corruption, and more depravity. When we lose the ability to see any human person as an icon of God and a neighbor in whom we are called to serve Jesus Christ, we become just like the rich man in the parable.

St. Paul taught the Ephesians that the very ground of their life was "God, Who is rich in mercy...[and] even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ..." They did not somehow earn God's favor by doing enough good deeds by their own power, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of your own doing, it is the gift of God." The apostle also teaches that those who have received His grace are "created in Christ Jesus for good works...that we should walk in them."

A life that displays the love of Christ in relation to our neighbors is not something that we achieve simply by trying to follow a rule. Instead, it is a sign of being healed from slavery to our passions by the grace of God. Healing comes to our corrupt souls through our Lord's mercy, which we cannot earn and do not deserve. The point of the Christian life is not simply to follow laws or develop virtues based on our own ability. It is instead to be transformed personally by the gracious divine energies to the point that the boundless love of our Lord becomes characteristic of who we are as we live and breathe in this world.

If we know that we are being saved through the undeserved grace of God, despite our sins, we must manifest that same grace in relation to our neighbors, especially those we are inclined to hate, condemn, or disregard. Jesus Christ modeled such a gracious life by ministering to the despised Samaritans and Gentiles, and even praising the faith of a Roman centurion as being superior to that of anyone in Israel.

If we recognize the love and mercy that the Savior has extended

to us, despite our past and present sins, we will understand that our lives must become icons of His love and mercy to our neighbors. If we are not being transformed by the Lord's grace in a fashion that leads us to serve Him in the Lazaruses of our lives, including our enemies, then we risk becoming ultimately like the rich man in the parable. If we blind ourselves to His presence in the suffering and difficult people around us every day, then we will prefer slavery to the passions over the great victory that our Lord has achieved through His glorious resurrection on the third day. How we treat others manifests whether we are finding the healing of our souls. Since we have received grace, let us show grace to our neighbors, no matter who they are or what they believe.



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 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.