

# 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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25<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost—Parable of the Good Samaritan

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As we approach the season of Advent, we're given the opportunity to renew and deepen our life in Christ, to grow in our love of God and neighbor, and strengthen our commitment to living out the Gospel—to "go and do likewise." Christ gives us today the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

"Advent," meaning "the coming."

This title refers to the coming of the Messiah foretold by the prophets and culminating in the miraculous virgin birth we celebrate at the Nativity six. But it also refers to a second advent, or coming—that of Christ God's Second Coming when He will judge the living and the dead and gather all His faithful who know Him into His near presence.

We're given a gift in having the Parable of the Good Samaritan thrust in our faces just before we begin the Fast so we may begin now to put its lessons into practice and arrive at the Feast of the Nativity that much stronger in our faith and practice at the celebration of His holy birth. Christ gives us this parable in response to a question put to Him as a test by a lawyer: "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

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+ 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost +  
++ The Holy Apostle Philip ++

Epistle: Ephesian 4: 1-6

Gospel: Luke 10: 25-37

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.*

## ***Angels and the Church, by Fr. Christos Klavas***

The angels have a special position in the Orthodox Church and particular honor is accorded to them. Holy Scripture (Old and New Testaments) is full of references to angels, who are presented as playing an important role in the implementation of the plan of divine providence.

Patristic literature also mentions the angelic powers and provides us with valuable information concerning them. From these sources we can draw important conclusions regarding the

creation, nature, knowledge, tasks and number of these immaterial beings. This information doesn't give us complete knowledge about them, but God allows us to learn as much about them as is necessary for our salvation.

Angels were created by God from nothing and are the product of the free divine will. They were created before the material world and the manner of their creation remains outside our comprehension. They exist and function in a different

dimension of time, on a higher level of time, the 'age' as it's called in ecclesiastical literature, and one which isn't restricted by matter. Their mode of existence is distinguished by the love they have for God and for each other.

As regards the nature of the angels, Saint John of Damascus notes that: 'An angel, then, is an intelligent essence, in perpetual motion, with free will, incorporeal, ministering to God, having obtained by grace an immortal nature: and the Creator

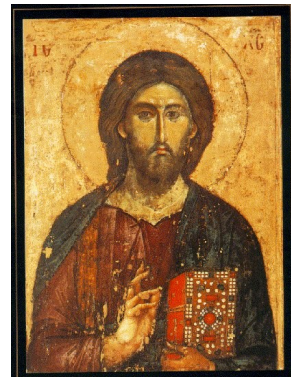
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

If you have any questions about the church or would like to speak with our pas-

tor, 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

### **News and Notes**

We welcome all who are worshipping with us today. We are also happy to announce that coffee social has resumed 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, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Laura, Elizabeth, Matthew, Corella, Ron, Daniel, Frankie, Pat, Bill, Loretta, Carol, Pam, Gladys, Anthony, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

### ***God gives us many second chances***

We should never wait until it is too late to change the course of our current and eternal lives. One of the greatest blessings that we receive as children of God is the opportunity to change our lives and thus change the course of our eternity. The lives of the holy saints teach us that many of them were terrible sinners,

living lives of sinful excess. But we serve a God of “second chances,” Who gives us the opportunity to repent, receive forgiveness and set our feet onto the path of righteousness. A perfect example of this turn-around can be seen in the life of St. Matthew the Apostle, a tax collector and agent of the Roman Empire. Matthew was one of the “sinners” that Jesus was accused of associating with (Mark 2:16). But by obeying two simple words, “Follow me” (Matt. 9:9), Matthew the reviled tax collector was able to turn his life around and become an Apostle for Christ.

Sometimes the smallest gifts may be the ones that have the greatest impact on our lives and the lives of others. It is not the size of the gift that matters, but rather the spirit in which it is given. Jesus pointed out to His disciples: “Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they gave out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had.” (Mark 12:43). It was the size of her *heart*, not the size of her *donation*,

### **Angels and the Church, continued from p.1**

alone knows the form and limitation of its essence.’ According to Saint Gregory Palamas, the angelic nature has intelligence and reason, but not the life-giving spirit, because it didn’t receive an earthly body, and therefore the spirit can’t be a cohesive force for it (the body).

A particular characteristic of the nature of angels is that they are autonomous, which involves the ability to choose freely between good and evil. The proper use of this ability by the angels gained them sinlessness ‘by grace’, though we know not when because of the lack of information in Scripture. So the angels who displayed obedience to the divine will were rewarded with the crystallization of their will to do good; whereas those who, led astray by egotism, showed disobedience, fell away and became demons.

Nevertheless, the adhesion of the angels to the divine will doesn’t deprive them of their autonomy. It means rather that these features co-exist and that freedom and obedience

are equated. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, autonomy is sanctified. It’s worth pointing out, however, that, according to Saint Gregory Palamas, the crystallization of the will of the angels to do good and their immova-



bility as regards doing evil was granted to them as a gift at the incarnation of Christ, because, as he points out, ‘they then learned in practice that the path which elevates and leads to becoming the likeness of God isn’t that of vanity, but that of humility’.

Angels are bodiless beings. They

don’t have a material body and so are not subject to any kind of perishability or material need. They don’t need nourishment or rest, nor do they die since they have immortality ‘by grace.’ They aren’t however, entirely bodiless, a feature which is true only of God. In relation to God, they’re embodied, but compared to us they’re bodiless, and they’re attributed with a kind of ‘ethereal and arial’ body.

Another feature of angels is that they’re circumscribed, which, according to Saint John of Damascus can be understood from the fact that: ‘when they are in heaven, they are not on earth and when they are sent by God down to the earth they do not remain in heaven.’ They are therefore not everywhere present, although they do have the advantage of being able to move swiftly. Besides, these immaterial powers ‘have no bounds’ since they are able to transform themselves into figures which serve the purpose of their mission and, since they’re



*(Homily on the Good Samaritan, cont'd from p.1)*

Now, people are putting Christ to the test all the time, asking questions like, “Why do I have it so tough? Why do I pray and (so it seems to me) nothing happens? Why do I not get what I want, what I asked for? Why does that person seem to have it so much ‘easier’ than I do?”

But such questions are also an ‘opportunity’: if we recognize what’s behind such questions, to make them into a cry for help from God: an admittance of lack of faith is a cry for more; a recognition of ego-centricism becomes a prayer for increased focus on Christ, of praying for others to get our focus off ourselves and the problems we often create for ourselves by turning inward instead of turning to our Savior, the only One who can really help us.

In the case of the lawyer, Jesus aids him in coming to see his own pridefulness; He helps him to gain humility by asking the lawyer a question in return:

“what’s written in the Law?” In response, the lawyer quotes from Leviticus 19:18, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus affirms his answer, but in his pridefulness, the lawyer’s still not satisfied: he’s still hoping to stump Jesus so he asks Him yet another question: “And who is my neighbor?”

The parable of the Good Samaritan is Jesus’ final response. But Jesus turns the lawyer’s question on its head: instead of answering the question, “who is my neighbor?” Jesus shows the lawyer what it means to be a godly neighbor, and, he calls on all of us to do likewise.

Jesus teaches us throughout the Gospels to prioritize those people we meet who are in need, both physically and spiritually.

In fact, the two are inseparable in the Gospels. Now, this is not some ‘social gospel’ that Christ is teaching, which generally ministers exclusively to the physical and temporal aspects of need. The priority with Christ is always on a person’s immortal soul, on their finding life in Him, repentance from their sins, which, if left unrepented of, would keep them from being able to be in His holy presence and find healing and glory for their souls.

An African proverb says, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” I like that proverb, but we can put an Orthodox twist on it that strengthens it further: feed a man for a day and you aid his temporal body; bring a man to Christ and His Church and you feed his soul for eternity. In other words, bring a person to the Church and Christ gives him the tools he needs to address his greatest needs—even physical needs as the two are intricately connected. Bring such a man to the Church and Christ feeds his soul while also providing him with a family to love him and help care for him, challenge him and encourage him, love him—body and soul, coming to know Him who is Eternal Life.

The fact is though that someone lying on the side of the road, beaten and bloody cannot escape our notice,

but the spiritual needs of those ‘storm-tossed’ by our culture, ravaged by the ‘thieves’ of the truth: secularism and nihilism, and all godlessness, is something so ubiquitous, we can easily find ourselves numb to their need and suffering. We can easily find ourselves just like that priest and Levite, who pass by indifferent to the needs of the dying souls around us.

The goodness of the Samaritan can be summed up in one word, “mercy.” He showed mercy on the man who fell among robbers. Mercy and love are very closely related. Mercy and love, when they’ve taken root in us through Christ, produce compassion and overcome indifference.

Some of the Fathers interpret the Good Samaritan to be a figure of Christ Himself: the bandages, oil and wine are sacramental images for the clothing of the neophyte at Baptism in a garment of white, signifying new birth, which heals us of the wounds of sin, the oil of Chrismation, gives us new life going forward in the Holy Spirit by whom we are sealed, the wine, which is the communion of the divine Blood of Christ, deifies us and leads us to eternal life with Christ God.

St. John Chrysostom says of the moral of this Parable, “Let us make our mercifulness abundant, let us give proof of much love to man, both by the use of our money, and by our actions.” Yes, this is part of it.” During the Advent Season, we focus even more on charitable

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### *Homily on the Good Samaritan, (cont'd from p.3)*

acts and serving with our gifts because it's an opportunity to grow in mercy and compassion. But it's easier to give money to a cause we believe in. When we see Christ tangibly ministering to our needs or those of others, we naturally want to support and further that work. This is why we tithe. But St. John urges us beyond what is easy, however, saying, "Go then, and put a stop to the evil; pull out those who are drowning, though you descend into the very depth of the surge..." (St. John Chrysostom, Homily XV on Matthew 5:14).

Now here's a challenge to us: do we love enough to address with the love and truth of Christ the evil we see harming those around us? Are we willing to go that extra mile and really address the core issues in our own life, so we too can become an inspiration, an example, and a vehicle through which God can work in the lives of those around us?

We don't have to be already healed to minister to others; we do need, however, to be healing. In other words, we have to be taking our spiritual medicine if we're going to have credibility with others whom we urge to do the same. We need to fight to make use of the tools of salvation Christ gives us if we're to impact the world and the people around us with the Gospel of Christ.

When we come outside ourselves, our own struggles and problems to love and care for those around us in body and in soul, when we really strive to love and serve, when we speak the Truth to those who need to hear it by authentically struggling to live that Truth—where else are they going to hear it if not from us in the Church—then we're assured that God will always supply in us what is lacking; He'll use such opportunities to work in us and through us.

Having finished His parable, Jesus asks the lawyer, "which of these was a neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And the lawyer responds, "he who showed mercy." Christ says, "Go and do the same." Pray to God for such opportunities to be used; pray for eyes of mercy. He who is Himself the Good Samaritan and calls on us to be the same, will give them to us! Amen.

### *Angels and the Church (cont'd from p.2)*

'unlimited', they know no material obstacles. Recognition of a kind of 'ethereal and arial' body for the angels is indicative of the fact that they are to be found in a particular location, in 'mental places,' while there can be no question of different sexes or reproduction among them, since they have acquired immortality 'by grace'. Moreover, the manner in which they communicate is also unknown to us, though it is certain that, as immaterial beings, they have no need of a tongue and the faculty of hearing and so must communicate without words.

The knowledge angels possess is certainly greater than ours, but the angels are in no way all-knowing. They know the past, of course, but not the future, and instances of their foretelling or of interpreting prophesies are due to illumination by God, as whose instruments they function. The limited nature of the angels' knowledge is apparent from the fact that they don't have a complete understanding of the mystery of the Holy Trinity and also that they had no knowledge of the divine plan for the incarnation of the Word of God. There is also a distinction of degree of knowledge among the angels 'because of the superiority of rank or of nature' [16], that is, the knowledge of the angelic powers is different, depending on the place they occupy in the hierarchy. Transmission of knowledge is from the higher ranks of angels to the lower.

According to Scriptural teaching, the task of the angels is twofold. The first is to glorify God and the second is to assist us humans. The second of the two is described by Saint Basil the Great as circumstantial, since it was assigned to the angels after our creation. It is the belief of the Church, based on Biblical and Patristic testimony that we each have a guardian angel and there is also some suggestion of an angel for nations and peoples, as well as angels being assigned to the protection of local churches. It is the conviction of the body of the Church that the angels accompany the souls of the righteous at the time of their departure from the body.

