

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be Forever!



Volume 10 Issue 493

30th Sunday after Pentecost-Sunday before the Nativity

December 19, 2021



In spite of what we may like to think, the story of our lives did not begin on the day of our birth, but extends back across the generations to those from whom we have inherited so many traits that make us who we are. Knowing about the heritage of our families can give us a sense of rootedness, a healthy acceptance that

we are not our own creators. Ultimately, of course, we trace our origins back to the Lord Who created us in His image and likeness by breathing life into our first parents.

As we all know from personal experience, not everything passed down in families is healthy or holy. That is because we all participate personally in the consequences of humanity's refusal to become more like God in holiness. Due to their disobedience, Adam and Eve were cast out of Paradise into the world of corruption that we know all too well. We have followed them in serving our own self-centered leanings instead of God. Instead of freely becoming more like God in holiness, we suffer the consequences of being held captive to sin and death.

On this Sunday before Christmas, we must remember that Jesus Christ
(continued p. 3)

+ 30th Sunday after Pentecost +
+++ Holy Fathers +++

Epistle: Hebrews 11:9-10, 17-23, 32-40

Gospel: Matthew 1: 1-25

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.*

Commentary on The Our Father by Archimandrite George (part 2)

By accepting to be called Father of us all, He gave to all of us the same noble origin, and consequently equality. Thus, we are united and no one possesses more than the other, neither the rich from the poor, neither the lord from the slave, neither the ruler from the reigned, neither the king from the soldier, neither the philosopher from the barbarian, neither the wise from the illiterate one."

As we shall see further on, the rest of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer

help us overcome our morbid individualism, our self-centeredness, and our selfishness. They help us open our heart and offer ourselves to God the Father, and to our brethren. That is to say, they help us to obtain love towards God, which is inseparably linked to benevolence and brotherly love.

Who art in heaven

The All-Holy God is our Father, but also the only Father in heaven. Saint Chrysostom explains, "When the 'in heaven' is said, we don't

confine God to heavens, but instead, the worshipper is elevated from the earth and fixes his attention to the higher places and residences."

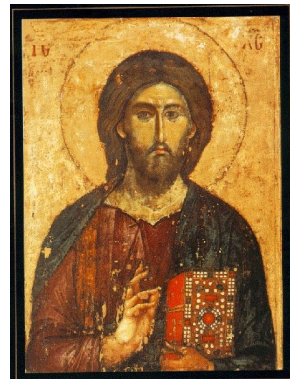
So, the phrase 'in heaven' signifies the holiness of God the Father and not the residence of the everywhere present God. St. Gregory of Nyssa theologizes, "Since the distinction between the divine and the human is not local, therefore we need not some trick or some device to transport this heavy, fat
(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

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

Discernment by St. Makary of Optina

Allow me not to return to the past, but to dwell rather on what may prove useful and beneficial in the future. According to the teachings of the holy Fathers, every impression, every image, every thought that comes into the region of our heart and fills it with great turbulence certainly comes from the realm of the passions.

This is why we shouldn't follow the impulses of our heart immediately, but only after careful self-examination and intense prayer. God preserve us from a blinded heart. Because it's common knowledge that the passions blind the heart and darken the bright sun of the mind, the sun on which we should all fix our gaze earnestly, at all times.

Finally, the endless night has passed. In your heart, the sun shines effulgently and in your mind the air is sweet and clean. Sweeter and cleaner than ever before. Thank God. The intervention of his grace is obvious. But from one point of view, your present state is also the fruit of your bitter trials. As Saint Mark the Ascetic says, behind voluntary sorrows lies concealed the mercy of God.

Be careful, though, because this intense inclination towards prayer that you have now is also a trial- from the right. If you allow yourself to wallow in the enjoyment, in self-satisfaction, then a cloud of spiritual darkness, deeper than the previous one, will envelop you.

Commentary on the Our Father, continued from p.1

and earthly body to the immateriall and intellectual conduct. But because virtue is intellectually separated from evil, it depends upon the human will to belong where he (man) wishes."

St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite provides us with the practical and moral consequences of this phrase, "Because our Father is in heaven we too must intellectually be in heaven, there, where our homeland is, the Higher Jerusalem, and not have our mind, as the swine do, down here on the earth. Our mind must be in our sweetest Savior and Master and on the heavenly beauties of Paradise. Not only in time of prayer but always and at all times we must keep our mind on heaven, so that the mind is not dispersed down here on perishable and temporary things."

Hallowed be Thy Name

This is the first petition of the Lord's, 'Hallowed' means 'glorified' according to Saint Chrysostom. Of course, the Uncreated God has no need to be glorified by His created creatures.

Nevertheless, He wants us to glorify Him because this benefits us men. He protects us from the danger of glorifying ourselves with a fake glory that does not belong to us. Selfishness gives birth to ambition.

We are set correctly in the world when we glorify God, recognizing God as worthy of glory, because He is the Creator, the Father, the All-Holy, the Savior, the Alpha and the Omega, and the Centre of the world, while we are His creatures who exist and live because He so wills.

You deceive yourself when you glorify yourself. When you glorify God you realize your nature, your destination. That is to say, you realize that you are not the center of the world, that you are not the source of life and holiness, that you are not infinite and immortal on your own. In other words, you accept your limitation.

Men cannot glorify God when they glorify themselves. This is what happened to our Forefathers. This is what happened to the teachers of Israel.

whom the Lord speaks about in the Gospel according to John, "How can ye believe, when you receive honor from one another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?" (John 5, 44).

This is what happens to our contemporary, humanistic philosophy which wants man to be the center of this world. The beliefs of the humanist man are summarized by the French atheist, J.P. Sartre,



when he says to God, "When You exist, I can not exist. It is either You or me". Nevertheless, according to St. Gregory Palamas, man is truly glorified when he glorifies God. He is glorified when in God he can become not independent from God, not a pseudo-god, but he can become a god by Grace, infinite and everlasting.

(continued next issue)

(Homily on the Sunday of the Holy Fathers, cont'd from p.1)

“is born now to raise the image that had fallen aforetime.” In other words, He is the New Adam Who fulfills our original calling to become like God in holiness. Indeed, He is truly God and truly human, and thus able to restore us to the sublime dignity for which He breathed life into us in the first place. In Him, we inherit the blessedness of Paradise, for He comes to heal every dimension of our corruption and to unite us to Himself in holiness.

We may wonder, however, if there really is healing for us who suffer the effects of our own sins and of the brokenness of others. We may despair of ever experiencing the fulfillment of our calling to become like God because pride, anger, lust, and other passions seem so deeply rooted in our souls. We may lose hope of ever finding peace amidst the battles that rage in our minds, hearts, and relationships.

If our struggles were simply about us as isolated individuals left to our own devices, we would have good reason to despair. Today, however, we remember that God worked across the generations from Abraham to the Virgin Mary and Joseph, her betrothed, to prepare for the birth of the New Adam.

Since King David served as a model for the Messiah, he figures prominently in the Lord's family tree. Remember, however, that he was guilty of adultery and murder, which the genealogy indicates by listing Bathsheeba as “the wife of Uriah.” Along with this reference, the names of Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth are surprising because they are all women who bring to mind scandalous episodes involving matters such as prostitution or intermarriage with Gentiles.

Our Lord's family heritage was certainly not comprised of perfect people. They experienced all the spiritual and moral brokenness common to humanity in our world of corruption. Nonetheless, they looked forward in faith to the coming of the Messiah. Despite their sufferings and imperfections, God worked through them to prepare for the Virgin Mary to become the Theotokos when she accepted the outrageous calling to become the Mother of God, the living temple of the Savior. In a manner beyond understanding and not tainted by passion of any kind, she conceived and gave birth to the Son of

God as a virgin. Joseph, her elderly protector, turned away from his earlier doubts and faithfully played his unique role in caring for both mother and Child. In the God-Man born at Christmas, we have received the fullness of the promise for which the Old Testament saints longed in faith.

By becoming one of us, He has raised the fallen image and made us “partakers of the divine nature” by grace. The disciplines of the Nativity Fast have helped us to know why we need a Savior Who comes to us in this way. By devoting ourselves for forty days to intensified prayer, fasting, and generosity to the needy, and by preparing conscientiously for Confession, we have come to see our own spiritual brokenness a bit more clearly. These practices have shown us that we need more

than a set of rules or a good example to follow. Like all those enslaved by the fear of death and our own distorted desires, we need to be born again in the New Adam. We need to be healed from the spiritual maladies that have taken root in our souls so that we will participate personally in the fulfillment that Christ works when He becomes a human being for our salvation.

None of us, however, is yet fully healed. We all have a long way to go—an infinitely long journey—in order to become like God in holiness. Instead of becoming discouraged at how far we are from fulfilling this high calling, we should remember that we fit right into the Lord's family tree. Those who prepared for His coming often fell short, even to the point of committing murder, adultery, and idolatry. If He can work through

such people to prepare His way, then it should not be surprising that the Savior came to call, not the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Who needs to be reborn except those who are spiritually dead? Who needs to be set free from captivity except those who are enslaved to sin? Who needs a New Adam if not all the children of the first Adam, all human persons who have fallen short of the glory of God and earned the wages of sin, which is death? Christmas is not a feast focused on rewarding the righteous, for who could possibly have merited or deserved the miracle of the Son of God becoming a human being? He fulfills

(continued p. 4, column 1)



the ancient vocation of all people to become like God in holiness not because any of us have somehow earned that astounding blessing, but instead on the basis of His love for sinners.

Even before the Incarnation, King David found forgiveness for committing murder and adultery. If already before the promise of the coming of the Messiah was fulfilled, God was so gracious to a repentant sinner, how much more must we trust that the mercy of the Savior born at Christmas will extend also to us? Many people struggle with a prideful form of shame that paralyzes them when they catch a true glimpse of their own spiritual state. When they do not live up to their own illusions of perfection, they cannot accept that—like everyone else—they have sinned and need the Lord's healing mercy. So instead of humbly repenting and trusting in His grace as they stumble forward in obedience, they insist on relying on their own power and ability. That results in worshiping a god of their own imagination, not the Lord Whose family tree included scandalous sinners of all kinds.

The Son of God was born "to raise the fallen image," which means to restore our beauty as living icons radiant with His holiness. No matter the present shape of our souls, the New Adam makes it possible for us to be fulfilled in His likeness, to become truly human as He always intended us to be. Nothing but our own prideful will has the power to keep us from entering into the divine joy of Christmas for our salvation. In Christ, we have all inherited by faith the fullness of the promise passed down for so many generations through the children of Abraham.

As we prepare to celebrate the Nativity of our Savior, let us all receive Him into our hearts with humility, knowing that He came to save us who were lost. If you think that you do not deserve that great blessing, then you are absolutely right. No one does. That is why the Savior was born.

* * * *

Don't seek to ascend to the heights through great privations unless you have the commensurate virtues, because you then run the risk of falling into delusion because of conceit and audacity. Those who seek divine gifts and sublime visions while they're yet burdened with passions

are foolish and proud and, therefore, deluded. Their first concern should be to cleanse themselves. Divine grace sends gifts as a reward to those who've been cleansed of the passions. Grace comes to them silently and at a time unknown to them.

Pride

Pride of the intellect is Satanic pride, which denies God and blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, which is why it's so difficult to cure. It's a deep darkness which hampers the eyes of the soul from seeing the light which lies within it and which leads to God, humility and the desire for the good.

Pride of the heart, on the other hand, isn't the product of Satanic pride, but is created by a variety of circumstances and events: riches, praise, honors, spiritual or bodily gifts (high intelligence, beauty, strength, skill and so on). All of these swell the heads of foolish people and they thus become vacuous, though not also atheists. Very often, God has mercy on such people, they're chastised with some form of divine reprimand and come to their senses. Their hearts are shattered, they stop seeking praise and vanities and in this way they're cured.

Your spiritual task is to examine your heart. Does pride nestle there like a poisonous snake, the passion the provokes so much wickedness, which mortifies each and every virtue and toxifies everything? Turn the whole of your attention onto this introverted wickedness. Day and

night this investigation should be your constant task.

I think it would be true if I said that the whole of our spiritual struggle consists of seeking out and exterminating pride and all its offspring. If we rid ourselves of it and enthrone humility in our heart, then we'll have everything. Because where there's real Christ-like humility, this is where all the virtues are gathered which elevate us to God.

Christian Noblesse

According to the Lord's commandment, Christians have an obligation to become holy and perfect. Perfection and holiness are first inscribed deep in the soul of Christians and from there are stamped on their thoughts, their desires, their words and their actions. In this way, the grace of God which lies within the soul of a person wells up into the whole of their external character.

(continued next issue)

