

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 11 Issue 506

1st Sunday of Great Lent—Sunday of Orthodoxy

March 13, 2022



Today is the first Sunday of Great Lent on which is celebrated two events. The first is the victory of those who venerate images of Christ, His Mother and the Saints (iconophiles) over those who were suspicious of any Christian art and, therefore, tried to destroy them (iconoclasts). The second event is the triumph of orthodoxy (the true, correct faith and the true glo-

rification of God) over heresy.

The dispute over the use of icons in the church was the cause of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, which took place during the eighth and ninth centuries. “The struggle was not merely a conflict between two conceptions of Christian art. Deeper issues were involved: the character of Christ’s human nature, the Christian attitude towards matter, [and] the true meaning of redemption.”

The central question posed at the council was: “If we establish that images (icons) are not idolatrous (which the Council had done) are we to say that they are necessary and essential to the faith?” The answer is, “yes,” as Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) writes, “because icons safeguard a full and proper doctrine of the Incarnation.” He then quoted St. John of Damascus
(continued p. 3)

++ Sunday of Orthodoxy ++
St. Nicephorus of Constantinople

Epistle: Hebrews 11:24-26; 32-12:2

Gospel: John 1: 43-51

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.*

“Contrition not Dejections,” by Archimandrite Gregorios

Holy Lent is starting and the Church has ordained that, at the services on the days of this period, texts and hymns should be read from the book of the Triodion. This book took its name from the three odes, that is the three groups of hymns which are sung.

According to the view of various historical scholars, the number three was included symbolically, as denoting the model of the Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Moreover, it conforms to

the harmonious glorification of the three parts of the universe: humankind, angels and the rest of creation.

So, on a daily basis, all the hymns of the three odes of Lent express the full theological conscience of our Church in all its breadth and depth. When we listen to these hymns and pay attention to their meaning, we see that they refer to the creation of the universe, as well as the fall and recreation of humankind and our nature.

In other words, they’re

liturgical incentives which aim at awakening our conscience, by making us aware that we’re experiencing a different ecclesiastical period, the purpose of which is to bring us to our final destination of the resurrection.

Through its inspired hymnography and its services in general, the Church wants and has as its aim our glorification in Christ. The holy Fathers say that Lent is a time of contrition but not dejection.

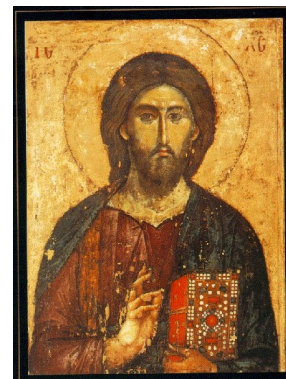
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

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

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

Wisdom for Life

For many people today, young and old, Great Lent is considered to be a change of diet, based on our customs and traditions. It's associated with a return to the Church, preparation for Easter, not so much from faith in the experience of the resurrection and our expectation of it, but more because of the joy and change that

the Feast brings and the return of life to its normal rhythm. An abundance of Lenten food makes the fast easier, as regards our choices and what we deprive ourselves of, but it also makes us lose sight of its significance. And given that a secular attitude and indifference to religion dominate the majority of outlets that shape our life (media, internet, entertainment and hospitality), we actually don't have much of a change, nor a real tithing of our time.

The fast can be an opportunity for the members to gather more frequently around the common table. To fast from particular individual choices. To meet at the Lenten assemblies in church, especially the afternoon presanctified liturgies, the salutations and the Sunday services. We can look again at our character, and at the schedules of our life, and ask more of ourselves. We should stop looking at others as a means to achieve some personal triumph and should devote more time to the prospect of love. The word of God, prayer, study, confession, alms, are all ways which contribute.

Contrition not Dejection, cont'd from p.1

In the hymns for this period which we read, we hear the constant refrain: 'pay heed to me for I am troubled'. This doesn't lead to depression, but to healing of the soul, in the form of greater divine light and joy.

It is no coincidence that, in monasteries, the main church is in the center of the courtyard, to show that worship should be at the center of our life. Great Lent serves the same purpose. It places penitential services at the center of our daily life so that we can absorb their divine messages. Matins, vespers, compline, presanctified liturgies and those on Sunday by Saint Basil the Great all offer unique devotional opportunities for raising our spiritual awareness.

The Church strives to extract us from arid reason, industrialized spirituality and Pharisaical religiosity.

Another characteristic of Lent is that it's a time full of the figures of saints like us, who are particularly close to us, such as the sinful Publican and Mary the Egyptian, who cry out to us that there's no excuse for us not to

become saints; we need only to look at the multitude of sinners who have been sanctified.

God doesn't ask for an account as to



why we haven't become rich or attained academic, social or professional distinction, but he will want to know why we were indolent when we had the time and opportunities for rebirth.

The time of the Triodion and Great

Lent is the most wonderful ecclesiastical period of repentance and reflection, transformation and rebirth. So let us each, separately and personally, make the best use we can of the time, if for no other reason than that we can't be sure whether we'll be here to do so next year. Amen.

* * *

'In exactly the same way as we fast from food, so our tongue should also fast from defamation and lies, from idle talk and condemnation of our neighbor, from anger. By the same token, we must fast with our eyes, so that we don't gaze at shallow things, we don't look brazenly and shamelessly. The same is true of all the senses' (Abba Dorotheos).

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A young man is talking with an Elder at the Holy Mountain: "My child, remember that the angel who appeared to Cornelius praised him for his fasting and his alms giving. Therefore, our prayer is stronger when is combined with fasting and giving to the poor.

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

“Of old God the incorporeal and uncircumscribed was not depicted at all. But now God has appeared in the flesh and lived among men, I make an image of the God who can be seen. I do not worship matter but I worship the Creator of matter, who for my sake became material and deigned to dwell in matter, who through matter effected my salvation. I will not cease from worshipping the matter through which my salvation has been effected.”

Matter does not defile the spiritual. What is spiritual is not disconnected from the material. Because of Christ's incarnation, man's material body, as well as his soul, will be redeemed, it will be transfigured.

On March 11, 843, the first Sunday of Great Lent, St. Methodius, Patriarch of Constantinople and St. Theodora, the Empress of the Byzantine Empire restored the

revelation of icons. At that time, the Empress and her son gathered with everyone else in the church where a procession began with icons, fragments of the true cross and the Gospel Book. Since then, the Triumph of Orthodoxy has been held on this day.

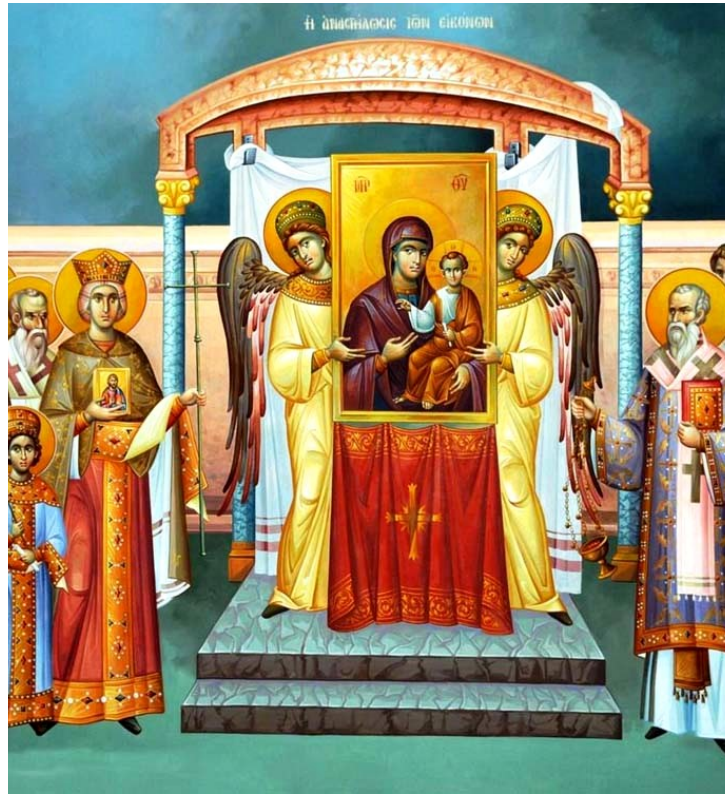
The Sunday of Orthodoxy not only commemorates the restoration of the veneration of icons but also the triumph of all Ecumenical Councils. For this reason, let us now look more closely at some characteristics of the Church's Ecumenical Councils. Each Council was convened to address a specific heresy at a particular historical period of the

Church. Those whom the Church considers “Fathers of the Church” are best described by Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov) who said: they had personal experience of God, had excellent intellectual gifts and they had also acquired the education of their day. “They were, therefore, able, on the one hand, to record this experience and, on the other, to confront the various heretics of their era.”

However, they did not imagine themselves able to explain the mysteries of God fully, rather, as Metropolitan Kallistos writes “they merely sought to exclude certain false ways of speaking and thinking about it.” “They drew a fence around the mystery,” which keeps men from falling into heresy. What is meant here by mystery, is the *experience* of the mystery which is different from the *dogma* about it. The personal experience of God that

the saints have is the experience of the mystery and cannot be explained. The dogma is a rational formulation concerning the mystery or revelation which can be expressed best by those with “excellent intellectual gifts” who have had experience of God.

Finally, Ecumenical Councils are not the highest authority within the Church. Instead, as Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk writes, “The final criterion for the acceptance or rejection of an ecumenical council was not the fact of its convocation, but the consensus regarding its ‘acceptance,’ which was achieved only later, when the local churches handed down their verdict on a particular council.” We see this in subsequent Ecumenical Councils which begin with the approval of all the previous Councils.



Metropolitan Kallistos observes in his introduction to the Tridion that not only is there a historical link between the events surrounding the Seventh Ecumenical Council and the celebration of the Triumph of Orthodoxy on the first Sunday of Lent, but there is also a “spiritual affinity.” This spiritual affinity is between the ascetic labors of the first week of Great Lent and the martyric struggles of the defenders of the faith. He writes:

If Orthodoxy triumphed in the epoch of the iconoclast controversy, this was because so many of the faithful were prepared to undergo exile, torture, and even death, for the sake of the truth. The Feast of Ortho-

doxy is above all a celebration in honour of the martyrs and confessors who struggled and suffered for the faith: hence its appropriateness for the season of Lent, when we are striving to imitate the martyrs by means of our ascetic self-denial. Yet in the midst of these struggles are found moments of light and joy as we find at the end of this first week wherein we now celebrate the labours of those who have gone before us. The labors that resulted in the triumph of light over darkness, orthodoxy over heresy. This is summed up well in the hymn at Vespers: “Advancing from ungodliness to the true faith, and illumined with the light of knowledge, let us clap our hands and sing aloud, offering praise and thanksgiving to God; and with due honour let us venerate the holy icons of Christ, of the all-pure Virgin and the saints, whether depicted on walls, on wooden panels or on holy vessels,

The hatred of the devil towards those engaged in the spiritual struggle is well known. This hatred was faced particularly by the fathers in the desert, whose purity, not only of body but also of mind, was greater than the enemy could bear. This is why he would often circumvent the usual means of temptation he had at his disposal and, instead, suggested bad thoughts or created circumstances involving other people. He attacked them tangibly, transmuting into a variety of wild shapes, and conjured up terrifying spectacles in order to scare them and overcome their bold, determined attitude.

Those whose were absolutely untouched by carnal passions and desires wounded him gravely and were met with his hatred in a particular form which is indicative of his insolence. He would attack and tempt them openly with sensual pleasure. In their efforts to preserve their purity, the saints responded heroically. He would then disappear, leaving behind, as

evidence of his presence, an unbearable stench in the room, which offended the sense of smell for days. By contrast, on the occasions when God's grace entered, it left an ineffable, otherworldly fragrance behind, which gladdened the soul and senses of the ascetic.

Whatever is bad stinks, which is why the fathers who had experiences such as those above, called these passions malodorous, unclean, reprehensible and so on.

If we take the physical condition of things as regards matter, we all know how odious the stench is when, for example, a septic tank is opened or when we meet the foul odor of a decomposing carcass. What sane person would want to inhale the stench of an open cesspit or hold something to scabble round the remains of a dead animal being devoured by worms? And yet, this is what those people do who concern themselves with scandals, because of their lustful flesh, having secretly succumbed to the power of unclean passions.

The proper thing for spiritual and, indeed, all reasonable people, is to remain silent and to turn away from any such situation, because it's a creation of the devil aimed at casting a large number of souls into the maelstrom of guilt through judging and condemning. The devil's not so much interested in the precipitous fall of a person into reprehensible passions as he is in the opportunity to create a scandal. Typical of a scandal of such order is that it causes deep, debilitating wounds in the souls of those who aren't firm in their faith.

Satan's gains from such a scandal are enormous, which

is why anyone who deliberately becomes an agent of the devil and harms many other souls is threatened directly by Christ: 'Woe to those through whom scandal comes' (Matt. 18, 7). Christ said 'Woe', because, as a rule, the insolence of the devil is transmitted to those who have become slaves to impure passions and brazenly act the victim. They collect and amalgamate such scandals and choose to assign blame rather than to keep quiet and humble themselves; rather than seek the cleansing of their soul through repentance and liberation from the bonds of the devil.

When we turn our face from such an unclean affair, we put up the best defence for the protection of our soul. At the same time, we can pray to our all-wise God who knows ways to send the mystical suction pipe of his love to draw out all the uncleanliness from the fallen person who created the scandal.



* * *

As Christians, we live in this society and we're called upon to declare that the message of the Gospel is applicable today. And above all, by applying it first ourselves, we should acquire the joy of the glad tidings to be gained by assuming responsibility for the weakness and sins of other people.

Christ undertook the responsibility and, by extension, so do those who continue his work. Any of us may find ourselves faced with someone who's in despair and we can

give them a helping hand, taking on some of the responsibility for their sin as if it were our own. In which case, we really are doing Christ's work. The joy and peace of Christ will then fill our heart and we'll experience something beyond anything that the world of egocentrism and selfishness can know.

Let us say that you have an issue to deal with. If you are left to your own devices, you will get angry, you will become exasperated, disappointed, you will explode. If you think, however, that God is well aware of the issue, that He is with you, and that, at the particular moment, he would like you to deal with it like a man of God, you will immediately change your attitude; you'll restrain yourself, you won't go out of your mind, you won't get disappointed or depressed, as if you were master of the universe in the first place. And in practice, you will come to realize that the issues you have are exactly what you need. I mean, that by undergoing them, you get to know God better; you humble yourself, you believe in Him, you love Him, you remember Him, you act according to His will and respond to Him. You may be thinking that these issues are obstacles; yet, they sanctify you.