

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

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Christ is in our Midst! He is and ever shall be!



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11th Sunday after Pentecost-Christ

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The Lord often taught in parables. A parable is a very short story that makes a particular point. Parables can spark our imagination and challenge us to see ourselves in a new light. Christ's parables call us into question and get to the heart of the matter of where we stand before God. They help us to see the truth about ourselves more clearly.

The first servant in today's parable begged for more time to pay an unbelievably large debt and his master responded with shocking mercy, for he forgave the debt completely. The servant then owed nothing at all. But instead of sharing the mercy that he had received with a fellow servant who owed him much less, the man refused to show any patience at all. He had the second servant put into prison until he could pay the debt.

When word of his actions reached the master, he had the first servant put in jail until he could repay the entirety of the massive amount he had owed. Christ concludes the parable with these challenging words, "So also My heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

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++ 11th Sunday after Pentecost ++
+ St. Job of Pochaev-Ukraine +

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 9: 2-12

Gospel: Matthew 18: 23-35

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.*

A Discourse on the Beatitudes by St. Gregory of Nyssa (part 3)

The riches of the virtues are wonderful, but earthly and material wealth is decried, because the first becomes an acquisition of the soul, whereas the second is excellent at deceiving the senses. This is why the Lord forbids us to store it, because it's open for moths to eat and burglars to plot for (Matt. 6, 19).

We're obliged to show our preference for the riches of the higher goods, which the forces of decay don't touch. When it says moths and

robbers it's talking about him who destroys the treasures of the soul. So if poverty is distinguished from riches, we can certainly, by analogy, conclude that there are two types of poverty.

One is to be rejected, the other to be praised. People who are poor in terms of mature restraint, for example, or who lack the precious quality of righteousness, or of wisdom or good sense or any other of the valuable treasures, are seen to be starving, without posses-

sions and poor, wretched and pitiable for their lack of precious acquisitions.

Others, however, who, through the warmth of their spirit, deprive themselves of everything that has to do with evil can be shown by the Lord as being in blessed poverty, the fruit of which is the kingdom of heaven. But let's return to our deliberations on the treasure and let's continue to try to reveal what's hidden by mining it out.

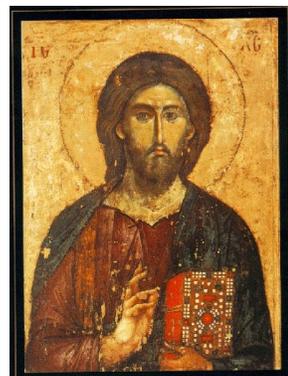
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

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: Mother Onufria, Fr. Michael, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Brittany, Maverick, Christopher, Elizabeth, Rudy, Marigold, Corella, Ron, Daniel, Frankie, Loretta, Mackenzie, Mike, Jessica, Grace, Gladys, Lisa, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

What is Asceticism?

In Greek the word means ‘exercise’. It is exercise in emptying oneself of the ego (cf. Philippians 2:7). All passions and sins are tied to the ego, and the ego is the source of the fall and estrangement from God and the other.

Most people think that asceticism is only for monks and ascetics, but this is something that is required of all believers. The

Church teaches us how to live it through prayer, fasting and repentance according to the Lord Jesus’ commandments to us.

Thus asceticism is the life of prayer, fasting and repentance with the goal of emptying ourselves of our ego so that God may become our ego, our life and everything for us. Asceticism is escape from the self– that is, from the source of the passions– through setting aside the pleasures and passions that fight man within himself, his heart and his being, through personal effort, firm and sincere desire, and God’s grace.

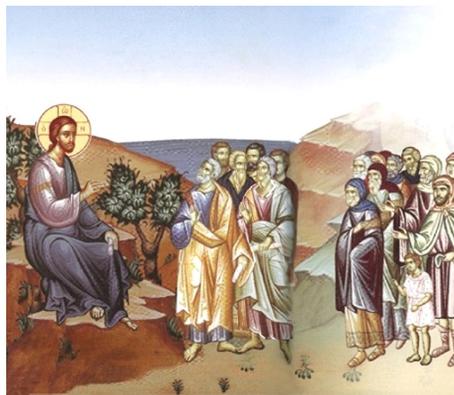
This is what is called the ascetic struggle or spiritual struggle. It is an activity that is shared between the will of man and the grace of the Holy Trinity, which we call ‘synergy.’ Asceticism is fundamentally the struggle of prayer, fasting and asceticism so that one may become practiced in knowledge of the self and purification of the heart in order to ascend in his relationship with God and the other until He arrived, through unity with the Trinity, at unity with all creation and the service of God in man.

Discourse on the Beatitudes, cont’d from p.1

The Lord says, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit’. We said this, in a way, above, but we’ll say it again now: the aim of the virtuous life is to become like God. But that which is pure and without passion completely escapes any imitation on our part. Because it’s simply not possible for an impassioned life to become the same as a nature which is not susceptible to passion. If God alone is blessed, as Saint Paul says (1 Tim. 6, 15) and our participation in blessedness depends on becoming like God, then imitation is impossible. It follows that blessedness is unattainable for us. Yet there are still some properties of God that people can imitate if they want to.

What are these? I believe that the Lord calls voluntary humility poverty of the spirit. As a model of this, Saint Paul gives us the poverty of the Lord: ‘that though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, so that by his poverty we might become rich’*. All the other properties which are manifest around the divine nature surpass

the measure of human nature, but humility is innate for us and is a companion to those who come from below, who are composed of earthly matter and who fall back into the earth.



You yourself acquire the characteristics of blessedness insofar as you imitate God as much as you can. Let no-one think that humility is achieved easily and without effort. It’s exactly the opposite. It’s harder work than any other virtue we seek. And why is that? Because when people who’ve received the seeds of good are asleep,

they also receive the seed of another sowing from the enemy of our life and in this way the weed of pride takes root. It was in this way that the devil cast himself down to earth. In the same way he dragged the human race down with him in the common fall.

So the passion of conceit sprouts in almost every person, in one way or another. There’s nothing worse in our nature than pride. This is why, when He begins the Beatitudes, the Lord uproots pride from our character, as a primeval wickedness, by urging us to imitate Him, Who voluntarily became poor and Who is truly blessed. In this way we’ll draw blessedness down upon ourselves, by choosing to become poor, as far as we can and whoever we are. Saint Paul tells us to be of the same mind as Christ, Who, although He was God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied Himself and took the form of a slave.

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(Homily on Christ , cont'd from p.1)

This parable shows that whether we forgive others reveals the health of our souls. The Lord's mercy is transformative and participatory. If we have opened our hearts to receive His forgiveness, then His gracious divine energies must permeate our lives. He said, "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven." To become radiant with mercy to the point we do not limit our love only to our friends is necessary in order to "be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect." (Matt. 5: 44-48)

If we call upon God's forgiveness for our sins, we put ourselves in a false position whenever we refuse to forgive other people. He is infinitely holy and death is "the wages of sin" for us all. We are each the chief of sinners against the Father

Who sent His Son for the salvation of the world. (Jn. 3:17) As those who dare to call for mercy beyond what we could possibly deserve, how may we refuse to forgive someone else? The God-Man enables us to become like Him in holiness, not to insist on our rights for satisfaction in relation to our neighbors. How we treat them, including those who have offended us, is how we treat our Lord.



As St. John wrote, "If anyone says, 'I love God, but hates his brother he, is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.'" (1Jn 4:20) When we refuse to forgive others, we demonstrate not only a lack of love for them, but for Christ.

As we all know, forgiveness often does not come quickly or easily. It is not simply a matter of what we say or how we act, but concerns our hearts. The Savior said that anger is at the root of murder and lust is at the root of adultery. He calls us to a purity of heart that frees us from bondage to such corrupt desires as we come to share more fully in His fulfillment of the human person in the divine image and likeness. In order to do so, we must turn our hearts away from indulging in holding grudges or obsessing about the wrongs of others, and instead learn to find our joy in the Lord. That is possible only as we open ourselves more fully to the healing

power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. St. Paul wrote, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (Gal. 5:22-23) As St. Siluonan the Athonite taught, "One can only love one's enemies through the grace of the Holy Spirit." And "He who does not love his enemies, does not have God's grace."

How we respond to those who have wronged us reveals the true state of our souls in a way that goes beyond simplistic distortions of the Christian faith. In our world of corruption, the primal relationship between Adam and Eve remains broken and gives rise to resentment, domestic violence, and untold misery across the generations. Cain murdered his brother Abel, and people still

kill family members, neighbors, and strangers for no reason other than jealousy and spite. We easily become blind to the image of God in every human person, especially those with whom we disagree or whom we think we should fear or hate for some reason. People build themselves up by putting others down, both individually and collectively, in ways too numerous to count.

Our Lord was rejected as a blasphemer because the religious leaders of the time viewed Him as a threat to their power. The Romans crucified Him as an example of what would happen to anyone who dared to threaten their rule. Apart from the healing power of the Holy Spirit, there is no escape from slavery to an endless cycle of resentment and retribution that leads only to the grave.

The Savior endured the full consequences of such depravity in His crucifixion and death in order to provide a path that leads from the grave to the glory of the heavenly kingdom through His resurrection on the third day. He abides in our hearts through the Holy Spirit through Whom we are able to cry out to God "Abba, Father," for we are not slaves, but children of God, heirs to all the promises to Abraham through Christ. (Gal. 4:6) We will find the strength to offer the desires of our hearts to the Lord for healing by opening ourselves as fully as possible to the healing power of the Holy Spirit.

(continued p. 4, column 1)

He is “everywhere present and fills all things” and we have received the fullness of His presence in the holy mystery of Chrismation. In order to acquire the fruits of the Spirit, we must actively cooperate with God’s grace by growing in humility, which fundamentally requires learning to see ourselves as we truly are before God. That is what the first servant in today’s parable lacked, for he did not see himself as simply a forgiven debtor who had received mercy he could never have deserved.

If we will learn to see ourselves as truly the chief of sinners, as those whose entire existence and others for their wrongs against us and in refusing to forgive others as we have been forgiven. Growing in humility is the only way for us to find healing for our passions, for our disordered desires ultimately root in the pride of not accepting the truth about who we are before God. One powerful step for acquiring humility is to ask the forgiveness of those we have wronged, for doing so manifests the truth about who we are as people in need of mercy for the harm that we have done to our neighbors, who all bear the image of God. Serving others by putting their needs before our own is another path for becoming humble as we follow in the way of Christ, Who “did not come to be served, but to serve...” (Matt. 20:28) and Who washed the feet of His disciples.

Fasting also provides an opportunity to deny ourselves in small ways and to support generosity to the needy with the resources saved by eating a humble diet. The fact that we are usually so bad at fasting can also destroy our illusions of righteousness pretty quickly. As in all things, we must be mindful, keeping a close watch on our thoughts and desires as we refuse to welcome into our hearts anything that would hinder us from becoming living icons of the merciful healing of Christ.

The challenge to forgive others as we have been forgiven is finding the healing of our souls by the power of the Holy Spirit. If we acquire the humility to see ourselves as we truly are before the Lord, then we will not become like the first servant in today’s parable, but will instead become radiant with the gracious divine energies as we convey to others the same mercy that we have received through our Lord. That is the only way that we will ever be able to forgive others from the depths of our hearts.

Orthodox spirituality is the life of the Christian which is inclined to become spiritual in the Holy Spirit. In other words, Christian spirituality, as in a life of freedom in Christ, Godlike and Christlike. Orthodoxy, that is orthodox spirituality, expresses the spiritual tradition with its dogmatic principles and psychosomatic labor. In this instance, the faithful experience the historical and eschatological union in the life of the Holy Spirit, in the theanthropic body of Christ, namely the Church.

Orthodox spirituality is the Theanthropic Christ and His Church, which is the Theanthropic “workshop”, as Saint Justin (Popovich) so characteristically points out. *“The Church is the Theanthropic workshop in which we, through the divine sacraments and virtues, become Godmen, Godlike, Christlike, and are transformed into Godmen and gods by the grace of God. Everything, in this case, exists through God, in God, according to God. Everything falls under the category of the God-man and God-eternal.”*

The faithful, who tread the path of authentic creativity, incessant transformation and renewal, strive to become one with God. While on this path, human existence is recognized. This struggle is never-ending, multimodal with an eschatological dimension and orientation. Man experiences orthodox piety when he communes in the holy ceremonies, thus cultivating an honest and genuine love for the Holy Mother of God, the



Saints, the Holy relics and sacred temples, while at the same time partaking in the divine and unspeakable mysteries of the Church. With our participation in the Eucharistic gathering, God is revealed. Man participates with all his heart and all his being to encounter the resurrected Christ, both in theory and practice: *“Who will give me wings like a dove? And I will fly by activity, and be at rest.”* (St John Climacus). This is evident in the spiritual experiences of the Saints and Fathers of the Church who incarnate the evangelic word of Christ and whose lives are biblical and Christ-centered.

Besides all others, through the mystery of repentance and strenuous, toilsome labor, the path of the faithful in orthodox spirituality has a mystical character. It is a path of purification from the passions, enlightenment, and perfection.

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