

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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13th Sunday after Pentecost-Christ and the Vinedressers

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In this week's Gospel, Christ is warning the people to take their work seriously. In the parable, the landowner had grown weary of the way the vinedressers had misappropriated his vineyard and how they had treated his representatives. Now he had sent his own son to correct them. This was their last chance to repent of their behavior and see themselves as stewards

and servants of God's will – and of his son. The warning to the people of Israel was clear: they had ignored God's instructions and they had ignored the corrections offered by the prophets.

At the time of this Gospel proclamation, God had sent his own son. If they ignored him and his instructions – worse yet, if they killed him and tried to set themselves up in his place, not only would the vineyard finally be taken away from them, they would be punished according to the wickedness of their deeds.

But this warning was not just for the religious leaders of yesterday, it is a warning to us now as well. With this parable, Christ is reminding us of the terms of the contract when it comes to our own parish: he has not given us this parish. We do not own it to do with it as we want. He is simply
(continued p. 3)

++ 13th Sunday after Pentecost ++
+ St. Theodora of Alexandria +

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 16: 13-24
Gospel: Matthew 21: 33-42

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.*

Forgiveness-a novel answer to intimidation, by Maria Stylianou

Intimidation's a word that encompasses a painful social reality, since it condenses a range of behaviors which affect the human person and wound people's dignity. Above all, however, they affect those who deliberately (or unconsciously) employ intimidatory methods in their behavior as part of their response to life's various challenges.

The present article doesn't aim to expand into an investigation of the precise nature of intimidation or the factors which produce and sus-

tain it, but rather proposes a solution which might sound innovative and often 'unachievable' for people today: forgiveness.

But what is forgiveness? Forgiveness is perhaps the most wonderful, the most 'outside the box', the most novel answer to the serious social problem of intimidation, in an era when virtues, ideals, ethos and morality have all been completely devalued and revised as regards their value and content.

And yet, forgiveness

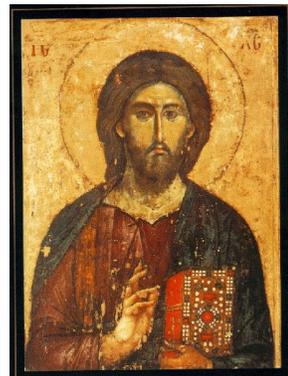
contains within itself the forgotten but much-desired miracle: the healing of our soul and the mending of our failing interpersonal relations.

This is because forgiveness is a movement of love from our soul towards the person who's injured us with their unseemly, hostile, insulting or humiliating behavior towards us. Forgiveness is a balm which we first offer as a gift to our own soul, to free it of all the negative sentiments of
(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: Mother Onufria, Fr. Michael, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Maverick, Corella, Ron, Daniel, Frankie, Loretta, Mackenzie, Mike, Jessica, Grace, Gladys, Lisa, Jeff, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

“For God so loved the Word” (Jn 3:16)

Sometimes we too do not feel lovable. We have difficulty in relating to others. We are frustrated by the political and social problems of our nation. We may be disappointed and discouraged in life. We have failed God doing the same wrong things multiple times. If we expect anything from God, it may not be praise and love but disapproval and judgment.

Nevertheless, God loves us. He loves us

with an unceasing and boundless love. Why does God love us so much? First because it is His nature to love. No other religion than Christianity proclaims its God to be a God of love. In the words of the Evangelist John “God is love.” (1 John 4:8, 16). And again “In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us.” (1 John 4:10)

God loves us because of another reason too. We are His creation. We are His children. St. Augustine taught that God’s love is personal. When God looks at the world, He sees not an anonymous mass of humanity but each person. God loves each person as if she or he is the only one on earth. Each person is God’s favorite.

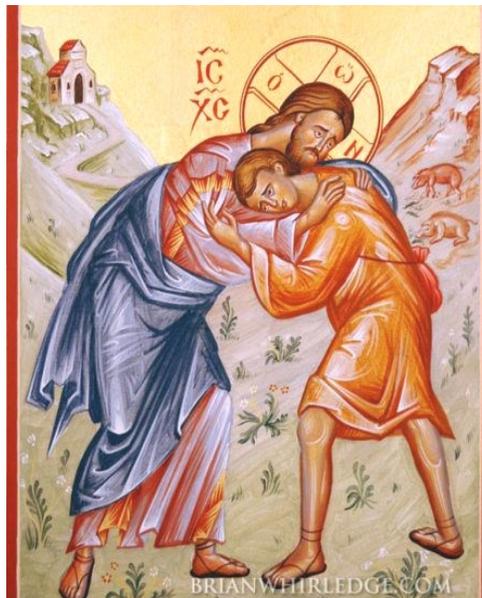
We belong to God and our nature is to be connected to Him. Created in His image and likeness we are endowed with amazing attributes of heart and mind. We possess creativity to explore new discoveries and to imagine new forms of beauty. We are gifted with moral sensibilities such as integrity and justice, truthfulness and compassion. All these attributes have but one source: God’s love.

How to Study the Bible cont’d from p.1

anger, rage, vengefulness, sorrow, disappointment, hopelessness and despair which were engendered in our heart by an act of intimidation, hostility or injustice. At the same time, it’s a gift to the other person, who, in any case, is also tormented by the wounds, spiritual weights and burdens from their own past, their genetic inheritance and, very likely, their inability to function properly in a social context.

In no way does forgiveness mean that we welcome the deleterious action and behavior of the intimidator as natural or socially acceptable or pleasing. Forgiveness doesn’t mean enforced reconciliation with the person who injured us, if there’s no restoration of the interpersonal relationship in a healthy, functional manner; if the psychological wound caused by the intimidatory behavior hasn’t been healed; if the shadow of intimidation is ever present (even after an atonement or apology) and if there’s a risk that it’ll be sustained for a long period in one form or another.

The benefits of forgiveness, provided it happens in secret and in the heart, and always with God’s help, forgiving the neighbor who has hurt



us, is the most wonderful gift of all to ourselves, because we learn to really love, because we mature spiritually and psychologically, because we learn to humble ourselves, to face the

fact that human measures have limits- be they regression or progression-, because we learn to distinguish the person from the action, because we can see that in each person there’s light and darkness in a continuous struggle for dominance, and, finally, we learn to make a conscious choice to give the medicine of love and kindness to fatigued humanity which is thirsting for love but which is often given ‘gall and vinegar’ instead.

Let’s make a start, then, in the here and now by learning to love and forgive genuinely, because beauty (love and benevolence) will save the world, as Dostoevsky once wisely counselled us.

So let’s listen to him and embrace the fragility of modern, fragmented people who want, more than ever before, to love and be loved and so emerge from behind the high walls of their narcissistic individualism and unbearable loneliness, but don’t know how to achieve this.

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

leasing it to us. It is not ours by right, but by his own good will. And if we do not run things according to his desire, then we separate ourselves from his grace. He will send us warnings to get us back on track, but if we ignore those as well, he will find others to take our place and we ourselves will suffer according to own wickedness.

I don't want to take this metaphor too far, but in what way does God send his son to us to ensure that we are doing things according to his will? There are at least three ways: Wherever two or more are gathered in his name, he is there (Matt. 18:20). His spirit guides those who work in his name. The leaders of this parish are given a blessing to manifest his will in a special way, but this is something

that we are all called to participate in. Because God's son is in and amongst us, we monitor and police ourselves.

He sends us sojourners, people in need of a home, people in need of spiritual food and drink, people in need of love.

Whatever we do for "the least of these", we do for him as well (Matt. 25:40). These are a continual check on our management of this parish. He is manifested most clearly in his living Body and Blood at the Holy Eucharist. The way we approach this mystery demonstrates our love of Christ and service to His Father.

So, in the light of today's parable, we have to ask ourselves, how are we doing? Have we done what the vinedressers did; have we thought of this parish as our own? How have we treated those he has sent us to instruct us? How have we treated him as he manifests himself among us? Is everything we do here done to glorify him and spread the good news of salvation through his son?

How much more true is that of what happens inside these doors, in the life of the church. We are the body of Christ in this world. We are called to do his work, to transform the world according to his will. When we refuse to work, when we shirk our duties, everyone is affected. It is too bad that we think of Sunday as a day off

– it isn't. It is the culmination of all we do. The work we do here is so important that we are forbidden to do any other work on this day. We call what we do together the "liturgy"; this literally means "the work of the people."

Outside these doors, very few people have the kind of jobs that allow them to see how much their efforts contribute to the health of our society; for people like farmers and nurses, the contribution is obvious, but for others it is much more abstract. I want you to know that what you do here, what we all do here together, is making a real difference. The changes Christ is making to this world through his church are profound. Occasionally we get to see glimpses.

You can see it in the healing that goes on among those

of us who have been hurt with illness or death and seek consolation in the church. You can see it with those who are struggling with raising a family and dealing with the effects of COVID-19. You can see it in the joy that the we share when we gather and fellowship together. You can see it in the awe that grows among us during our celebrations. You can see it in our communal participation in Christ's Body and Blood.



Let me leave you with one final thought: Virtuous people do not work to make money or because they enjoy their jobs (although this is welcome when it comes). They work because they are good and work is what good people do. The Liturgy on Sunday and Feast days is this kind of work. It is what good people do. It is what God's people do. When people "out there" work, they become better and the economy and the culture flourish. This is good, but it is a pale reflection of what happens here. Because the work we do here is done in Christ, we don't just become better – we are perfected; and through this labor, the world doesn't just flourish – it is recreated in Glory. Let's rededicate ourselves to Christ and his work.

How good, how pleasant, how joyful it is to be a Christian! If you are a Christian, you are always with God, and God is always with you. Wherever you are, wherever you go, everywhere you will have God Himself as your Companion. The grace of God attracts blessings to all of a Christian's activities. A Christian, in accordance with the Savior's commandment, seeks, first of all *the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness*, and everything else is "added unto him" (Mt. 6:33). If any troubles and sorrows befall him, then a Christian still remains calm and placid.

If he is deceived or treated unfairly, then he says, albeit with a sigh, "And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." And now, instead of earthly blessings, he receives forgiveness of his sins and treasures in Heaven (despite the fact that even our earthly losses are often fully restored).

If he has been humiliated or even become a victim of violence, a Christian nevertheless feels joy instead of despondency, following the example of the apostles, who *departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name* (Acts 5:41). Imitating the Savior Himself, a Christian prays for his offenders. And his temporary troubles and sorrows, instead of morphing into depression, turn into a confessor's crown for him, and his soul becomes filled with the peace promised by Christ to His disciples: *Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you* (Jn. 14:27).

A Christian cannot be frightened by earthly hardships and even death. St. Basil the Great responded boldly to the royal threats of the confiscation of his property, exile, beatings, and even death: "All this means nothing for me, since I possess nothing but old worn-out clothing and my few books, of which the entirety of my wealth is comprised. Exile means nothing to me, since I am bound to no particular place. This place in which I now dwell is not mine, and any place you send me shall be mine. Better to say: every place is God's. Where would I be neither a stranger and sojourner (Ps. 38/39:13)? Who can torture me? I am so weak, that the very first blow would render me insensible. Death

would be a kindness to me, for it will bring me all the sooner to God, for Whom I live and labor, and to Whom I hasten[1]." The prefect brought the sad news to the emperor, saying: "We stand defeated by a leader of the Church".

A Christian is afraid, by and large, of only one thing: to be separated from the Lord. But he knows that unless he himself walks away from God, no external forces are able to do this. Therefore, a Christian can say with the Apostle Paul: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Rom. 8:35; 38-39).

To put it briefly, whatever may happen in a Christian's life, he accepts everything as the will of God, following the advice of Abba Dorotheus of Gaza: "Do not wish for everything to be done according to your determination, but wish that it is how it should be, and in this way, you will attain peace with everyone." [3] Strange as it may seem, those who are used to being guided by this rule always live according to their own will, avoiding the source of sorrows common to most of us: "Then, no matter how disinclined he is to fulfill his own will, it turns out that it is always fulfilled. For to one who does not have his own will,

everything that happens to him is according to his will." The joy of a Christian is of Heavenly origin. Its source is in God, and not in earthly pleasures. Therefore, no earthly sorrows can destroy it. The saints are models of this heavenly joy for us.

Therefore, even if a Christian were to lose the entire world, he will have the most important thing—God Himself. And no one will take away this joy from him: *Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation* (Hab. 3:17-18). Now all we need is to become such Christians.

