

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 12 Issue 550

32nd Sunday after Pentecost-Christ heals Bartimaeus

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Today in Luke's gospel we hear about the blind man with great faith. In Mark's gospel we are told his name, Bartimaeus. In this passage the Fathers explain that; the blind man symbolizes future generations such as us – who would come to faith only by hearing without seeing Christ in person – as Christ says to Thomas (John 20:29) *“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have be-*

lieved.” Those who tried to silence the blind man represent those who are persecutors and tyrants, who in every generation try to silence the Church and the Son of God and hinder those who are seeking.

The low-lying city of Jericho, at 850 ft. below sea level, represents sin and fallen humanity, and Christ passing through Jericho represents His incarnation into this broken and sinful world. The restoration of sight to the blind signifies the healing available for all of humanity through His grace. Christ's subsequent journey up to Jerusalem, at 2750 ft. above sea level, represents Christ bringing us on the path to the heavenly kingdom, and we are represented by Bartimaeus, having received healing from our spiritual blindness, joyously glorifying God and drawing our seeking brothers and

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++ 32nd Sunday after Pentecost ++
+ Apostle Timothy of the 70 +

Epistle: 1 Timothy 1:15-17

Gospel: Luke 18:35-43

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 Talk on the Divine Liturgy, Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol (part 15)

The antimens is consecrated by the bishop during the consecration of the church and is anointed with holy Chrism. And particles of holy relics are placed into the antimens, just as into the altar.

Unlike the altar, the antimens can be moved anywhere you want. You can't serve the Divine Liturgy without it. Of course, if a church is consecrated, then the antimens isn't necessary.⁴ But if I go somewhere to serve Liturgy, in this hall, for example, I

can't do it without an antimens. If there isn't a consecrated altar somewhere, then you have to have antimens. With antimens, I can celebrate the Liturgy under the open sky, on a boat, in an auditorium, “in every place of His dominion.” Wherever a priest is, if he has an antimens, he can celebrate the Liturgy.

We continue to analyze the text of the Divine Liturgy. Last time, we examined the first petition: “In peace, let us pray to the Lord,” and spoke about how Christ is the

peace of our souls. The presence of Christ in our lives is the only thing that is truly necessary for us, inasmuch as we can only pray, labor, and generally live with the help of the grace of Christ.

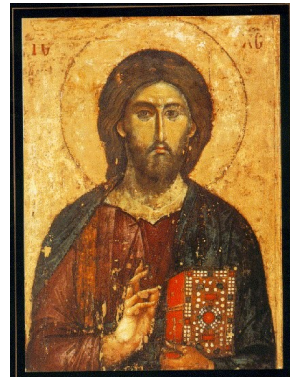
In response to the deacon's petition, the people (or the choir) respond: **“Lord, have mercy”** When we say, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,” or “Lord, have mercy,” we mean: “Lord, give me that which I need,” that is, “help me,” “save me,” “take pity

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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.





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 that our souls
may be saved.

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, Mackenzie, Mike, Jessica, Lisa, Jeff, Bonnalee, Joanne, Sesu, Skip, Georgia, Colleen, Stan, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

St. Theophan the Recluse

God is everywhere. And when He finds a heart that isn't opposed to Him, a humble heart, He enters it and fills it with joy. The joy of the heart which has God within it is so great that it attaches itself to Him and never wants to separate from Him. The Lord doesn't approach a heart puffed up with egotism. Such a heart is deeply sad, shrivels and slowly dissolves. It wallows in ignorance, sorrow and darkness.

No matter how sinful we are, as soon as we turn to the Lord in repentance and desire, the door of the heart opens to Him. Our inner uncleanness drains out and makes way for purity, virtue, the Savior Himself, the great Visitor of the soul, the Bringer of joy, light and mercy. This blessed state is a gift of God, not something we ourselves have achieved. And since it's a gift, we ought, in humility, to thank the giver.

Humility! The basis of all the virtues and the fundamental requirement for spiritual fruition. Do you have humility? You have God, You have everything! You don't have humility? You lose everything! So retain the feeling of humility in your heart. Our natural and normal relationship with God requires a heart which is impassioned, contrite and entirely devoted to Him, a heart which cries mystically at every moment: 'Lord, You know all things; save me!' If we surrender ourselves into His hands, He'll do with and for us whatever's best for our salvation, according to His wise and holy will.

A Talk on the Divine Liturgy, cont'd from p.1

upon me," "be merciful to me," "enlighten me," "guide me," "heal me." All of our needs and requirements are contained in one phrase: "Lord, have mercy." These three words encompass everything. Remember, the Old Testament tells how the Jewish people, wandering through the desert, fed upon manna—which became for each what his body needed. Similarly, the prayer, "Lord, have mercy," becomes for every person an expression of what he needs.

It's much more beneficial for us to say: "Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me," than to tell God: "Listen, give me this, give me that." We have to fully commit ourselves to God both in daily life and in our relationship with Him. Of course, we can ask God for something specific (such a desire is quite understandable in human terms), but it's much better to have confidence in God's providence and invoke His mercy. God knows what we need, what we lack, and when and how to give it to us.

Further, the deacon proclaims: "For

the peace from above, and the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord." In other words, "Let's ask the Lord to give us Heavenly peace and salvation for our souls." As you can see, the second petition of the litany continues the first, and they both



speak to us about how the Lord Himself is the peace for the human soul.

Partaking of Divine grace, this energy of Divinity coming directly from God, a man immediately finds peace. After all, the first thing grace brings to our soul is peace. Therefore, when the fathers of the Church want to determine whether a man is under the

influence of Divine grace or the influence of Satan, they look first of all at whether he has peace in his soul or whether he's in turmoil. Peace of soul is one of the first signs that what is happening to a man is from grace. If the soul is full of turmoil and anxiety, you can immediately understand that the evil one is acting there.

It's impossible for God to dwell in a man who is full of turmoil and uneasiness. God will never find rest for Himself in the heart of such a man. When a man is in turmoil, when everything is upside down in his soul, grace leaves him. God has nothing to do with turmoil, anxiety, and commotion.

"The peace from above" comes down from God the Father Himself and isn't dependent upon circumstances and events of this world. The peace of God doesn't depend on what's happening around us, in our family, in society, in the entire world—wherever.

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

sisters to join us in following Christ!

“Jesus, Son of David” Bartimaeus cries out. Everyone in this Jewish crowd knew exactly what he was saying when he addressed Jesus with this title. “Son of David” was the title of the Messiah. This was great revelation given by God to Bartimaeus. When he asked who was passing by, Bartimaeus was simply told, “Jesus of Nazareth.” No hint of Divinity in that title. Might as well have been “Joe from down the road.”

Yet somehow through the gift of faith, Bartimaeus knows this is the promised Messiah. He who created all things -in heaven and on earth – visible and invisible. Thrones, dominions, principalities, powers – these are all orders of angels – the pre-incarnate Christ created them – In Him ALL things consist. It is hard to even begin to get your head around this reality, but once we begin to get a small glimpse of understanding and knowing who Christ really is in all His fullness, our faith is established.

Hearing Bartimaeus calling Him, appealing to Him as the Messiah and crying out from the depth of his heart the Jesus prayer, “Lord have mercy on me,” Jesus immediately stops and asks, “what do you want Me to do for you?” God hears us when we are desperate, when we pray from the very depths of our being! When things get messed up in our lives, this can be a great blessing – it can bring us back to dependence on Him. When in our despair we desperately call on Him to help us and He meets us in our deepest need, our faith naturally grows. When things are just coasting along smoothly, we often neglect to turn to God in thanksgiving. We may even start to think it is all because we are so wise and deserving that our lives are so comfortable, rather than understanding with gratefulness that all things come from His great ever-present love for us. Any situation that ultimately brings us closer to God in faith and love is a great gift.

Christ then restores Bartimaeus’s sight saying, “Your faith has made you well.” What is this faith that Christ refers to? It is the foundation of all reality. Without this faith we are blinder than blind Bartimaeus ever was. This faith is the knowledge that Christ is the Messiah, the Savior of the world, the Creator of all that exists in

both the material and immaterial realms. Paul says in Colossians (Col. 1: 16, 17) “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.” Bartimaeus’s faith in Who it is that he is addressing, is all that is required to have both his physical and more importantly, his spiritual eyesight restored to 20/20.

Once we start to have this faith, this knowledge of what true reality looks like, and Who Christ really is, we also receive our sight and wake up from the slumber of delusion that infects the race of Adam. God is everywhere present and fills all things, but sin blinds us to that which is all around us, right under our noses. God is not some “super spiritual” force like we encounter in Star Wars. Christ is fully human and fully God – true God of true God. God beyond what we are even capable of encountering or experiencing at any level of our being. All of the visible and invisible world, all of matter and non-matter is filled with His presence. He created and holds all things together, and apart from Him nothing exists.

This is why the Church gives us the prayer of Blind Bartimaeus – the Jesus prayer – as an antidote to our great spiritual blindness. “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God have mercy on me a sinner.” As this prayer seeps into our hearts, faith and humility grows, and the scales covering our eyes slowly dissolve as the light of Christ begins to fill our vision. Only in union with Christ and His love do we have union with brothers and sisters from every age of history, every part of the world, and even our neighbors. This is what Christ offers to us, and has faithfully delivered since He established His Church through the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

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By Your Cross You destroyed death. To the thief You opened Paradise. For the Myrrhbearers You changed weeping into joy. And You commanded Your disciples, O Christ God, to proclaim that You are risen, granting the world great mercy. (*Troparion Tone 7*)



On the Spiritual Work of the Human Mind

There's only one way this is achieved: by enclosing the mind in the heart. We have to return the mind, which soars through the outside world, to its former and natural home in order to fulfill its purpose, pray together with the heart, give heed to the actions of the heart, contemplate God, and take its rest in Him, and thereby be delivered from the passions, sins, and lies. This requires enclosing the mind in a tight place, inside a man, so it can't be dispersed and distracted.

When a snake is about to shed its skin, it goes into a tight place and slithers through it with great effort. So the mind, striving for the path of salvation, makes its way through the heart, and with the help of unceasing prayer, it sheds the clothing of the imagination and becomes pure, bright, and fit for unity with God.

Just as the rays of the sun are more blinding and more burning when gathered into one point, so the mind concentrated in the heart becomes luminous and burns the images of the imagination. In this way, many unlearned and illiterate people have been vouchsafed the gifts of the Holy Spirit, for Christ Himself said: *I thank thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes* (Lk. 10:21).

That our mind must be enclosed in the heart is clear because the passions and thoughts lie, according to Christ, in the heart, whence they come and fight us. St. Gregory the Theologian and many other Holy Fathers teach that our enemies take refuge near the heart, for the Lord Himself said that after Baptism the unclean spirit comes out of a man and later returns to him when he finds his heart free of grace.

Thus, unceasing prayer, thinking about God, about the Kingdom of Heaven, and the abiding of the human mind in the heart contribute to the purification of the heart and soul from the passions, to its enlightenment with the true light, to acquiring positive knowledge; and it helps with work, obtaining a means of living, or at least fulfilling our numerous duties. If the mind soars throughout the external world, if it is carried away by imaginary images and feelings, then it's useless to others, harmful to itself, and barren in life.

Let those who have ears, hear; let them understand with their minds and hearts; let them know the great truth revealed by the Spirit of God to all who want to con-

sciously follow the path indicated by the Lord.

O God! *Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Thy law is the truth!* (Ps. 118:142) Amen.

* * *

After the Holidays-Now What?

Now that a great part of the festal cycle in our life has been completed, the Church leaves us with a command for how to proceed: the need to equip ourselves. It's not enough that we've celebrated the great events of our faith. Many of us have attended services. We've fasted; we've gone to confession; we've taken communion; and we're glad at the joy of the hymns. But, because life goes on, none of the above exhausts the need for us to be better equipped in matters of faith. Not only in terms of knowledge and behavior, but also on the level of transfiguration, that is a change of heart.

If we're honest with ourselves, every time we experience a festal cycle, we're aware of our spiritual emptiness. The passions which don't allow us to be at peace with ourselves, to feel the power of love prevail in our life, to feel our faith in Christ giving us the strength to shoulder the crosses of our life without complaint. We're glad of the feast. But we still feel where we're empty. Even if we've made spiritual progress, we still realize that our mind requires nourishment. And that we aren't as well versed in the dogmas of the Church as we ought to be. That the hymnology escapes us. Because we don't have that completing love which makes us feel that every moment is there so that we can glorify, give thanks, share and enjoy, with whatever our faith and the tradition of the Church has provided us. And also to give to oth-

ers some of what Christ is for us. The feeling, that we've partaken of the body and blood of Christ and that we've made a fresh start with zest for life and love, may well exist, but it doesn't last long. The concerns of life, temptations, the lack of concentration in the mind and the heart all make us aware of that harsh question: 'And after the feast, what then?'

Saint Paul urges us to awaken with the word of God, prayer and the communion of the Eucharist. Scripture reminds us of the need for repentance; the continuous call to our mind the existence of Christ, his love for us, and the fact that his Gospel leads to eternal life. Let us seek their words. Let us share their experience. Let us work together to build up the body of Christ.

