

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 560

5th Sunday of Great Lent—St. Mary of Egypt

April 2, 2023



Mary of Egypt, whose Sunday we celebrate today, valued all the temporal ‘attractions,’ the way of the world; she valued the lusts of the flesh more than all else. Running away from home at 12, she made herself a harlot. For seventeen years, she was self-abused—she didn’t see the image of God in herself or in others, but made herself an object of insatiable passions.

When we seek or give into the vani-

ties of this world over the Kingdom of Heaven—power, influence, material wealth, we harm ourselves and others, whom we judge in our pride and envy. We can make ourselves ‘feel better’, at least temporarily, by putting others down, by giving into the wants of the flesh, by lording it over others.

But this broken pattern, this way of the world, is a dead-end street: good looks fade with age, power and influence too are temporal and riches can quickly turn into poverty with a bad economy or a natural disaster. If our hope is in any of these things, we’re truly to be pitied for all these things are passing away.

Because He loves us, the Lord desires better for us; He desires we live with eternity before our eyes, that is, to understand our identity as those who are hidden in Him. He would

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++ 5th Sunday of Great Lent ++
+ St. Titus the Wonderworker +

Epistle: Hebrews 9: 11-14

Gospel: Mark 10: 32-45

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.*

God’s Righteousness, by Dimitri Mavropoulos

In the Lord’s wonderful Beatitudes, we read, ‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled’; and the second is, ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for of such is the kingdom of heaven’. In the first of these verses, it appears that initially Christ is referring to righteousness in society, in the way people live; while in the second the reference is to eschatological righteousness. Jesus introduces the

great theme of righteousness by way of an image describing the physical needs each of us experience, hunger and thirst, thereby showing that it’s as vital as the basic elements of life. What this righteousness means is set out by Matthew the Evangelist in his description of the three temptations Christ underwent and which, in essence, are endured by all people.

If the necessities of human nature imprison us and trap us into dependency on the goods and forces of the created

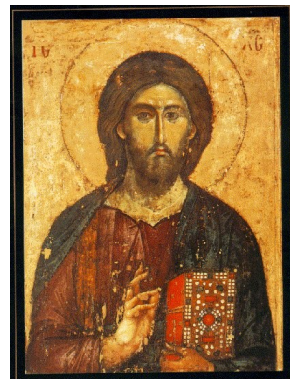
world, Jesus, as the new Adam, answers that we do not live by bread alone, that we don’t submit to magical and irrational powers, and that we aren’t interested in earthly kingdoms. What is highlighted by Christ is the harmonization of his will with that of his heavenly Father. This is the righteousness which is introduced into history, but which has as its prototype the righteousness of God.

This righteousness was revealed by the Holy
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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 with us today and invite you to join us at our coffee social 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, Joann, Skip, Georgia, Colleen, Stan, David, Carol, Lee, Norris, Debbie, Linda, Grace the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

Peace, Love, and Mercy

When despondency or despair come, then this is how you have to act. Let us say to this spirit: "Christ came for the sake of sinners, of whom I'm the first!" And to the extent that I lead a repentant life, the Holy Spirit pacifies me. But first, so we can feel the mercy of God, we must combine repentance with humility. Then I have no enmity with anyone; I don't want to hear about anyone anymore, and if I

hear about someone, I don't want to hear anything bad. When I hear about someone's goodness, joy, spiritual prosperity, then my soul rejoices and calms down.

And when I see that some people don't understand the importance of peace, love, and humility, and my soul sees that everyone is looking only for revenge: "He told me, and I'll tell him!"—then I myself become smaller and I try to get out of there by any means possible. Therefore, one Holy Father says, "Unless God and I are in my heart, I won't be saved."

Know that we need to be aware of one thing; one Holy Father says: "If in the fire of your anger you killed someone's soul, that soul will be demanded from the fire of your anger." We must beware of these temptations. These are very strong, heavy temptations that haunt and gnaw at our conscience. Sometimes it's necessary to rebuke someone, if it corresponds to the advice of the Holy Fathers; but mostly we can help the soul in another way.

Prayer, cont'd from p.1

Spirit to the prophets, who describe it as the name of God. When the divine law was handed down to Moses, the Lord made his name known: 'The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, rich in mercy and true and maintaining righteousness and mercy to thousands' (Ex. 34, 6-7). Essentially this has to do with God's fidelity, which culminated in the incarnation of his Son.

Christ's righteousness is referred to in the gospels as sacrificial righteousness. Moreover, for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness he offers another way of satisfying this need: partaking of his body and blood. 'Take, eat... All of you drink of this'. Remember what he said to the Samaritan woman: 'Whoever drinks of the water I will give them will never thirst again' (Jn. 4, 14). So this has nothing to do with some abstract notion of righteousness, but with that which springs from the will of God.

God is called righteous and his

righteousness is identified with love. The whole task of the divine dispensation, culminating in the incarnation of the Son, all his actions, were expressed as divine righteousness, as they continue to be. Can the world



accept such righteousness, which is expressed as love? History tells us it can't. As the Epistle to Diognetus puts it: Christians 'love everyone and are persecuted by all'.

The life of Christians finds contentment in this righteousness of God.

And, as we've already said, others

equate it to love. St. John the Evangelist tells us that God is love, i.e. he's righteous. This righteousness doesn't come to us from him as an individual accolade. It's there in any case, and acts in the faithful if they've trained themselves to be able to receive and accept it. This training is called 'cleanliness of my hands' by the poet (Ps. 17, 21). 'Cleanliness of my hands' means actions. What the faithful give to God is their belief and submission to his will.

What is given by God in return is his presence as righteousness, that is, as love. This sending back is summed up in the expression 'divine grace'. Remember the prayer we send up to the Lord after the consecration of the precious gifts: 'That our God, who loves humankind having accepted these [...] may send down upon us in return his divine grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit'. This is the dynamic relationship between the created and uncreated: sending, and sending back in return.

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have us place our hope in His changelessness and not in those things that are quickly passing away. He desires to help us so we can put off sin and death, and cleave to Him who is Life.

Worldly success, power, and influence feed our egos; the proud person cannot see God or be united with Him because God Himself is humble, not proud. Pride, as such, is incompatible with communion with Him. God demonstrates Himself to us as the ultimate 'servant.' He condescends to us, becoming man, one of His own creatures, to enter into and redeem human nature. He gives His own life to defeat sin and death for us on the cross. He bears with us patiently in our struggles, as a parent bears patiently with his child he loves. He disciplines us in love that we may learn and grow to participate more and more fully in the life that He alone is.

In today's Gospel, Jesus reminds His disciples that He must suffer torture and death in order to defeat sin and death on our behalf—to make a way for us to inherit the Kingdom prepared for us. These are such stirring words; Christ reveals to them that He must die that mankind may live.

Immediately after telling them that He will die on their behalf, that He Himself is the ultimate, the final Pascha (Passover), the disciples begin vying for who will be on top in His Kingdom. They picture the Kingdom of Heaven just like the way of the world where influence and power politics can put you on top. We can imagine some of the disciples falling prey to this mistaken thinking, because we ourselves might have done the same. Jesus reminds us all that the way of the world won't get us anywhere in the economy of heaven. What's valued in the world is poison for the soul that desires the Kingdom of Heaven.

Instead, Jesus shows us a better way by example: a way that enables them and us to commune with the living God, to find freedom from vain and worldly pursuits, lust for power, and covetousness over what we don't have. He says, "Whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. For even the son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

This is also the story of Mary: she was busy wearing out her body and destroying both her body and her soul when she was confronted by the icon of the Holy Theotokos. The icon of the Virgin convicted her with her

purity, her humility; she was forbidden entrance into the holy church of the cross in Jerusalem. She couldn't enter into the holy presence of Christ's victory over sin and death; she couldn't bear communion with Him in her present state.

The Holy Virgin, whose loving and pure image confronted her, was everything that Mary was not; the Theotokos in her purity, her humility, in her YES to God's love and calling on her life, in her servanthood and submission, was outwards and inwards a mirror image to Mary's licentiousness, her vanity, her NO to God and to His likeness in her. Mary knew no love; the Theotokos knew only love. In her despair over this realization, she desired a change, a new beginning with even greater fervor than she had desired the flesh up until that point—she turned away from her former life that was death and towards a new life in Christ, Who is Life.

After years of self-abuse and giving into the basest of passions, it took Mary seventeen years of intense struggle through prayer and extreme fasting to find freedom and win the victory over her passions—for no one is beyond God's healing and grace if they are willing to humble themselves, admit and confess their sins before God, as Christ God spoke to the sinful woman who anointed His feet with her tears, saying, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

You may not have the depth of struggles with the passions or pride that Mary did or the woman who anointed Christ's feet. Perhaps you're not so enraptured by this world's temporal vanities, but we all are in need of continued healing and growth in God's divine grace, in the humility and repentance Mary exemplifies, that Christ God is, if we wish to be in His near presence. We all have need of continued struggle to be freed of the passions and grow in the faith that manifests itself in a servant's heart and love for those around us.

Our growth in the likeness of God, our return to our full selves—whom God has made us to be as His adopted sons—as those who have "put on Christ" and for whom much has been forgiven, begins with this humility, with our desire to love God more by loving each other right here, in the family of the Church. Only from this starting point of repentance, and forgiveness, do we learn to come outside ourselves to love our brothers in the world, and so, draw them also into the net of Christ's God's love and truth.



Righteousness, in the end, is the same as God's mercy or charity. God is righteous because he's merciful. In the Septuagint, the words are often interchangeable. At many points in the Old Testament, we see the word alms-giving instead of righteousness. So the Lord's blessing and charity are God's gift to those who decide to ascend to his realm. God's righteousness is expressed through his presence and his presence means that of the divine, uncreated energies. If continuous spiritual exercise (including that of the body) allows the presence of these divine energies to act in us- 'the kingdom of God is within you' (see Luke 17, 21)- then the sin of this world is defeated. Christ's declaration is clear 'Take courage; I have defeated the world' (Jn. 16, 23).

In other words, God's righteousness is his loving-kindness. This is adumbrated in the pre-history of the Church, i.e. in the Old Testament, particularly in the prophets. Hosea is exceptional as regards this. This loving-kindness is identified with God's name. As we said at the beginning, Moses learned God's name on Mount Horeb: 'I am he who is.' And this name is revealed and expanded on Mount Sinai: the Lord is plenteous in mercy, loving-kindness and truth. This is his name, but it's one that moves through history like a shadow. It would become clear, as his righteousness, in a tangible manner, when we had his own Son with us.

St Paul develops this concept, stressing that, although we've all made mistakes and that because of these mistakes we're lacking as regards the glory of God, we're nevertheless vindicated, there's righteousness which vindicates us through the grace which redeemed us, saved us, in the person of Jesus Christ, whom God gave to us as a sacrifice of atonement to remit our mistakes. With his blood, he achieved this redemption, so that his righteousness might be revealed, as a sign of his righteousness.

This righteousness is revealed by the Son, Jesus Christ, 'to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus'. Righteousness isn't a feature of God's, it's his name, the manner in which he exists. This righteousness of God has nothing to do with any righteousness that we humans may come to know, that we can develop and describe and, if you like, activate in

our life. It's another order of righteousness altogether, to which the prophet Isaiah calls us: 'Learn righteousness you who dwell upon the earth' (Is. 26, 9). It's righteousness which justifies those who surrender themselves to Christ: 'and justifies those who have faith in Jesus'.

The issue of righteousness played an enormous role in the history of Israel. The first person to be called righteous was Abraham. And he was deemed righteous not because he did things that we think of as righteous, but because he believed. It was his faith which made him righteous; faith in the sense of 'trust', of 'surrender'. He trusted and surrendered to him who called him. In the case of Abraham there's a call: 'Leave here and go there'. And Abraham acceded to this call, that is, he de-

veloped a relationship of trust with him who called him. This is what we call faith. You'll remember how Saint Paul deals with this matter of Abraham's faith: 'he believed in God and this was reckoned to him as righteousness' (Rom. 4, 3; cf. Gen. 15, 6).

According to St Gregory of Nyssa, God's righteousness is the root cause of the salvation of the world ('accordingly those who have been saved by the son, were saved by the power of the father') and this righteousness is also the measure against which people are judged ('and those who are judged by this are subjected to judgement by God's righteousness'). In the end, God's righteousness is Christ and he revealed this to us not only in his words but also in his actions ('For Christ is God's

righteousness which was revealed in the Gospel'). Indeed, St John Chrysostom, underlines the fact that, as God's righteousness, Christ also justifies those who are in sin ('but, also suddenly makes righteous those others who are festering in sin').

So when we speak of God's righteousness- 'in your righteousness'- we refer to the presence of a real relationship. The mistake our first ancestors made was to sever this relationship. We've since tried to correct this initial mistake by making this relationship present. Have we succeeded? History says not. Even history since Christ says we can't repair this relationship. What we can do, however, is accept the gift of this presence. That is very different. We accept the gift of this presence and, depending on the extent of our ascetic struggle, our willingness, we can surrender to it.

