

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!

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7th Sunday of Pascha-The Feast of the Ascension

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Sometimes we are all set our sights too low, expecting too little of ourselves and others. When we do so, we sell ourselves short and do a disservice not only to ourselves but to everyone around us. When we aim low, we can't expect to achieve high goals. The season of the Ascension is a powerful antidote to such low expectations, for it reveals the great glory and dignity that Jesus Christ has given

us. Through His Ascension, we are raised with Him literally to the heights of the heavenly Kingdom.

Forty days after His resurrection, our Lord ascended into heaven. In Him, humanity and divinity are united in one Person; He goes up into heaven as the God-Man. The Son shares in the glory that He had with the Father and the Holy Spirit before the creation of the world. And He brings our humanity into that glory with Him. There is perhaps no more powerful sign of our salvation than the Ascension, for it makes clear that our Lord has raised us—not only from the tomb, not only from hades—but into the eternal life of the Holy Trinity. We truly become participants in God, partakers of the divine nature by grace, in our ascended Lord.

And we are reminded by the feast of
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+Feast of Our Lord's Ascension+
+ Sts. Constantine and Helena +

Epistle: Acts 1: 1-12

Gospel: Luke: 24: 36-53

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.*

On Real Prayer by Elder Haralambos

Noetic prayer is also called prayer of the heart. You ask if oral prayer can also be called prayer of the heart. Unless it's pure, neither noetic or oral prayer can be called 'of the heart'. It's prayer of the heart when the heart literally swallows the mind. Bombs could fall, the house could be on fire, but the mind wouldn't think of leaving the heart, even if it was in danger of being consumed by fire.

Read the life of Saint Irene Chrysovalantou if

you want to understand. Satan set fire to her clothes, her body was being burned and she stood elevated, above the ground and motionless, like a candle.

That's real prayer, which strikes through the heavens and reaches the throne of God.

Moses, without even opening his mouth, heard God say to him: 'Why are you calling me?'

This means that a cry escaped from within him. It means that he penetrated heaven with his heart. As regards the oral pray-

er of beginners, it's mixed up with other thoughts; it's not pure. How then can it be called prayer of the heart?

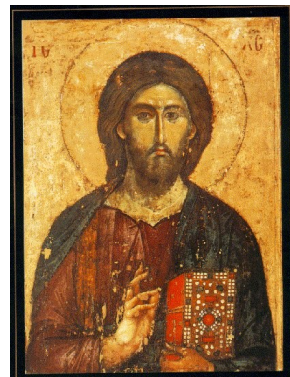
But even with the mouth, a prayer is often from the heart. This is what David meant when he said 'Out of the depths I cried'.

When the Canaanite woman begged Christ on behalf of her child, she said 'Have pity on me' with her mouth, but it came from the depths of her soul. That was prayer of the heart. When your
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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, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Mackenzie, Mike, Jessica, Lisa, Jeff, Bonnalee, Skip, Colleen, Stan, David, Carol, Norris, Debbie, Linda, Daniel, Matthew, Tracy, Molly, Michael the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

Opportunity knocks-Open the door!

It's time we forgave, sincerely and from the heart. We must become humble and charitable. We must love and practice civility, tolerance, companionship and kindness. There's a lack of humanity. There aren't any smiles. Faces, actions, words and decisions are marred by harshness and scowls.

The difficult position we find ourselves in won't be improved by greater weights,

additional measures, rejection and vindictiveness. The police can arrest when necessary, but not subject people to abuse. Judges shouldn't expend all their rigor on certain people only. They present themselves as rigid upholders of the laws, but there's evidence that they sometimes err grievously.

Teachers at all levels won't help their charges through brutality, excessive strictness and sarcasm. Our politicians are taking us down the road to derision and chaos.

Now is the time for us to take a good look at ourselves and to see others with understanding. Goodness is a fine thing. Mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual appreciation are very necessary today. In a locked house, we have an open window. A window that brings the sun, light and fresh air. Spring's a wonderful time. In the darkness a single candle sheds light. Let us open the window of our heart with humanity and goodness, of which we all have so much need.

*Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God,
Have mercy on me a sinner.*

On Real Prayer cont'd from p.1

Mind is absorbed in God, son, even if you say it with your mouth, the prayer's of the heart. Heart and mind are united with God.

Another necessary condition is explained here. In order to be free to practice noetic prayer, it's essential that you have a clear conscience as regards other people.

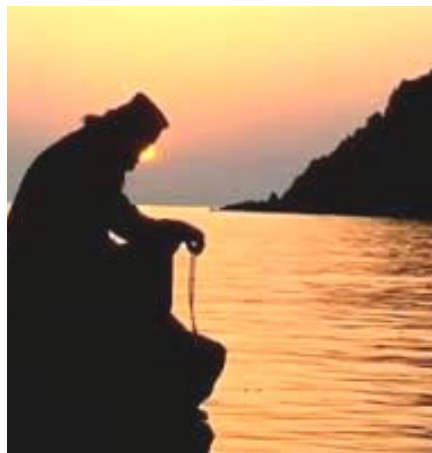
Say you live in a monastery with fifty other monks. It's your duty to get on with all of them, as far as you're in a position to do so. If you get on with forty-nine and disdain one, that one wins and your prayer doesn't prosper. He's an obstacle. Sometimes another monk's at fault and refuses to recognize it.

If you want to find God in your prayer, you'll take the blame yourself. You'll say your sorry. You'll say a loop on the prayer rope for him. You'll do whatever you can to bring him peace.

If the other person has a malignant spirit and avoids you, then, of necessity, you'll have to be patient. We have some who are moved by the

spirit of envy and it clouds their mind. You can't get through to them.

But we still have a duty to love them and to say a loop on the prayer rope for them. You live in the outside world. Be straight and polite to eve-



rybody, at home and at work. Avoid those who can injure you, and be careful not to show particular friendship towards others in front of them. They'll notice and you'll be in trouble.

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You know you're really praying

when you feel warmth and contrition in your heart. When you feel you're of no consequence and you cry to the Lord: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, sinner that I am'. Or use other words if you feel more comfortable.

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Who were the rich who were made hungry? Those who handled their wealth badly, who didn't live in repentance, exercising the virtues, but selfishly satisfying all their hedonistic passions. And who are those who will not lack anything that's good? Those who call upon the Lord's name, who live in repentance and observe God's commandments.

You can't prosper spiritually, if you are small minded. We constantly need to have joy within our soul, because we are sensible beings and we are alive. We realize that, whereas God should have rejected us once and for all, He has given us new life with His whole work and keeps regenerating us, sanctifying us, deifying us in the Church.

of the Ascension that Jesus Christ is not merely a great teacher or example or even an angel or lesser god. As the Fathers of the Council of Nicaea proclaimed, He is light of light, very God of very God, of one essence with the Father, the only begotten Son of God. For only One who is truly divine and eternal can ascend into heaven and bring us into the divine, eternal life of the Holy Trinity. That is why the Council of Nicaea rejected the teaching of Arius, who did not think that the Son was fully divine. That is why the Orthodox Church has always disagreed with those who deny our Lord's full divinity or His full humanity. For only One who is truly both God and human can bring humans into the life of God.

Unfortunately, some have set their sights too low in how they view Jesus Christ and themselves. If we want a Savior who merely teaches and models a good life or advances a political agenda, we might become a bit more moral by listening to Him. But human teachers and examples cannot conquer death and cannot raise us with them into eternal life. There apparently always have been, and continue to be, those who want a Lord in their own image: a teacher of secret spiritual truths to a select few; a social or political activist of whatever ideology; or a rabbi or philosopher who speaks with wisdom. Movies, documentaries, and books come out all the time with the claim to have discovered a true or secret Jesus who is different from the Lord portrayed in Scripture and confessed in the Church.

But countless martyrs, including Jesus Christ's disciples, did not go to their deaths out of loyalty to a mere human teacher. They looked death in the eye and did not blink because they knew that their Lord was God, that He had conquered death and would share His victory with them in heaven. In a matter of days, Christ's disciples went from total despair and defeat at His crucifixion to the astounding joy of Pascha and Pentecost. These were life-changing experiences that gave them the strength to sacrifice their own lives for the Lord. Teachers and good examples die and are ultimately forgotten; generations of martyrs do not give their lives for them. But the life of the risen and ascended

Son of God continues in the Church, especially in the witness of the martyrs who share in a victory that is not of this world.

Indeed, we all share in the eternal life of Christ through His Body, the Church. The Son prayed to the Father that His followers "may be one as We are...that they all may be one, as You, Father are in Me, and I in You; that they may also be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one..."

Here is a very high, very exalted view of what it means to be a human being in the image and likeness of God. In Christ's Body, the Church, we are to be one in Him, showing forth the unity of holiness and love that are

characteristic of the Holy Trinity. Christ has given us His glory, a share in life eternal, the life to which He has ascended as the Savior of the world. And that glory, that eternal life, is not an individual undertaking; it is the life of unity in Christ, of His Body, of which we are all members by baptism.

Unfortunately, we have all fallen short of the life in Christ. The truth is that we often would rather not ascend in Him to a life of holiness. We prefer to do things which are beneath us, which are not fitting for those created in the image and likeness of God, those who are called to live the life of heaven even now. Instead of dwelling on what is true, noble, just, and pure, we too often dwell on what inflames our passions, our self-centered desires. Instead of recognizing that our salvation is a life together in the Body of Christ, we try to live as isolated individuals, continuing the divi-

sion from one another that has beset humanity since Adam and Eve.

It might be possible to follow the guidance of a teacher in isolation from others, on our own terms, according to whatever private interpretations seem right to us. But it is impossible to embrace the fullness of life in our Risen and Ascended Lord in isolation or as though our faith means whatever we want it to mean. We can interpret the words of a merely human teacher however we want, but the One Who has conquered death and ascended into heaven requires something different. The point is not to

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make Him in our image, to water Him down into someone Whom we can accept and understand on our own terms. Instead, the point is to fall before Him in worship, to accept in humility the great blessing of the resurrected, ascended life which He gives us, and to live faithfully in the unity of the Church as we grow in Him.

Let us celebrate the Ascension, then, by embracing the great dignity that is ours in the God-Man Who has gone up to heaven. Let us pay close attention to our thoughts, words, and deeds, and stop doing what is beneath us as those whose are called to the glory of the Kingdom. Let us make of our life in the Church an icon of the Holy Trinity, a Communion of love and holiness. Yes, we really can live this way because we are not simply following the teachings of a human being; instead, we are participating even now in the eternal life of the One Who has conquered death, the tomb, and hades, and taken our humanity into heaven.

If Jesus Christ can do that, we may put no limits on what He can do with our lives, our families, our marriages, our friendships, our relationships with other people, or anything else. For the Lord has ascended into heaven, and He will take us with Him if we will only embrace—with humility and repentance—the great glory that He has brought to us as those created in His image and likeness.

This is not a message for a few select souls, but good news for the entire world, for you and for me, no matter how we have fallen short of fulfilling God's purposes in our lives. We are all called to ascend in Jesus Christ to a life of holiness and to the blessedness of the Kingdom of Heaven. The only question is whether we will answer that call. Amen.

The Lord's Ascension is the visible sign of God's reconciliation with us, but also the glorification of our human nature. This reconciliation and our glorification were achieved through the incarnation of the Son and Word of God, His teachings, His voluntary Passion, His glorious Resurrection, culminating in His Ascension into heaven.

As regards the time of the event, the book of Acts tells us that it occurred forty days after the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The Lord remained on earth for the duration of this time so that His disciples could

realize fully that the resurrection had actually taken place. At this point, it's worth pointing out that during this period of forty days, the Lord was not with His disciples continuously, thus allowing them to become accustomed to the idea of the end of His presence on earth. As regards the manner in which this happened, according to the description in the Biblical texts, it was an act of accommodation on the part of Christ to our human nature. According to the Fathers of the Church, this was comparable to the consumption of food by the risen Lord, which was to convince the disciples that it was no spirit standing before them.

This plan on the part of divine providence included the incarnation, the passion, the resurrection and culminated in the ascension, which marked the completion of Christ's mission to the world. We should make clear at this point that the Lord's ascension doesn't mean that He was ever absent from heaven during His time on earth, just as His incarnation doesn't mean the suspension of His divinity.

The plan of divine providence didn't envisage merely the return of human nature to its prelapsarian state. It doesn't simply redeem us from the consequences of the Fall, but it actually achieves the final goal of bringing us back to the path of becoming in the likeness of God. The Ascension is therefore the crown of the work of divine providence, since it completes God's plan for our salvation, leaving to each of us separately the choice of accepting this path.

The completion of the work of Jesus Christ with the Ascension marks the coming of a new era, which is inaugurated with Pentecost and extends as far as the Second Coming. The Church of Christ preserves and transmits the revelation in Christ and, at the same time affirms its historical truth, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This revelation, which is presented with tangible means and historical facts isn't restricted to them, nor is it restrained by the immediacy of the world, but it extends beyond it and makes possible the transcendence of the world.

Christ is not absent in bodily terms, but remains present in the Church in the Holy Spirit.. He remains united with the world through the sacrament of the Divine Eucharist which becomes a mystical encounter between us and God, while at the same time heralding the advent of the Second Coming.

