

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

Christ is in our midst!

He is and ever shall be!



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27th Sunday after Pentecost—Parable of the Wedding Feast

November 24, 2024



We have just heard the Lord's parable about those bidden to the wedding feast (Matthew 22:1-14), a parable about how God calls people to His supper, but people – for one reason or another – refuse to respond to God's call.

Like the other parables of Jesus, it has several levels of meaning. It relates first of all to the Jewish people, to whom God from century to century sent prophets, whom they rejected,

and who later rejected the Beloved Son of God, Who came to save this nation. But in a broader sense this parable speaks of many other nations. God called not only the Jewish nation, but in various periods He also called other nations, whom he wanted to make God-bearing nations, but they either did not respond to God's call or turned out to be unworthy of this call.

But a nation is not an abstract concept: a nation is all of us, each one of us. And everything that happens in a nation reflects on each one of us; and, vice versa, everything that happens to us reflects on the nation as a whole. From this follows another meaning of the parable: it is addressed to every specific person, to each one of us. We are very often incapable of responding to God's call.

Sunday comes around, and either out
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++ 27th Sunday after Pentecost ++

+St. Gregory the Wonderworker+

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 1:21-2:4

Gospel: Matthew 22: 1-14

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 Christ's commandment, *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 Faith in the Christian Life, by St. Seraphim of Chernigov

God allows trials so that the righteous "might be crowned more signally: that the other might receive a severer wound. For when after benefits conferred a man suffers, and that grievously, and yet continually gives thanks, it is a blow to the devil."

Such is the will of God that His beloved ones remain in labors, and not in delusions and passions. The Spirit of God doesn't abide in those who are at rest. That's how the sons of God differ from others—they

live in sorrows, while the world rejoices and prides itself on luxury and rest.

The repentant sinner

The Lord so loved mankind that, not desiring the death of sinners, He gave His Only-Begotten Son over to death on the Cross for them. Therefore, the death of the soul, redeemed by the Divine Blood of Christ, is an infinite sorrow for all the inhabitants of Heaven.

The Son of God Himself told us what joy there is in Heaven *over one sinner that repents* (Lk.

15:7). Therefore, the soul of a man redeemed by Christ is more precious in the eyes of God than the whole world, and the grace of God constantly fights for people and prompts sinners to repentance with the God.

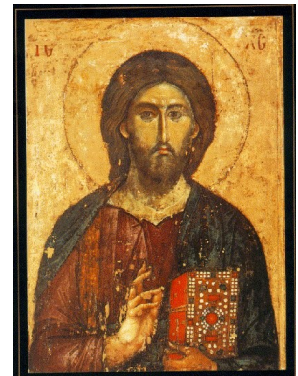
What joy there is in Heaven now! The Heavenly Father and the holy angels rejoice over repentant sinners! Jesus Christ said that *there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents* (Lk. 15:10).

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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 for the Centennial Celebration of our Church.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

Please keep the following in your prayers: Mother Onufria, Larissa, Jack, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Mackenzie, Abraham, George, Rochelle, Theresa, Tamam, Priscilla, Helen, Loretta, Frankie, Brittany, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Avoiding Temptation

We are in the habit of saying: "Had I not looked, I should not have been tempted;" "Had I not heard, my heart would not have ached;" "Had I not tasted, I should not have desired." You see how many temptations arise from our own sight, hearing, and taste. How many have suffered and still suffer because their hearts were not firm in their good inclinations, because they imprudently looked with impure eyes, because they heard with ears unaccustomed to discern between good and evil, because they greedily tasted!

The senses of the sin-loving, greedy flesh, unrestrained by reason and by God's commandments, have drawn them into various worldly passions, have darkened their minds and hearts, deprived them of peace of heart, and taken away their free-will, making them the slaves of these senses.

Thus you see how necessary it is to look, listen, taste, smell, and feel prudently; or, rather, how necessary it is to guard your heart so that through your outward senses, as through a window, no sin may steal in, and that the author himself of sin--the Devil--may not darken and wound that heavenly fledgling, our soul, with his poisonous and deathly arrows.

The soul receives the Lord into it in the Life-giving Sacrament by the thought of faith and by the heart's acknowledgment that the Lord Himself is truly present in the sacrament, whilst our body receives the Lord through the mouth and belly. When the soul receives the Lord with firm faith, then the Lord fills in a single moment both the soul and the entire body.

From St. John of Kronstadt.

On Faith in the Christian Life, cont'd from p.1

All of you, as children of the Heavenly Father, have come to the house of your God and Father to entreat forgiveness. If you're weeping or frightened, if you're in pain or ashamed, so much the better, for the joy of the angels of God is fuller and more perfect. If you're troubled by the coldness of your heart, the lack of a spirit of repentance, the lack of tears, or uncertainty that your contrition and repentance are genuine and will be salvific, then don't despair; only be sincere children of your Heavenly Father. This distress is already a sign of dissatisfaction with oneself, and childlike timidity is a sign of humility.

Oaths

God never forbade swearing by His name, but commanded people not to abuse this oath. *Ye shall not swear by My name falsely*, says (Lev. 19:12). Could the Lord forbid people for whom He willingly accepted death on the Cross from taking Him as a witness, and precisely for the sake of righteousness and truth? After all,

truth was brought to earth by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. No, He couldn't forbid it, and we know that the holy Apostles took an oath. For example, the holy Apostle Paul begins one of his epistles with an



oath. *For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ* (Phil. 1:8).

You should know, beloved, that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself also swore an oath at trial. The high priest who judged Him turned to Jesus with the words: *I adjure thee by the living*

God, that thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God. But Jesus Christ not only didn't tell the high priest that he was asking for something improper—an oath—but, on the contrary, immediately answered: *Thou hast said* (Mt. 26:63-64). When taking an oath, the Jews always said either, "Amen," or "Thou hast said," or, "Let it be so." Therefore, Christ took an oath at the trial and showed under oath that He truly is the Messiah, the Only-Begotten Son of God.

Thus, the Lord allows us to swear an oath, but only for the good, and to find out the truth in important and lawful matters. We Christians are obliged to treat an oath as a Divine matter and clearly understand how great the sin of oath-breaking or a false oath is. We know of terrible punishments for breaking oaths from sacred history, for deceiving God Himself must entail the just wrath of God, for *God is not mocked* (Gal. 6:7).

Homily on the Parable of the Wedding Feast (cont'd from p.1)

of laziness and negligence, or out of coldness and hardness of heart, we do not want to go to church, putting off going to church until the next Sunday. We reject God's call when, coming to the Divine Liturgy, we do not commune of the Holy Mysteries, likewise out of laziness and negligence, or because we have not prepared for Communion, not having read the required rule. But preparation for receiving Christ's Holy Mysteries is not simply a matter of reading prayers. We need to prepare for participation in the Lord's Trapeza our entire lives. The Apostle Paul says: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). And preparation for receiving the Holy Mysteries of Christ lies precisely in each one of us having this mind. This is the "wedding garment" of which the parable speaks. The Lord calls each one of us, but we should not simply respond to this call and come to the wedding feast in just any old way. We need to spend our whole lives in fulfilling Christ's commandments, in good deeds, in prayer and repentance preparing for Communion.

We have no right to receive Christ's Holy Mysteries if we do not have that mind that was in Christ Jesus. It is Christ that is the image that we must follow. We do not have the right to approach Christ's Holy Mysteries if we carry a grudge against someone or if we ourselves have offended someone. The Lord says: "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matthew 5:23-24). Every time that Sunday approaches, we should ask ourselves: do we approach God with peace of conscience and at peace with our neighbors? Are we ready to approach Christ's Holy Mysteries or not? Do we bear within ourselves the mind that was in Jesus Christ, that is, to what extent is our life an imitation of the life of Christ, God Incarnate? If we receive Christ's Holy Mysteries without having been reconciled with God, with

ourselves, and with our neighbors, then the same thing can happen to us that happened to the man who came to the supper without a wedding garment. The king, seeing this man, said to his servants: "Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 22:13).

Our eternal fate depends upon how we commune and how we approach God: will we be cast into "outer darkness," where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth," or will we be found worthy of the promised Heavenly Kingdom? Our fate is decided when we, having heard God's call, respond to it or not, and care for our "wedding garment" or not. And this call sounds unceasingly. Every minute, every hour, and every day of our lives we hear God's call, and at any given moment we make choices between good and evil, between God and the devil, between light and darkness – a choice upon which our future depends. Amen.

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Life of St. Katherine cont'd from p.4)

After seeing this miracle, the Empress Augusta and the imperial courtier Porphyrios and 200 soldiers confessed their faith in Christ before everyone, and they were beheaded. Maximian tried again to entice the holy martyr, offering to marry

her, and again he was refused. Saint Katherine remained faithful to her heavenly Bridegroom Christ, and after praying to Him, she laid her head on the block beneath the executioner's sword.

of their visit. The relics of Saint Katherine were taken by the Angels to Mount Sinai. In the VI century, the venerable head and left hand of the holy martyr were found through a revelation and transferred with honor to the newly-constructed church of the Monastery on Mount Sinai, built by the holy Emperor Justinian (November 14). Saint Katherine is called upon for relief and assistance during a difficult childbirth. Pilgrims to her monastery on Mount Sinai are given souvenir rings as a remembrance of their visit.



Saint Katherine the Great Martyr (November 24)

The Holy Great Martyr Katherine was the daughter of the governor of Alexandria, Egypt during the reign of Emperor Maximian (305-313). Living in the capital and possessed of a rare beauty and intellect, Katherine received an excellent education, studying the works of the greatest philosophers and teachers of antiquity. Young men from the most worthy families of the empire sought the hand of the beautiful Katherine, but she was not interested in any of them.

Katherine's mother, a secret Christian, sent her to her own Spiritual Father, a saintly Elder living in a cave outside the city, for advice. After listening to Katherine, the Elder said that he knew of someone who surpassed her in everything. "His countenance is more radiant

than the shining of the sun, and all of creation is governed by His wisdom. His riches are given to all the nations of the world, yet they never diminish. His compassion is unequalled."

This description of the Heavenly Bridegroom produced an ardent desire in the soul of the holy maiden to see Him. "If you do as I tell you," said the monk, "you will gaze upon the countenance of this illustrious man." In parting, the Elder gave Katherine an icon of the Theotokos with the Divine Child on Her arm and told her to pray with faith to the Queen of Heaven, the Mother of the Heavenly Bridegroom, and she would hear Katherine and grant her heart's desire.

Katherine prayed all night and was permitted to see the Most Holy Virgin, Who said to her Divine Son, "Behold Thy handmaiden Katherine, how fair and virtuous she is." But the Child turned His face away from her saying, "No, she is ugly and unbelieving. She is a foolish pauper, and I cannot bear to look at her until she forsakes her impiety."

Katherine returned again to the Elder deeply saddened, and told him what she had seen in the dream. He received her, instructed her in the faith of Christ, admonished her to preserve her purity and integrity and to pray unceasingly. She then received the Mystery of Holy Baptism from him. Again Saint Katherine had a vision of the Most Holy Theotokos with her Child. Now the Lord looked at her tenderly and gave her a beautiful ring, a wondrous token of her betrothal to the Heavenly Bridegroom (this ring is still on her hand).

At that time Emperor Maximian was in Alexandria for

a pagan festival. Therefore, the celebration was especially splendid and crowded. The cries of the sacrificial animals, the smoke and the smell of the sacrifices, the endless blaze of fires, and the bustling crowds at the arenas defiled the city of Alexandria. Human victims also were brought, the confessors of Christ, who would not deny Him under torture. They were condemned to death in the fire. Katherine's love for the Christian martyrs, and her fervent desire to ease their sufferings, compelled her to speak to the pagan priest and to Emperor Maximian.

Introducing herself, the Saint confessed her faith in the One True God, and exposed the errors of the pagans. The beauty of the maiden captivated the Emperor.



In order to convince her of the superiority of pagan wisdom, the Emperor ordered fifty of the most learned philosophers and rhetoricians of the Empire to dispute with her, but the Saint got the better of the wise men, so that they came to believe in Christ themselves. Saint Katherine made the Sign of the Cross over the martyrs, and they bravely accepted death for Christ and were burnt alive by order of the Emperor.

Unable to persuade the Saint, Maximian tried to entice her with the promise of riches and fame. Hearing her angry refusal, the Emperor ordered his men to subject the Saint to terrible tortures, and then throw her in prison. The Empress Augusta, who had heard much about the Saint, wanted to see her. She prevailed upon the military commander Porphyrios to accompany her to the prison with a detachment of soldiers. The Empress was impressed by Katherine's strong spirit, and her face was radiant with divine grace. The holy martyr explained the Christian Faith to them, and they were converted to Christ. On the following day, they again brought the martyr to the judgment court where, under the threat of being broken on the wheel, she was urged to renounce the Christian Faith and to offer sacrifice to the "gods." The Saint steadfastly confessed Christ and she was taken to be tortured on four wheels with sharp iron spikes, but an Angel smashed the instruments of execution, which shattered into pieces with many pagans standing nearby.

(continued p.3, column 2)