

# A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

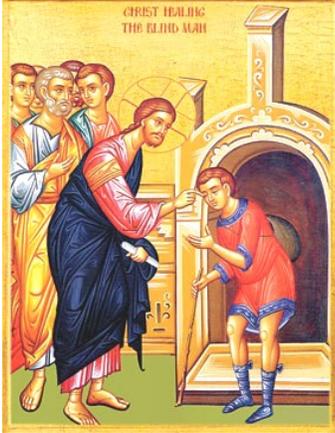
*Glory be to Jesus Christ. Glory be forever.*



Volume 9 Issue 395

31<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost—Sunday after Theophany

January 19, 2020



We often fall into the trap of blaming other people for our problems. That is true whether we are upset with someone in particular or with a group or organization. It is tempting to think that if others would do what we want or at least leave us alone, then all would be well. It does not take too much spiritual insight to see, however, that things are never quite that simple.

St. Paul certainly had ample opportunity to blame other people for all his struggles. He endured beatings, shipwreck, imprisonment, criticism from opponents, and all kinds of difficult challenges within the churches he oversaw; and, of course, he died as a martyr. But when he encouraged the Ephesians to “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might,” he stressed that “we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Paul had the insight to see that his enemies were not the pagan Roman Empire or those who misinterpreted the faith or questioned his authority as an apostle. No, his true foes were the corrupt spiritual powers who

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**\*\* 31<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost \*\***

**\*\*\* Martyr Tatiana of Rome \*\*\***

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.*

## ***The Essence of the Church-Why do I need to go? Archmandrite Markell***

It is very joyful that a lot of people come to the church on the feast of Christ’s Baptism. This can also happen only on Easter and Palm Sunday. On other holidays and Sundays, there are significantly fewer people. Maybe this is because the majority of people does not know why they need to go to church, and those who go do not know how to correctly explain this to others.

The feast of Theophany explains the essence of our faith best of all.

When the Lord was baptized in the Jordan River by St. John, at that moment the Holy Spirit came upon him in the form of a dove and a voice came from heaven: “You are my beloved Son; in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1: 9–11).

So for the first time three Persons of the Holy Trinity were revealed in the New Testament: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It was in honor of the Holy Trinity that we, dear brothers and sisters, received holy

Baptism in childhood. The unity of the three Hypostases in a single Essence, according to the Holy Fathers, points to one of the main goals of Christian life: unity with God and other people in gracious love.

Is there such a unity in love between us? There are very few happy families in which there is complete harmony between a man and a woman, parents and children. There are more discord and hatred in society.

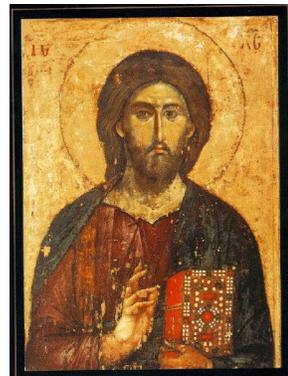
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

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.





*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  
for our souls  
salvation.

**News and Notes**

We welcome all who are worshipping with us today and invite you down to the church hall for our social hour.

**Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)**

We ask that you keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Olga, Lillian, Meg, Larissa, Stephen, Louise, Marcia, George, Lorraine, Peg, Christopher, Jackie, Karoline, Evan, Ryan, Kathleen, Sandy, Andrea, Samuel, Anatoly, Linda, Alexey, Eric, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Sally Lou, Bob, Catherine, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, and those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

**Words of wisdom from the Elders**

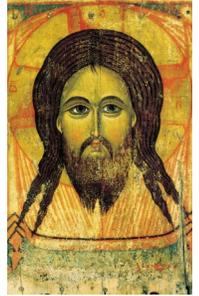
St. Theophan the Recluse says, "The crux of the matter is that we must rain our minds to live within our heart. Our mind must be transferred from our intellect into our feeling heart, the two must be made one." In other words, our thinking mind must become our loving mind. This is the depth and warmth which the Church Fathers invite us to reach. Yes, in our very

poor efforts to pray, our minds are immediately and firmly rooted in our own personal conceit and pride.

St. Macarios the Great, a 5th century Desert Father use to say that our minds must be nailed to the cross of Christ.

The Church Fathers have a great deal to say about how to save ourselves from sin, or in other words, how to come closer to Go. The way to God leads, through our attitude to other people, to our neighbors, and it is along thi way too that spiritual death comes to us.

We can be angry at people, we can be proud in our relationships with them, or we can emanate sensuousness. Each one of these evil attitudes can bring us to our own spiritual death. We can also love a person, experience humility in our relationships and see someone with pure eyes. When this takes place, we discover that every human in made in the image of Christ. *(Light in the Darkness, Serge Fudel, p. 66)*



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How to achieve unity in the image of the Holy Trinity?

Sins separate us most of all. And therefore the path to unity lies through repentance, to which the Lord Himself calls and the Holy Prophet John called before Baptism: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3: 2; 4:17). St. John Chrysostom names five ways of repentance: the first is the condemnation of one's sins, the second is the forgiveness of the sins of one's neighbors, the third consists in prayer, the fourth is alms, the fifth is humble wisdom (reasonable humility). He calls not to stay lazy, but to go every day along all these paths, because they are convenient, and you cannot justify yourself by poverty.

Indeed, even if you live the poorest of all, you can still subjugate your anger, humble yourself, pray earnestly, and condemn your own sins. So, poverty is no obstacle. Even on the path of repentance, where you need to spend money (meaning alms): even there poverty does not at all pre-

vent us from fulfilling the commandment, as shown by the widow, who put two mites (see Mark 12:42). The best place to repent is the house of God. Here, through the non-hypocritical Confession, participation in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, we all have the opportunity to unite with Christ Himself and embark on the path of eternal life.

Whoever neglects prayer and does not get down to Confession and Communion or deviates into schism or a sect, becomes spiritually dead. Because every sin that we carry out by deed, word or thought, first paralyzes us, that is, takes away the power to do real good, and eventually it kills us. And then we are not only incapable of doing good deeds, but we infect others with our cadaverous poison, so we become distributors of evil. Why does it happen that many people don't hear, or rather take aggressively, the call of Christ and His Church to repentance?

Most people want to justify themselves by busyness. Some consider

themselves self-sufficient and do not want to bow to anyone. Others, because of their constant lies and deceit, are afraid to awaken conscience in themselves, the torment of which is very painful. Many of all these people pass to schismatics or sectarians who only imitate the Church and church life, but do not have the power of God, because they lost it when they fell apart from the true Church because of their pride.

Those who have never felt pleasure in the grace of God also fall apart from the Church and fight with It. Although, there are those who had previously felt it, but because of frequent compromises with their conscience regarding repentance of their sins, they lost the taste of enjoying it.



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who tempt people to sin.

His message to the Ephesians is that they must be prepared to resist temptation and spiritual assault by putting "on the whole armor of God." Their struggle for faithfulness will be a battle in which they must cover themselves with truth, righteousness, "the gospel of peace," and "the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one." He called his primarily Gentile Christian audience to live in stark contrast to the standards of their culture. Instead of serving the false gods of money, power, pleasure, and earthly glory, they were to offer themselves fully to the Lord. They had to gain as much spiritual strength as possible in order to respond faithfully to the great challenges they faced in serving Jesus Christ.

Christians, however, are called to something very different from living according to the standards of the world as we know it. In order to become more like God in holiness as partakers of the divine nature by grace, we must engage in constant combat against the temptation to think that our true enemies are persons or groups who wrong us or whom we do not like for whatever reason. Those who annoy or threaten us are not our true enemies, but fellow children of God who bear the divine image. Our true enemies are the spiritual forces of darkness that encourage us to hate those who harm us and to refuse to forgive them. If we want to know where those enemies are at work, we should look first to our own hearts before daring to diagnose anyone else.

In order to defeat these powerful enemies, we need to put "on the whole armor of God." That means opening ourselves as fully as possible to the healing energies of our Lord through full participation in the sacramental and ascetical life of the Church. Prepared by prayer, fasting, and Confession, we should receive the Body and Blood of Christ frequently as the most powerful nourishment for the healing of our souls. The more that we live in communion with Christ each day as we reject temptation, the better prepared we will be to share in His life through this holy mystery for "the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting."

That is precisely how St. Paul and countless other martyrs, throughout history and to this very day, have found

the strength to turn the other cheek and love their oppressors as they followed in the way of the Savior Who said from the Cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

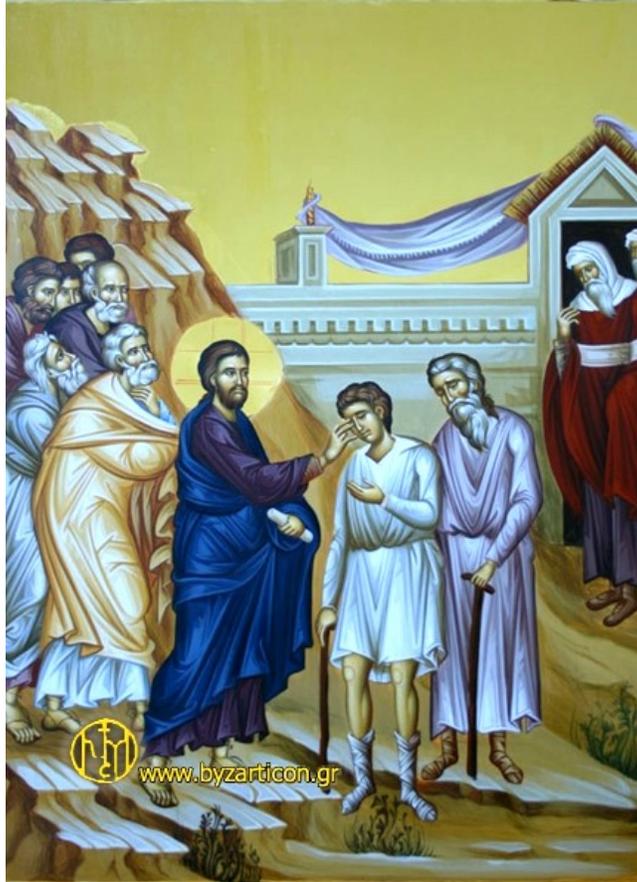
Most of us, of course, cannot see how we could possibly live or die that way. We have become blinded by our own passions to the point that we often feel perfectly justified in hating, condemning, and refusing to forgive people for wronging us in much smaller ways. When that happens, we become blind to the identity of our true enemies: the demons who tempt us to live as those who do not share in the life of Christ. We also then become blind to our own spiritual state in preferring the weakness of Adam and Eve, who stripped themselves naked of the divine glory, to the strength found in wearing "the full armor of God."

In today's gospel lesson, Jesus Christ restored the sight of a blind beggar identified as Bartimaeus in Mark 10: 46-52. This man persistently called out for the Lord's mercy as He passed by, even though others told him to be quiet. Because of his bold and persistent faith, Christ restored his ability to see.

When we catch a glimpse of our spiritual blindness and weakness, we must follow Bartimaeus' example of focusing our attention on the Savior as we ask for His healing and strength. He persevered in calling out "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" even when people told him to shut up. It is

precisely when we are tempted to give up in despair that we must persist like the blind beggar with our daily prayers, our fasting, our almsgiving, and our conscientious participation in the full sacramental and ascetical life of the Church. That is how we will open ourselves to the healing presence of the Lord in our lives.

Instead of pointing a judgmental finger at anyone or making excuses of any kind for our inflamed passions, we must humbly look to Christ and put ourselves in the place of all those who have embraced His mercy for the healing of their souls. That is an essential practice for putting "on the whole armor of God" each day of our lives. If we are to do battle with the forces of darkness that have taken root in our souls, we must do so not with illusions of our own power or righteousness, but by uniting ourselves to the Savior as fully as possible as blind beggars in need of His healing.



## *Theological and Scientific Theories of Knowledge, by George Mantzarides*

Orthodox Christian theology has always distinguished between two kinds of knowledge: the secular and the divine. Secular knowledge functions on the level of created matter and is unable to approach the uncreated, that is the divine, which reveals God's purpose for the world. Secular science is empirical in nature. It objectivizes the world and always and everywhere seeks objectivity. While it depends on the individual and makes its leaps through personal inspiration, it avoids subjectivity. As knowledge about changeable and relative things, scientific knowledge is changeable and relative. And as an attempt to understand the finite world, with its infinitude of dimensions and phenomena, it is always both finite and never-ending.

Divine knowledge is of a personal nature. It doesn't function on the level of objectification and never becomes objective. It does, of course, lead to objectifications, but this is not its essence. Divine knowledge is the fruit of actual communion, the communion of love. This, too, has an empirical character, though its experience doesn't function on the level of corporeal feelings, but on spiritual ones and on spiritual communion. As communion with God, Who is infinite and transcendent, this knowledge is infinite and transcendent. And it has these features, not because of uncertainty or relativity, but because of weight and infinitude.

The apophatic or negative approach of Orthodox theology is often stressed. And this emphasis is useful, particularly in academic theology. But this must not be allowed to overshadow its cataphatic or positive character, which is inherent in its empirical nature. The living God is revealed to us directly and personally. Of course, this revelation isn't a manifestation of His essence, but of His energies. But the energy or grace of God is still God Himself. As Saint Gregory Palamas points out succinctly, although the energy of the grace of God differs from His essence, it is not severed from it, 'rather it upholds those who have been granted association with the Holy Spirit'.

Scientific knowledge is verified through experiments.

But divine knowledge is also available as experience. With divine knowledge, however, there's no possibility of

forcing an experiment, because such knowledge is acquired freely, on the level of personal communion. Communion on this level coerces neither God nor people, but is a charismatic event granted by God to those who freely offer themselves. This self-offering to God on our part is achieved through the observation of His commandments. These engage our volitional energy with divine energy and make knowledge of God possible.

Divine knowledge, then, is verified by people on a personal level when they conform to the divine will, that is to divine energy. Besides, each of us is called to participate in this experiment by Christ himself: 'If you want to do

his will, you will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority'. There is also encouragement from Scripture to undertake this: 'Taste and see that the Lord is good', or 'take my yoke upon you... and you will find rest in your souls'.

There can be no conflict between secular or scientific knowledge and divine knowledge, because each functions on its own level and has its own character. Both these kinds of knowledge are good and useful for us. Despite that, they're not of equal value, nor are they equally necessary. People who restrict their interest to the level of worldly matters prioritize or even make an absolute value out of scientific knowledge, deprive themselves of the knowledge which leads to the freedom of the Spirit. Meanwhile, those who restrict their interest to the transcendental, ignore the relative value of earthly knowledge, which

facilitates the servicing of basic human needs.

Scientific knowledge serves our everyday needs, it facilitates horizontal communication and helps with the development of our civilization. Divine knowledge opens up to us the transcendental horizon, cultivates vertical communication, gives meaning to life and inspires our works and culture. It's impossible to imagine the whole of Byzantine, Medieval or even Modern European Civilization in the absence of Christianity. Besides, contemporary scientific research has its origins in the monasteries of the West where monks who combined divine and human knowledge investigated the secrets and laws of nature with religious interest.

