

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 401

37th Sunday after Pentecost—Forgiveness Sunday

March 1, 2020



When the prodigal son returned home, he was surely filthy, malnourished, and at least half-naked. The father restored him to the family by clothing him with a robe, a ring, and sandals, and then celebrated his return with a great banquet. As we prepare to begin the Lenten journey tomorrow, we recall today how Adam and Eve stripped themselves naked of the di-

vine glory and were cast out of Paradise into a world enslaved by death.

Like the prodigal son, they rejected their Father because they used His great blessings only to fulfill their self-centered desires, and made themselves miserable and weak as a result. The murder of their son by Abel by his brother Cain provides a vivid portrait of where the path away from God leads for those created in His image and likeness.

During Great Lent, we seek to follow a path that leads back to Paradise. In order to liberate us from slavery to death and to restore us to our proper dignity as His sons and daughters, our Lord offered up Himself on the Cross. That is when He said to the penitent thief, “Truly I tell you, you will be with me today in Paradise. (Lk. 23:43) In doing so, He took upon
(continued p. 3)

On Tradition by George Kyprianou

It is the case that many people have expressed their own understanding and convictions regarding tradition in a variety of ways. The worst of it is that many have trampled upon it in order to promote and build upon it their own careers and selfish ambitions. It’s a subject which has been bothering me for many years now, and I confess that I’m troubled over the truth behind the precise definition and expression of the notion of ‘tradition’, both in the

artistic and ecclesiastical spheres.

Usually, the most innocent and widespread view regarding it is that tradition is understood as an unaltered reproduction of features from the past, such as customs, arts and habits, with no correlation or reference to the present, as if they were museum objects, entirely divorced from the modern era and showcased as a valuable legacy to be preserved.

Yet it’s true that whenever something has no

place in the present, it’s condemned either to be lost or to be transformed into an inanimate feature of everyday routine, devoid of any meaning for our life.

A connection with the past isn’t achieved by the reproduction of certain features, but through the transferal of their ethos and deeper meaning. In brief, the ethos is more valuable than the custom because the ethos produces meaning in our everyday life and our
(continued p.2)

**** 37th Sunday after Pentecost ****

******* Cheesefare Sunday *******

Epistle: Romans 13:11-14:4

Gospel: Matthew 6:14-21

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.

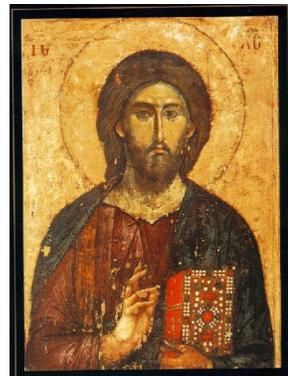
We worship God in Trinity - Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

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.*

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, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & the persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Words from Elder Joseph of Vatopedi

Why Did God not prevent Adam's fall, since He had foreseen it?

Had He prevented it, He would have interfered and would have abolished man's freedom, which He bestowed him as a gift. Had He removed man's freedom, then man's conduct as well as his salvation would have been compulsory. Man would have lost his personality and would have been a creature without will. God pre-

ferred to change His designs on man, rather than take away the most significant element of his personality, his freedom.

God has added a second element which is beneficial to man: His justice against demonic malevolence and hate. The devil believed that by misleading man, he would have prevented God's designs and would have shattered man's likeness to God. Thus he believed he would have managed to both take revenge on God and deprive man of his value. Thus, God did not prevent the devil from implementing his evil plan in order to completely crash him when He took upon Himself human nature, by His future incarnation.

In this way, man who was the victim of demonic wickedness is to be able to rise "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named" (Ephesians 1, 21) not only in this age but in the years to come. Therefore, had God prevented man's fall, He would have deprived him of the glory which he has inherited by his substantial union with God himself, through His incarnation.

On Tradition, (cont'd from p. 1)

relations with other people and the world, whereas custom simply reproduces something from the past as a performance, a spectacle, an exhibit.

Even those things we call traditions are the products and results of their contiguity in time and place. They arose from a melding of even older features in the place and time when they made their appearance and became established. So they're products of relativism rather than absolutism. The fact that they have actually come down to us is also the result of older investment, through the lens and filter of the time when they were formed.

We ought, therefore, to define tradition not as an object, or immaterial legacy, but through our own time and place. We should attempt to seize and grasp the ethos, the experience, the values and principles of its features and imbue the elements of our everyday life with them. The vessel will change, but the contents will remain the same.

As one academic put it once, there's no point bringing a sickle into the

present as a museum piece, or the place where it was used, unless you allude to the value of the fatigue, the labor and the pain of a hard life; there's no point restoring an old couch without feeling the value of



hospitality and respect and the delicacy of everything made, even a piece of furniture in everyday use.

The same is true in the sphere of the Church. It can be seen that we try to preserve the ecclesiastical arts through the mystique and veneration of the necessity to maintain tradition. But in this way we separate and elevate ecclesiastical art, be it iconogra-

phy, architecture, or, more importantly, music, from the events and stimuli of the contemporary era, thus creating the impression of an alien and extraneous art. We thus deprive many devout and godly artists of the opportunity to create and to express themselves within the worship of the Church, regarding the attempt as a deviation from tradition and a potential for heresy or ecclesiastical indiscretion or hubris.

In conclusion, if we wish to be faithful followers of any historical investment and identity, we should reflect on the meaning of the word 'tradition'. In my humble opinion, if we wish to be true and authentic, we should pore over everything valuable, eternal and beneficial we have received and use it to infuse our life with new purpose. Life and its future are not so much in need of molds and matrices from another era, as they are of content and substance. Let's change our lives, rather than just disguise them in the costumes of another age.

Himself the full consequences of sin and entered into death. Hades and the grave could not contain Him, however, for He is not merely human but also God. The icon of Christ's resurrection portrays Him lifting up Adam and Eve from their tombs. The Savior raises us up with Him so that we may participate already in the joy of the Kingdom as we anticipate "the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come."

We become members of Christ's Body when we receive the garment of light through baptism. Our first parents repudiated that divine glory when they chose to diminish themselves and the entire creation. St. Paul describes baptism as putting on Christ like an article of clothing, for "as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (Gal. 3:27) When we are baptized into His death, we rise up with Him into the new life of holiness for which He created us in the first place. Upon being baptized, we receive the Eucharist as participants in the Heavenly Banquet. Like the prodigal son, our nakedness is covered and we are restored fully as beloved children of the Father.

Our Savior is the New Adam Who, as the God-Man, has fulfilled our vocation to become like God in holiness. As we join ourselves to Him, He enables us to become perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect. Because He is infinitely holy, however, that is a goal we should

never think that we have completed, and too often we do not want to pursue it at all. Only a moment's introspection shows that much of the corruption of the old Adam remains within us. We remain enslaved to the power of self-centered desire in so many ways. We typically do not live as those clothed with a robe of light, but prefer the pain and weaknesses of those who choose their own will over God's. Instead of returning to Paradise through union in holiness with Christ, we often prefer to head the other way.

That is precisely why we need Great Lent as a stark reminder of the importance of offering ourselves to the Lord Who offered up Himself for our salvation. The only way to do that is to take intentional steps to become more like the One Who has restored and fulfilled what it means to be a human being in God's image and likeness. As St. Paul taught, that involves us in a struggle

with our own distorted desires, for we must "put on the armor of light" and "make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."

That means that we must mindfully direct our energy, time, and attention to fueling growth in a life pleasing to God, even as we refuse to devote time, energy, and attention to whatever enslaves us to our passions. Lent will provide us with many opportunities to invest ourselves so fully in prayer, fasting, generosity, and other spiritual disciplines that we will not have much left to invest in "the works of darkness."

We must remember, however, that Lent is not about going through the motions of piety for their own sake. We must conform ourselves to Christ from our hearts in order to follow Him through His Passion back to Paradise.

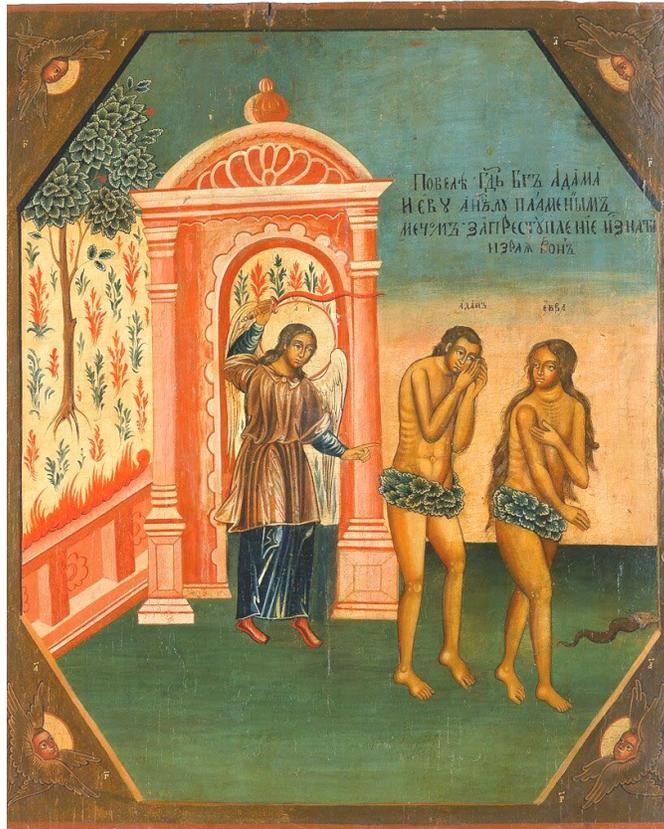
Today's gospel lesson provides us with a severe test of whether we are doing that. The same Lord Who said from the Cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," tells us that we must forgive others their offenses against us if we want the Father to forgive our sins. (Lk. 23:34) The hard truth is that, if we refuse to forgive others, then we are not uniting ourselves to Christ. If His merciful love is not becoming characteristic of us, then we are not participating in His healing of our souls.

Like other spiritual disciplines, forgiveness is often a struggle and a process. If we refuse even to begin the journey of forgiveness, or to get back on

its path after we have strayed from it, then we direct ourselves away from Paradise and do our best to rip off the robe of light. If we stubbornly refuse to forgive others, then we show that we want no part in the Lord Whose forgiving love is most fully manifest in the Cross, from which He forgave even those who nailed Him to it.

Because we typically find it hard to forgive, we need spiritual disciplines like fasting that help us gain strength in redirecting our desires for fulfillment to union with God in holiness. Remember that sin came into the world through our first parents' refusal to restrain their desire for food according to God's command. By struggling to abstain from rich food and large portions, we will grow in our awareness of how addicted we are to satisfying ourselves on our own terms. We will see our own weakness before our passions a bit more clearly, which

(continued p. 4)



(Homily on the Sunday of Forgiveness, cont'd p. 4)

should fuel our growth in patience and empathy for others when they fall prey to self-centered desire. Fasting should strengthen our ability to forgive those who wrong us, for it helps us understand that we are all weak before the deeply rooted desires that so easily lead to words and deeds that harm other people. Because it is pride that hinders forgiveness, the humility fueled by fasting gets to the heart of the matter. The Savior warns, however, that we must not make a show of our fasting in order to draw attention to ourselves or win the praise of others. Doing so will destroy its healing power.



The same is true about generosity with our resources, time, and attention for the needy. If we invest everything in hopes of gaining the world's riches, we will end up worshiping our vision of success in the world. That will only further enslave us to self-centered desire and incline us to hate those who stand in the way of our plans. Our hearts will follow our treasure, and those who stand between us and our treasure will have no place in our hearts. By limiting self-indulgence in order to help others, we turn away at least a bit from making the world our god. If we want to be the kind of people who display Christ's mercy in our own lives, we simply must be generous with our neighbors. Remember that we serve Him in them.

The Lenten journey leads us back to Paradise through the Passion of our Lord. It is a calling to embrace as fully as possible the great dignity that He has restored to us through baptism as sons and daughters called to the celebration of the Heavenly Banquet. If we pray, fast, give, and forgive with integrity, our eyes will be opened to how much of the corruption of the old Adam is still with us. When that happens, we will see how ridiculous it is not to extend to others the same forgiveness that we so desperately need from God. The coming weeks are all about becoming more like Christ, for it is only by sharing more fully in His life that we will be able to enter into the joy of His great victory over death. That is why we all need to "cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light."

* * * *

Prayers for the Dead by Michael Bressemer

A round white mound, frosted with powdered sugar and decorated with candied almonds, sits on top of a silver platter with a thin lit candle in the center of it. Is it someone's birthday? No, it's the anniversary of someone's death. It's the almost weekly macabre remind-

er of our eventual demise, decay, and doom.

Likely the strangest ritual a convert to Orthodoxy witnesses is the memorial service following the Divine Liturgy. Other than perhaps a vicar offering a brief petition at a grave side funeral for the departed—that the deceased may "rest in peace"—prayers for the dead are absent from Protestant practice. They tend to believe once someone passes from this life then it's too late for them to receive God's grace. So why does the Orthodox Church pray for the dead?

An Intermediate State

The Orthodox Church asserts there is an intermediate state between our death and the final judgment (Matthew 25:31-46; Romans 2:2-16; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:11-15). The Bible gives evidence of the deceased being conscious (alert and aware). The spirits of Moses and Elijah appeared to and talked with Our Lord at His Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36). In Christ's parable of "The Rich Man and Lazarus" there is both communication and concern expressed by the deceased characters (Luke 16:19-31). Christ said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:25-26). This verse affirms that though a man's body may die his spirit still lives. St. Paul also taught the departed were alive with Christ (2 Corinthians 5:8; Ephesians 2:4-7; Philippians 1:21-23; Hebrews 12:1). Finally, the book of Revelation gives examples of the deceased worshipping and praying to God (Revelation 4:4,10-11; 5:8-10, 13; 6:9-11; 7:9-12).

Yet despite this evidence, Protestant Christians are fond of quoting Hebrews 9:27: "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). However, this

scripture does not necessarily refer to an immediate successive event. You could also say, "It is appointed for men to have one child-



hood, but after this they must work." Though eventually men will need to settle down into a vocation, there could be many events between graduating from high school and having a long-term career: travel, military service, advanced education, getting married, etc. Or another interpretation of this verse is to view the "judgment" as God's decision about what place or in what condition (e.g., Luke 16:19-31) the departed will temporarily await the final judgment.

(continued next issue)