

# A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

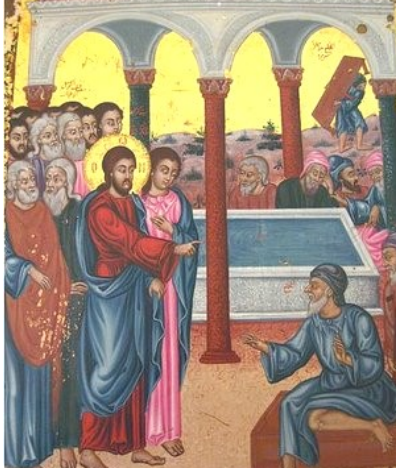


*Christ is Risen! Christos Voskrese! Al'masir Qam! Christos Anesti!*

Volume 9 Issue 411

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Holy Pascha+ Healing of the Paralytic

Sunday, May 10, 2020



We all face difficult circumstances in our lives that we are tempted to think will never change. Sometimes we lose hope of gaining health and strength when we have been sick and weak in body or soul. Problems in marriage, family life, or other relationships may seem beyond healing or repair. Before the difficulties of our lives, let alone

the persistent problems of the world, we can easily feel helpless.

In today's gospel lesson, the blind, lame, and paralyzed people who waited to be healed at the pool of water outside the Temple certainly felt that way. Most probably despaired of ever being healed, for they lacked the ability to move themselves into the water at the right time. The man who had been paralyzed for thirty-eight years had no one to help him get there, and he obviously could not move himself.

The Jewish people had a Temple in which animals were sacrificed, and the pool provided water for washing lambs before they were slaughtered. This scene occurs at the Jewish feast of Pentecost, which commemorated Moses receiving the Law, which had been given by angels. Fallen humanity remained spiritually weak and sick  
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\*\*\* Healing of the Paralytic \*\*\*

St. Theodosius of the Kiev Caves

Epistle: Acts 9: 32-42

Gospel: John: 5: 1-15

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.*

***Worship without Love is Useless, by Fr. Georges Massouh***

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).

Christianity does not accept a duality or multiplicity of gods. There is not a god for every human lust. There is not a good and another of evil. There is not a god of war and another of wine and another of fertility... Nor is Christianity a religion

that accepts duplicity of behavior in life according to the needs of worldly life. In Christianity, worshiping God requires you to put your hope nowhere else but in Him.

Worshiping God means that you worship nothing apart from Him. But also, according to the words of the Lord Christ, there are two inseparable commandments that cannot be fulfilled one without the other, and unless they are practiced, this worship is not sound:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22:37-40).

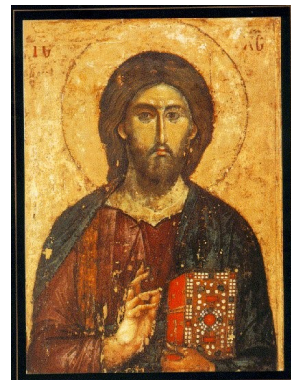
We do not need to be reminded the neighbor is not only our neighbor in the flesh, but every person we encounter in our  
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

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, Evan, Ryan, Kathleen, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Bonnalee, Vicky, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

### **Christ's Promise, Fr. Zacharias**

The Lord's words, 'I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice', has a paradoxical character. The psychological man, who rejoices at the physical presence of the beloved, would hope to hear: 'You will see me again and your heart will rejoice.' Christ puts everything on another basis, saying, 'I will see you again.' It is not important whether man sees the Lord

or not, but rather that the Lord's merciful gaze should fall on him. The natural sun, the eye of the visible world, shines unceasingly and quickens creation; whether man sees the light or not, he receives its beneficial effects. Something similar occurs with respect to the hallowed Sun of Righteousness, the Light that knows no eventide, the Almighty Jesus. The wounds of His Passion and His sacrifice become sources of eternal Light. His eyes pour out Light that illumines the entire spiritual world.

Even when the eyes of man's soul seem unable to see the Sun of Righteousness, the rays of His Light reach out beneficially to him. The energy of the unfading Light of the Resurrection illumines all of humanity. The Lord's gaze is drawn to man, not as an All-seeing God Who contemplates all His creation, but in the same way that He watched attentively over His disciples in their desolation and the myrrh bearers in their grief. The Lord's words bring tidings of something beyond His creative oversight, which will enflame our hearts, enlighten our minds, and bring joy.

### **Worship without Love is Useless, (cont'd from p. 1)**

daily life. Our neighbors are not only those who share our religion, our nation, our color, our race or our sex... Our neighbor is every person created by God in His image and likeness. The quality of being a neighbor increases the more this person needs us.

Worshipping God, then, first of all requires you to love your fellow man, not only in word but in deed. This means that you prefer nothing over him, not even your money. For this reason Christ indicated that the sole impediment preventing someone from loving his fellow man is his idolatrous attachment to his money. Christ made Himself equal to the needy when He said, "For I was hungry, and you gave Me food... I was a stranger and you took Me in" (cf. Matthew 25:31-46). Truly loving God requires you to love the hungry and the refugee who has no shelter, not only in word or thought, but in deed— that is, with your money, with everything you possess.

Saint John Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople said, "Here Christ

calls money a lord not because of its own nature, but because of the wretchedness of those who submit to its yoke... How wretched are those condemned from the likes of those who abandon God as their Lord so that they may be painfully ruled by money."

In reality, money is not an evil in itself, but it becomes an evil when one treats it as an end, rather than a means to a higher end: the love of man. Money becomes an evil when the love of it becomes stronger than people's love for each other. At the end of his discourse about money, Jesus says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

Of this saying, the Blessed Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, says, "When Jesus said, 'Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,' He clearly indicated that seeking other things comes after that, not in the sense of seeking them at a later time, but because they are of secondary

importance. What we seek first is the Good and what we seek after that is what we need. But seeking what we need comes by way of realizing the Good."

Truly worshipping God requires one to regard money as a trust from God that he spends in the places where it must be spent, for Jesus' beloved ones: the needed, the vulnerable, refugees, those who are tormented...

One only owns his money if he spends it. One is owned by money— and is not its owner— when he saves it for himself, thinking that it ensures his future and the future of his children and grandchildren... Truly worshipping God requires you to love man first.





and enslaved ultimately to death. In such a corrupt state, we lacked the strength to fulfill our calling to become like God in holiness, and certainly could not overcome the ultimate paralysis of the grave. The Law was surely both a blessing and a cause of frustration for the Jews, for it lacked the ability to heal the soul. The sacrificial system of the Temple foreshadowed the great Self-Offering of our Lord on the Cross, for He is the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. It did not, however, deliver anyone from bondage to death, the wages of sin.

The paralyzed man represents us all who lack the power to move ourselves to complete healing of body, soul, and spirit. He did not even call out to Christ to help him; instead, the Lord reached out to him, asking what may seem to be an odd question, "Do you want to be healed?" Why would anyone who had endured thirty-eight years of paralysis not want to be made well? Recall, however, how easy it is to adapt to our maladies and passions, to become accustomed to whatever forms of corruption have become second nature to us.

To be healed requires something very different, for we must obey the Lord's command: "Rise, take up your pallet, and walk." That means cooperating with the gracious divine energies of our merciful Lord as we rise up in obedience such that we are transformed personally to become more like Him in holiness. Doing so is never as easy as lying comfortably in bed. To receive personally our Lord's healing requires getting out of our comfort zones.

The man in today's gospel reading would never have found healing had he chosen to remain as he had been for thirty-eight years. Lying still for a long time makes us weak and unable to rise up and walk on our own. The same will be true of us spiritually if we do not embrace the struggle to cooperate with the mercy of the Lord by serving Him as faithfully as we presently have the strength to do. That is how we open ourselves to receive His healing, regardless of how weak we have made ourselves. The paralyzed man would have rejected his healing had he refused to accept the struggle of standing up, carrying his bed, and walking.

After a lifetime of not moving, doing so must have

been difficult and quite scary. He had learned how to survive as an invalid, but now the Savior was directing him to a very different life, the challenges of which he could not predict.

Perhaps we look at the prospect of a life of obedience to Christ as being difficult and scary, for we have become accustomed to living as people enslaved to self-centered desire fueled by the fear of death. If we think that the measure of our lives extends no further than the period of our physical existence on Earth, then the temptation will be great to indulge ourselves in whatever pleasures make life more bearable and distract us from

despair about our ultimate fate. But because "Christ is Risen!," we must not continue in the weakness that comes from doing whatever it takes to distract us from fear of the grave and the insecurities it produces.

Instead, we must do whatever it takes to share more fully in the ultimate healing of the human person in God's image and likeness that our Savior has accomplished through His glorious resurrection on the third day. We must live as those who already know the joy of life eternal as we look for the coming fullness of the Kingdom of God. We will open ourselves to the healing and strength necessary to live in the joy of the resurrection by participating in the life in the Church, which is the Body of Christ.

In our reading from Acts, St. Peter heals a paralyzed man and commands him to get up. He even raises a woman from

death. Peter did not do this by his own power or authority, but because the Risen Lord was working through him. He said to the paralyzed man, "Jesus Christ heals you..." Throughout Acts, we read of how the Lord works through the Church to enable people to participate personally in the new life brought by His empty tomb.

We celebrate Pascha by participating personally in the Lord's victory over Hades and the grave, and there is simply no way to do that which does not require obedience to the command that Christ gave to the paralyzed man. That is how we will find healing from our maladies of soul that are driven by slavery to the fear of death. Because of the resurrection, we may all rise up from our comfortable beds of sins and provide the world a sign that something radically new has come into the world through the Savior's Cross and empty tomb.





## Why Don't Temptations Go Away? By Fr. Michael Gillis

In homily 69, St. Isaac reminds us that temptations to sin come upon all people, even the “perfect.” Quoting freely from St. Macarios of Alexandria, St. Isaac reminds us that our inner state is rather like the weather. “There is cold, and soon after, burning heat, and then perhaps even hail, and after a little, fair weather.”

I think some of us will find this shocking, that even the perfect experience changes in their inner state. For the spiritual beginner, like myself, there is a tendency to think that if I resist temptation bravely, eventually I will no longer be tempted.

But that is not the case, St. Isaac and St. Macarios tell us. Temptation comes and goes, like a visitor (c.f. 2 Samuel/2 Kingdoms 12:4). Like the weather, our mind “suddenly turns away from its peaceful disposition into turbid confusion without any immediate cause, and ... it enters into great and unspeakable danger [of falling into sin].” We beginners can easily fall into despair because we expect in our life something “more exalted than struggle.” We forget that our calling is to fight a spiritual warfare on the battlefield of our own soul.

Certainly, if we do not resist temptation, we fall into sin more easily. And certainly, if we intentionally fill our mind with images and thoughts that stir up our passions, such passions will dominate us. For example, if I intentionally look at pornography or if I intentionally read things that I know will make me angry, I cannot complain to God that I am continually lustful or angry. It's like moving to the Arctic and complaining that it's so damn cold all the time. What did you expect?

But if we try to resist temptation, we soon discover that it is much harder than we expected—like the fellow who says he can stop smoking or drinking or gambling any time he wants. The real struggle lies in the wanting, consistently wanting to stop and not go back. Our hearts are fickle and our minds are weak: “even without their being negligent or lax; for even though,” St. Isaac says, “they are observing right discipline, downfalls occur which are opposed to their will's aim.” This is why the person wise and experienced in the spiritual life understands and does not despair. But rather, begins again. The same spiritual disciplines that brought relief in the past will bring relief again. We return with humility to the beginning.

Why is this so? Why don't our passions just go away if we do not want them? Why does God let us struggle? St. Isaac tells us that this aberration in ourselves, these trials that befall us daily until our death are how we are trained: “now there is warfare, now grace comes to our aid; sometimes the soul is found in a tempest and violent waves rise up against her, and then a change occurs, grace overshadows a man and fills his heart with joy and peace from God, and chaste and tranquil thoughts [are in his mind].” This is the secret warfare of all Christians. This is spiritual warfare. And this is how we accept Christ, and choose

heaven, and love God again and again at every hour of every day.

We are human beings, not angels or demons. Whereas angels and demons chose once and are forever bound by their choice, human beings, so long as they are in this world, choose daily, take up their cross daily, die daily and so follow Christ along the Way: step by step, moment by moment. This is why the New Testament consistently refers to the Christian life as a walk. We follow Christ. We walk in the Way.

The experienced soldier of Christ, St. Isaac tells us, is neither boastful when their hearts are at peace, nor despairing when their souls are in turmoil: “If it should happen that after we receive those chaste and gentle thoughts, we should suffer an assault, let us not be sorrowful and despair. And likewise, let us not boast during a period of grace-given rest, but rather, in the time of joy let us

expect affliction.”

In saying that we should not despair when temptations assail us, he does not mean that we should not stand up against them and resist them. We do not consider sinful thoughts to be somehow natural or even our own thoughts. The thoughts that assault us are like the weather. Although I cannot stop the rain, I can put a hat on. I can resist the cold by wrapping up and exercising. I can turn away (run away!) from the source of the temptation. I can turn in my mind to Jesus, saying the words “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me!” (again and again). I may not be able to stop the storm, but I can hide under the shelter of His wings.

This is how we become soldiers of the King of Heaven. Our warfare is not with flesh and blood. Our enemy is not someone outside ourselves. Our enemy is a spirit, the spirit of this age; and the battlefield is our own mind, our own heart, our own will.

