

# 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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2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost-All Saints of America

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Christ calls Peter and Andrew, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, and immediately, they leave their nets to follow Christ. They willingly sacrifice everything in order to follow Christ, to serve Him, and become the “fishers of men” that Christ has called them to be. Their response is astonishing, childlike in its innocence and

manly in its ready and courageous response.

These disciples, all fishermen, left their homes and families, their livelihood, everything, to follow Christ. Often, they didn’t know where their next meal would come from or where they would lay their heads to sleep. After Christ’s resurrection, they were imprisoned and persecuted, tortured, and, eventually crucified, for sharing the Gospel, the Good News that Christ the long-awaited Messiah, had come to give new life to all, a new identity to us fallen sons and daughters of Adam. In fact, just like Simon and Andrew, all of the disciples except John were martyred for that “Yes!” to Christ’s calling.

In other words, in calling them to be “fishers of men,” Christ God was not calling them to a life of ease, of power  
*(continued p. 3)*

\*\*\*2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost \*\*\*

\*\*\* All Saints of America \*\*\*

Epistle: Romans 2:10-16

Gospel: Matthew 4:18-23

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 Grace of Being a Christian, by Metropolitan Ieronymos***

The Church wishes to honor all its saints as a whole, who, like a cloud, surround the holy throne of God and show the heights to which we can rise if we willingly consent to God’s invitation to allow Him to become our Father and for us to become His children by grace.

So the Church doesn’t merely recall the descent of the All-Holy Spirit but also experiences and records what this means for our life, for the presence of the Comforter on

earth, how He can act in us and how far beyond human understanding it is to contemplate the majesty with which we can be adorned by His sanctity.

It’s worth noting the way the phrase (Matt. 10:37) ‘Everyone, therefore, who shall confess in me before other people, I also will confess in them before my Father who is in the heavens’. That this is not a mistake is shown by the continuing verse, which states: ‘But everyone who denies me be-

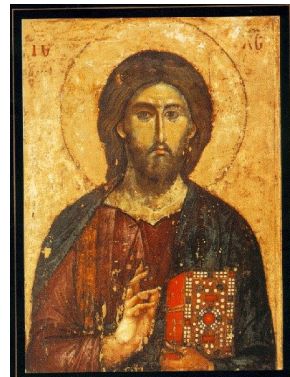
fore other people, I will also deny...’. Why is there this difference in the way the phrase is formulated?

The answer is of the utmost importance for an understanding of the way in which Christ sees His people. According to the interpretation of Saint John Chrysostom, it demonstrates that: ‘those who confess the faith do not do so through their own powers (here he means the personal beliefs, the convictions and  
*(continued p.2)*

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, Corella, Gail, Mike, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

### **Words from St. Luke the Physician**

1. Love the Cross of Christ, and love Jesus who was crucified on it. The more often and the more deeply you ponder on the Cross of Christ and His Passion, the clearer, better, and softer your heart will become. These thoughts will drive away all that is black and bad, which hinders the Spirit of God from establishing his dwelling in you.

2. All love is blessed, but there is the initial, the lowest kind of love, and we need to climb up from it to a much higher level of love for all people, for all the poor and the suffering. We have to rise up from it to the third degree of love – the divine love, the love of God Himself.

3. People who are truly pious are always deeply focused, self-absorbed, and look into their hearts. The chatty mouths, however, not only keep talking gibberish, but also spew the adders' poison (Psalm 140:3), the venomous words of condemnation, slander, gossip, and disgusting curses. Meanwhile, the Lord Jesus Christ strictly forbade any swear words, even the least rude...

4. You should love the Lord with all your heart. You should be afraid of the slightest of your sins. You should strive to be like those holy ascetics who had no grave sins but spent their entire lives in penitence.

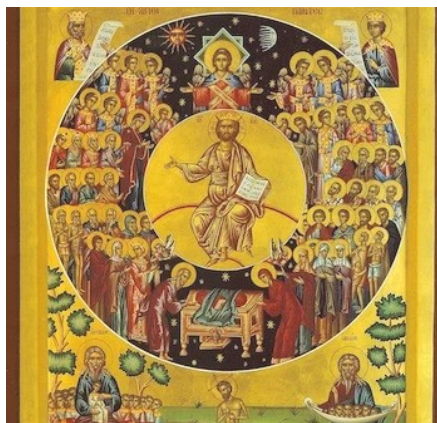
5. The mercy of God is limitless. It is immeasurably greater than an infinite ocean. It is in this divine mercy that one can easily drown all his mortal sins if he repents with all his heart.

### **The Grace of Being a Christian, (cont'd from p. 1)**

enthusiasm) but that they're assisted and inspired by divine grace. Whereas, regarding those who deny, He doesn't say 'in me', but simply 'me', in order to show the starkness of their soul and their estrangement for the grace of God. It is this which leads to denial. So the confession of faith is proof of a soul which has grace, in which Christ resides and which He defines, whereas, on the other hand, denial is a consequence of the devastation of the soul, because of its abandonment by God, the reason for this being our human attachment to anything that may prove to be an impediment to a real relationship of love with Him.

In other words, the Gospel describes that supreme spiritual state defined by Saint Paul when he confesses: 'I no longer live, but Christ lives in me' (Gal. 2, 20). This state is described by Saint John Chrysostom through a telling example which demonstrates that Christ does, indeed, abide in people. 'Take a piece of iron and put it in the fire. After a while

it'll glow. Has it stopped being iron? No. But now it's also fire'. This is how we work together with God, this is how we unify, co-exist, to the point where we can't be separated.



What's the result of this relationship between God and people? What else but that He should seek to place Himself at the very center of our lives. God seeks absolute priority in the hearts of His people; He wants to be at the top of their scale of values. Christ says 'be fond of' ('care for') rather than 'love', in order to show the profound affection, the total com-

mitment and the worried concern that you find in family relationships, which make them different from the other relationships of respect that are cultivated in human society. Christ requires that His people should be even more committed to Him than we are to our family members, and that we should place our relationship with God at the center of our existence, as the quintessence of our experience of life.

It's this that makes Christ different from and far superior to ordinary teachers. Aristotle once said: 'I'm fond of Plato, but I care more about truth', in order to show that he would sacrifice the love in a friendship for the sake of truth. Christ doesn't tell us to sacrifice the love in our family for the sake of truth. He does something finer: He tells us to sacrifice any love we have, even the greatest, for His personal sake. Or rather, we should regard it as of much less consequence than our relationship with Him, given that He's not only Truth, but also Life and the Way.

through their leadership, of earthly riches, but rather, of self-denial, of service, of dying to self—even at the cost of their earthly lives. He called them to put Christ and His Church above all things. Fishing for men was not what the disciples did on the side, it became their whole lives because the love of God compelled them, motivated them, to live life for Christ God and desire that life for others above all else. Our Lord reminds us, “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all” (Mk. 9:35).

The same example of selfless service that we see in the Apostles, we also see in the Saints of North America whom we commemorate today. They ‘risked’ their lives as “fishers of men” on this continent to bring the Gospel and the Orthodox Faith, the life in Christ, to this spiritually barren land; all suffered—some even martyrdom just like the Apostles—to preach the timeless truth of Christ to a nation newly born; they reassured their scattered, uncertain flock that it is in their grounding, their identity in Christ in His Church, that they (and we) find our true home—beyond any ethnic or national identities. They didn’t come to make good Greeks, Arabs, or Russians; they came to make men and women true Christians, to introduce them to the knowledge and love of God. But two of them went from being missionaries on the frontier to being two of the greatest Patriarch Saints of modern Russia. We celebrate their legacy today and ask for their prayers in our own efforts to share the Gospel and the Orthodox Faith in this dry and thirsty land.

Being “fishers of men” isn’t just a calling for the Apostles and the clergy, but for all baptized Orthodox. By virtue of our Chrismation, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit and empowered to live this life to God’s glory—if we are willing, if we are willing to live out our baptism and serve God, compelled by love for our fellow man and woman.

Christ calls on us in today’s Gospel to be “fishers of men” too, to serve and evangelize in His name (this is what it means to witness and share the Gospel). It’s a common mistake to think that it’s the priest’s responsibility alone to evangelize and witness the faith or it’s the priest’s job alone to be a servant. In reality, the priest is here to equip the people of his flock in discovering, growing, and using their gifts and talents to serve God and build up the Church. But all of us as baptized Orthodox are called to evangelize, to witness to the truth of

the love of Christ. This is what it means to be “fishers of men.” St. Tikhon puts it this way, “The spread of Christ’s faith ought to be near and precious to the heart of every Orthodox Christian.”

What motivated the disciples and the Saints of North America to give up so much in order to follow Christ and be ‘fishers of men’? There was no threat in Christ’s call, but simply an invitation. There was no earthly reward, but rather one heavenly and ethereal, and there was certainly a price, a cross, for many, martyrdom for others. What’s clear is that love for God and their fellow man was the primary motivating force at work in their lives, and this love of God compelled them to proclaim the Good News, the Gospel of salvation, to work tirelessly to bring others to that same knowledge and love of God. Our love for God and our fellow man has to be our motivation too if we are to witness effectively and help change the lives of those around us.



As we struggle and strive to live out our faith daily, in our prayers, our repentance, our yes to God and no to sin, our participation in the worship of the Church, our offerings of fellowship with others, the use of our gifts, talents, and treasure, we create an environment where we can come outside ourselves to share Christ’s love with others. And this desire grows in us, it humbles us, makes us more like Christ, and enables us in turn to serve even more.

Our life takes on real purpose when we take our Christian faith from inside and reflect it on the outside. St. Theophan asks, “when we come outside ourselves, whom do we meet?” The answer is, God and our neighbor. As fishers of men we witness to

the truth of the reclamation, the healing of the human race. We take what God has done and is doing in our lives [healing us, growing us] and share it with those around us, living out our faith (however imperfectly but sincerely we do so) in witness to the Truth that Christ alone is.

The Scriptures remind us, “perfect love casts out fear.” Love is something we can and do grow in; it’s the natural outgrowth of our increasing faith in Christ: Like begets like. As we grow, we heal, as we heal, we grow in love and faith. As we grow in faith, we naturally desire to love and serve more. May each of us pray for such love to be His true witnesses, fishers of men! And may we beseech the holy Saints of North America to pray for our efforts to glorify God with our lives!

## All Saints of the Americas

On the second Sunday after Pentecost, each local Orthodox Church commemorates all the saints, known and unknown, who have shone forth in its territory. Accordingly, the Orthodox Church in America remembers the saints of North America on this day.

Saints of all times, and in every country are seen as the fulfillment of God's promise to redeem fallen humanity. Their example encourages us to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily besets us" and to "run with patience the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). The saints of North America also teach us how we should live, and what we must expect to endure as Christians. Although it is a relatively young church, the Orthodox Church in America has produced saints in nearly all of the six major categories of saints:

Apostles (and Equals of the Apostles); Martyrs (and Confessors); Prophets; Hierarchs; Monastic Saints; and the Righteous. Prophets, of course, lived in Old Testament times and predicted the coming of Christ.

The first Divine Liturgy in what is now American territory (northern latitude 58 degrees, 14 minutes, western longitude 141 degrees) was celebrated on July 20, 1741, the Feast of the Prophet Elias, aboard the ship Peter under the command of Vitus Bering. Hieromonk Hilarion Trusov and the priest Ignatius Kozirevsky served together on that occasion. Several years later, the Russian merchant Gregory I. Shelikov visited Valaam monastery, suggesting to the abbot that it would be desirable to send missionaries to Russian America.

On September 24, 1794, after a journey of 7,327 miles (the longest missionary journey in Orthodox history) and 293 days, a group of monks from Valaam arrived on Kodiak Island in Alaska. The mission was headed by Archimandrite Joasaph, and included Hieromonks Juvenal, Macarius, and Athanasius, the Hierodeacons Nectarius and Stephen, and the monks Herman and Joasaph. Saint Herman of Alaska, the last surviving member of the mission, fell asleep in the Lord in 1837.

Throughout the Church's history, the seeds of faith have always been watered by the blood of the martyrs. The Protomartyr Juvenal was killed near Lake Iliamna by natives in 1799, thus becoming the first Orthodox Christian to shed his blood for Christ in the New World. In 1816, Saint Peter the Aleut was put to death by Spanish mis-

sionaries in California when he refused to convert to Roman Catholicism.

Missionary efforts continued in the nineteenth century, with outreach to the native peoples of Alaska. Two of the most prominent laborers in Christ's Vineyard were Saint Innocent Veniaminov and Saint Jacob Netsvetov, who translated Orthodox services and books into the native languages. Father Jacob Netsvetov died in Sitka in 1864 after a life of devoted service to the Church. Father John Veniaminov, after his wife's death, received monastic tonsure with the name Innocent. He died in 1879 as the Metropolitan of Moscow.

As the nineteenth century was drawing to a close, an event of enormous significance for the North American Church took place. On March 25, 1891, Bishop Vladimir went to Minneapolis to receive Saint Alexis Toth and 361 of his parishioners into the Orthodox Church. This was the beginning of the return of many Uniates to Orthodoxy.

Saint Tikhon (Belavin), the future Patriarch of Moscow came to America as bishop of the diocese of the Aleutians and Alaska in September 1898. As the only Orthodox bishop on the continent, Saint Tikhon traveled extensively throughout North America in order to minister to his widely scattered and diverse flock. He realized that the local church here could not be a permanent extension of the Russian Church. Therefore, he focused his efforts on giving the American Church a diocesan and parish structure which would help it mature and grow. Saint Tikhon returned to Russia in 1907, and was elected as Patriarch of Moscow ten years later. He died in 1925 after

harsh imprisonment and torture by the Communist Soviet Government.

Saint Raphael of Brooklyn, born in Damascus, Syria, was the first Orthodox bishop to be consecrated in North America. Archimandrite Raphael Hawaweeny was consecrated by Bishop Tikhon and Bishop Innocent at Saint Nicholas Cathedral in New York on March 13, 1904. As Bishop of Brooklyn, Saint Raphael was a trusted and capable assistant to Saint Tikhon in his ministry. Saint Raphael reposed on February 27, 1915. In addition to the saints listed above, we also honor those saints who are known only to God, and have not been recognized officially by the Church. As we contemplate the lives of these saints, let us remember that we are also called by God to a life of holiness.

