

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

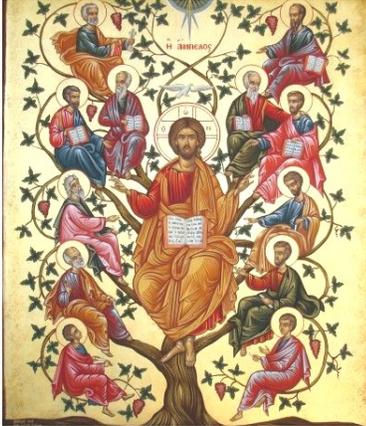


Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be Forever!

Volume 9 Issue 428

13th Sunday after Pentecost-The Vineyard of Christ

Sunday, September 6, 2020



Today's passage of the Holy Gospel, my dear brothers and sisters, is a parable that illustrates Christ's own mission and the spreading of His Gospel to the nations. The language of this parable is borrowed from the beginning of the fifth chapter of the Prophet Isaiah:

I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had

a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. "Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?"

When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it. (5:1-7)

The vineyard of the Lord Almighty
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***13th Sunday after Pentecost ***

Miracle of St. Michael at Coloasse

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 16: 13-24

Gospel: Matthew 21: 33-42

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.*

Time and the Church, Part 1, by Professor George Mantzaridis

Christ's advent brought the kingdom of God into the world. And the realm where the kingdom of God is made manifest is the Church. This retains eternity within history and provides history with the perspective of eternity. The Church is the body of Christ, which transcends time and space, joining people together in a transcendent community outside time, where everything is present in the Holy Spirit. In the Church, time and the whole world are saved.

Whatever God provides for the world is in the Church and is then given to people for their salvation and renewal.

The kingdom is God is not merely awaited in the future, but is perceptible also in the present. And Christ's resurrection and people's renewal is not awaited merely in the future, but is also available in the present: 'The time is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear it will live' (Jn. 5,

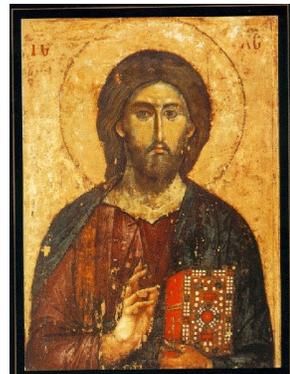
25).

The voice of Christ, which has already been heard and has called people from death to life, will also call those in the tombs and will revitalize them. The time that is coming, but which is already present, is the time of the presence of Christ. It is Christ Himself. The last things exist in the last Adam, Christ. What is expected is already provided in His person. The period of His presence and His Church is
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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 worshiping with us today. Because of COVID-19, our social hour has been canceled until we receive further instructions from the Department of Health.

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

Words of Wisdom-St. John of Kronstadt

The angels have a spiritual, immaterial, subtle, and immortal nature, free of all corruptibility, but limited, not like that of the Lord Himself, the Spirit – existing everywhere and unique, without beginning and all-encompassing. He brought forth the angels from nothingness into being,

sanctified them with His word, and for their steadfastness against evil confirmed them in the Holy Spirit (i.e. they can no longer fall into sin);

Their nature is full of wondrous, ever-shining light, holiness, goodness, beauty, wisdom, power, immortality, and an ardent love for their Creator, for each other, and for mankind, over whose salvation they rejoice, and whom they wish to have as their eternal compatriots in the kingdom of eternal light and incorruptibility, peace and joy. St. Dionysius the Areopagite, a disciple of the Apostle Paul who had been raised by the Holy Spirit to the third heaven, heard from him the mysterious teaching on the angelic world, recorded it, and passed it on to the Church.

Let us contemplate with wonder God’s all-benevolent and wise providence, His immeasurable bounty, which has destined us for eternal co-habitation and bliss with the angels in our future homeland, and which established a single Church composed of radiant and incorruptible angels, and chosen and worthy humans. Let us emulate their example and praise God.

Time and the Church, cont’d from p. 1)

is the period of the ‘last days’ days (Cf. *Acts*, 2,17; *II Tim.* 3,1; *Heb.* 1, 2; *James* 5, 3; *I Jn.* 2, 18; Athanasios the Great, *Against the Arians* 1,55, PG 26, 125 C). It is the period in which God and His kingdom are made manifest in history (Cf. *Matth.* 16, 28; *Mk.* 9,1; *Luke*, 9, 27). It is the beginning of eternal life, which is not terminated by death.

Christ’s Transfiguration and Resurrection are already manifestations of the kingdom of God in the world. And the times after the Lord’s advent are the last times. The manifestation of the glory of God in the Church, with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, as well as the personal manifestations in the saints of the Church, are eschatological events. And the experiences of these events are experiences of the final manifestation of God, which, because they take place in time and space, where there is still death and corruption, are necessarily ‘partial’ (*I Cor.* 13, 9). In this way, the last times are both present and awaited, experi-

enced and expected.

When the Church was constituted, communion between God and people was realized. The uncreated and eter-



nal God was united ontologically with created and mortal humanity. Eternal life made its appearance in that which is fleeting. So, created and mortal humanity became, by grace, eternal and everlasting, that is without beginning, because the grace

which renews our existence is also uncreated, eternal and without beginning. Nothing remains now to hinder the conjunction of created and uncreated, temporal and eternal, of the present and life.

The times when these events take place are the last times. The date and the hour is the last hour. Nothing is awaited now. Not the Messiah, not the Comforter, not the Antichrist. They are all present: Christ, the Comforter and the Antichrist. Christ is present with the Holy Spirit in the Church. And the Antichrist is present as the evil spirit who fights against the Church: ‘Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, so now many Antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour’ (*I Jn.* 2, 18. Cf. also 4, 3). The presence of the Antichrist is an eschatological phenomenon, not so much in itself as in the relationship-or, to be more precise - the juxtaposition with the eschatological presence of Christ.

(continued next issue)

is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress (5: 1-7)

Christ takes, then, this image of the book of Isaiah, an image with whose meaning His audience would have been familiar, and expands it: the landowner who planted the vineyard is God the Father and the vineyard is Israel, His chosen people. The hedge around it is His Law and the tower is His temple. "When the harvest time approached"—that is, when the fullness of the times came—He sent his prophets which the parable calls "his servants," but the tenants of the vineyard "seized the servants, and they beat one, killed another, stoned a third."

In that gruesome line is summarized the history of Israel with its prophets, of which in the Gospel of St Luke Christ reminds us that He holds Israel responsible: Because of this, God in his wisdom said, "I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute."⁵⁰ Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world,⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. (Luke, 11:49-51)

God continues to send prophets to Israel, but each is abused as the one before. "Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said." (Mt. 21:37). Notice how the Son is sent "last of all" for there will be no more prophets after the Son Himself has come. And notice how the Son is clearly distinguished from the "servants", for He is not one of them, He is not one of the prophets. Foretelling the death by which He will die, Christ relates to His audience what the tenants of the vineyard will do with Him: "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him." (Mt. 21:38-39) They killed him "out of the vineyard" as He was crucified outside the walls of the city.

Thus, Israel is abandoned and the vineyard is given to "new tenants"—as the Lord continues, speaking now not

in riddles but quite explicitly "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit." (Mt. 21:43) The Church saw Herself as this new people, as the new Israel to which the promise of salvation had been renewed and made certain.

However, the lesson of this parable remains as a stern warning for us too: the sons and daughters of adoption. For we too might commit the same grave mistake as those tenants of the parable: that is, we might begin to think that the vineyard is, after all, our possession; we may begin to see ourselves not as humble workers in the vineyard of the Lord but as its owners. Such a danger is closer and more real for us the clergy—bishops, priests, and deacons—who have been called to work at the vineyard of the Lord. It is the danger of forgetting that the vineyard of the Church is not our property, but His, who, in the time of the harvest, will demand of us "to bear fruit."

Such an insidious danger takes the form of ungratefulness: we are reminded again of the words that God speaks through the Prophet Isaiah: "What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?" (5:4). Indeed, He planted it, He protected by building the wall around it, He adorned it with a watchtower and a winepress, and when all was ready, He called us to work and cultivate His spiritual grapes. Yet, He is the vine; we are the branches. If we remain in Him we will bear much fruit; for apart from Him we can do nothing" (Cf. John, 15:5).

Sometimes one hears here too, among our communities in America, people voicing a similar misconception, talking of the Church as if it was theirs, as it belonged to them, because they or their parents played some role in the edification of the building. Brothers and sisters, if the Church is yours, then it is not the Lord's, and if it is not the Lord's then it is not the Church—what, then, are you boasting of?

Friends, let us all of us, clergy and laity, avoid the ungratefulness of the old tenants, let us avoid the hardening of their hearts, let us instead repeat and proclaim with gratitude the last words of today's Gospel: "*the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes*" (Mt. 21:42). Amen.



How do we return to Church after a quarantine? Thoughts from Russian Priests.

The main thing the quarantine reminded us of is that a person is not only a bodily being, but also a spiritual one. A person does not only need to be well-fed and healthy. Participation in church sacraments is as essential for a Christian as going to a hospital or a store. Such refreshing of our senses was useful for us. We understood the value of Holy Communion.

If today, when churches reopened to everyone, you find it difficult to return to regular church life, simply ask yourself: why do I need this? What do I want from going to church? Such questions to yourself are generally important in many situations of our life. If you find the answer, your energy will be renewed, going to church will have a meaning, and you will find strength to do it.

When a person really has a need to participate in the Eucharistic life, if he cannot live without communication with Christ through the sacrament, he goes to church and takes Communion. If he does not feel such a craving for Christ, if he was merely forced to do it by his relatives, as it sometimes happen, or by the circumstances of sorrow or illness, then Communion unfortunately turns into an unnecessary rite for him.

So ask yourself this: Is Holy Communion important to me? And if the answer is “yes”, then give yourself a light spiritual kick and go to the church!

But if you suddenly felt that you cannot find the answers to the questions “why?” and “is it important?” yourself, talk to your confessor and try to find these answers with his help.

There is a joke on the Internet: “Lie on the couch as if it will be sold tomorrow”. There is some truth in it, but, you must admit, you also experience the joy from movement. This is a muscle joy. Our soul has muscles too, and they also need to have such muscle joy. With God’s help, I hope you will experience this joy.

* * *

Returning to the church after a break is like returning to work from a vacation. It’s hard to start going to bed early and waking up again on time.

I remember one of my friends, an athlete, got a serious leg injury. He could not walk at all for six months, and then he was recovering for another six months. When his leg stopped hurting, he realized that it was difficult for him to return to his usual life: “I am lazy, I stopped doing sports, I don’t run up the stairs, I use the elevator, I don’t

walk, but take a taxi and the subway.” He lost his motivation for sports; he lost the joy from physical activity. The same thing happens with our spiritual life.

Our routine is important here: overcoming laziness, with an effort, stand up and go to church. Soon you will fall into the familiar, pre-quarantine rhythms. It is better to return to your usual routine not by yourself only, but together with your whole family. I notice with horror that if I am alone, I do not always force myself to read the morning and evening prayer rules. But together with my family there are no problems. After dinner, everyone stands together. We pray and go to bed. The feeling of responsibility towards each other helps you to overcome yourself, and most importantly, to remember that where two and three are gathered in His Name, there is Christ in their midst.

If you do not feel the spiritual need to return to the church, then ask yourself: How alive is my church life? How much do I need it? In fact, for many people, going to the church brings nothing – they go there out of habit or out of fear. For those people whose spiritual life was on its last legs before the quarantine, this forced break played its negative role.

A person in general is made in such a way (if you do not take into account the sense of duty) that we communicate only with those people with whom we like to communicate. If after communicating with a person there is a feeling that we wasted our time, then we stop this communication.

The same is true with respect to God. After all, this is also a personal relationship. It is in our own power to build them.

* * *

At Saint George, we are following the federal and state guidelines regarding houses of worship. We have spaced out the chairs to ensure six feet of separation, require the use of face masks, and administer the sacrament of Holy Communion in a safe and respectful manner never, forgetting that the Precious Body and Blood of Our Lord and Savior is the ultimate source of healing both soul and body. The priest consumes the entire contents of the chalice after the liturgy demonstrating that the virus cannot survive-since no priest ever died by consuming the holy gifts regardless of the outbreaks of plague, AIDS, Ebola, or COVID-19. As our Lord reminds us, “Your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed.” (Matt. 5.34).

