

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!



Volume 9 Issue 436

21th Sunday after Pentecost—Jesus heals the Demoniacs

Sunday, November 1, 2020



If you were Jewish, and you lived in the first century, there were at least two places you typically, did not go. On the one hand, it was forbidden to mix with gentiles. You could perhaps do business with them, but as a rule the gentiles were kept at a distance. It would be an unusual thing in particular

to leave your Jewish home and to travel into pagan country.

Extremely unusual if you happen to be a Jewish rabbi or religious leader. Another place you would not go is a cemetery, to the place of tombs. The realm of the dead. To pass through a cemetery would violate the laws of ritual purity, and anyone who would so travel would then be prevented from temple worship until the correct sacrifices were offered.

And so there are these two places you did not go if you were Jewish. Pagan country? Don't go there. Cemetery? Absolutely don't go there. But the Gospel this morning takes place in a cemetery, in pagan country. The disciples must have been very worried. You can imagine their conversation. "Master, come one, let's just stick close to home. Let's stay in Galilee.

(continued p. 3)

**** 21th Sunday after Pentecost *****

***** Sts. Cosmos and Damian *****

Epistle: Galatians 2: 16-20

Gospel: Luke 8: 26-39

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 Fear of God versus Panic, by Fr. Andrei Chizenko

Today, this topic is especially relevant in connection with the coronavirus pandemic. The fear of God differs from panic in the fact that, when a person succumbs to panic, he or she is detached from the Lord.

On the contrary, when a person is filled with the fear of God, he or she is united with Him and approaches Him. The fear of God includes thirst for God, awareness and perception of the Divine presence, the fear of offending God with one's

sin, of withdrawing from the Almighty, and of detachment from Divine grace.

So, the foundation of the fear of God is the perception of the Divine presence. Or, in other words, we must wholeheartedly and unshakably believe in the dogma of the Divine Providence. This is how this dogma is formulated by the Orthodox catechism: "The Providence of God is the unceasing action of the omnipotence, wisdom and goodness of God,

with which God preserves the existence and strength of creatures, directs them to good goals, helps them in every good deed, and suppresses or corrects the evil that arises through the removal from goodness suppresses and turns it to good consequences."

Let us also recall the words from the Gospel said by the Savior Himself: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground

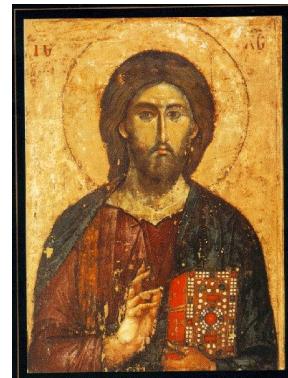
(continued p.2)

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

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

Five ways to Repent

Saint John Chrysostom shows us five practical ways to repent. He says: The first way is to condemn yourself for your sins. The Lord esteems this action greatly. If you condemn your sins, you're less likely to repeat them. No fault will be found in heaven with the awakening of your con-

science through self-criticism.

The second is not to bear a grudge against anyone, even your enemies. Always hold your anger in check and forgive the sins of others. Our Lord taught us this when he said: 'If you forgive the debts of others, then you'll certainly be forgiven by our heavenly father' (Matt. 6, 1).

An ardent and deep prayer of the heart leads us to the third way of repentance. The widow in Luke 18, 1-8, who persisted in her case before a cantankerous judge reminds us how much easier we can persuade our heavenly Father, to give us whatever we need for our salvation.

The fourth way of repentance is alms-giving, Love can cancel out sins. Through charity, repentant transgressors rectify all things, by their struggles and the grace of God.

The fifth way is a combination of abundant modesty and heartfelt humility. The publican in the Gospel parable demonstrates these. His genuine humility lifted the whole burden of his sins as he chose every one of these paths to achieve salvation and eternal life through repentance.

The Fear of God versus Panic, cont'd from p. 1)

without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Matt. 10: 29-31). And again: "There shall not an hair of your head perish" (Luke 21:18). In the interpretation of these biblical texts, the St. John of Kronstadt exclaimed: "What complete security is promised to those who suffer for the sake of the truth! The all-powerful Lord of life and death is seen in these words." I would also like to remind you of the following famous saying: "God is closer to man than the soul is to the body." That is, He is as close as possible. Symbolically speaking, He always carries us through life in His arms.

Panic begins where faith in the Providence of God is lost. Where a person internally seems to be trying to cut off his connection with the Lord, his Creator, and completely rely on fate or on karma, or on chance, some kind of chaos, which people are trying to elevate to the rank of a deity.

Very often you can hear this statement: "I achieved everything myself." It is a certain proud motto of life. And such a person, accustomed



to living without God, has the opinion that their fragile world – their fragile body, a matchbox of his apartment, the material wealth accumulated by them – is unshakable reinforced concrete. They believe it will always

be this way. But when misfortune and calamity arrive, and a person loses all of their material wealth, they succumb to panic, a state of irrational fiery illogical fear. And with such a loss, they fall into a state of despondency and despair, which can end in the most terrible act : taking one's own life.

Why is this happening? Because one has an incorrect system of values. God is the Holy Trinity: Father and Son and the Holy Spirit. God is not some dead matter that will sooner or later be destroyed. Moreover, God constantly cares about you. If an illness affects one – it was allowed by Him. Turn to Him and be patient, pray, beware, watch out, but be patient. The merciful Lord will not let you perish. He has prepared the best for you. Indeed, you are His treasure, you are His beloved son or His beloved daughter. If you seek Him, in due time He will reveal Himself to you, and this communication with the living God will become the greatest happiness for you!

(Homily on Christ healing the Demoniacs, cont'd from p.1)

The people there are just like us. Let's not give the Pharisees any more reason to grumble and complain. Besides, it's been a rough. We just crossed the sea of Galilee and there was that big storm and we all thought we were going to die, well everyone except you because you were just calmly sleeping there in the boat, and then you stood up and commanded the wind and the water to be still -- which was really strange by the way -- but the point Master is that we are tired, and we are scared, and we have no good reason to travel further into this pagan country. Let's just turn completely around and start walking the other way. Let's avoid the tombs and get out of this region."

We know of course that Jesus presses on. He travels more deeply into gentile territory, he enters the realm of the dead, and there He is confronted by a man who is possessed by demons. This is the most unholy and godless place imaginable to the followers of Christ. But into this most unholy and Godless place, Jesus brings the power of his love and compassion, and he casts out the demons and bestows life on one condemned to the tombs.

Brothers and sister, this unusual story of demons and swine is a nothing less than a short version of the Gospel itself. The Gerasene graveyard is an image of Pascha, it is an image of the great and Holy Sabbath, of the work accomplished by our crucified Lord when he dies and enters Hell itself -- truly the most unholy and Godless place imaginable. This is an image of Holy Saturday, when Christ enters the tombs of Hell and destroys them for our sake.

Yes our Lord enters an unholy realm, and yes he heals the demoniac and destroys the demons by driving 2,000 swine off a cliff. But the keepers of the swine, we are told, run to town and tell the Gerasenes what they have seen, and in response the people go out to meet Jesus and to see what ought to be done. And the people arrive and, on the one hand, they see the demoniac -- they see their kinsman and their friend, sitting there ... healed and in his right mind.

On the other hand, they see the dead bodies of the swine, a symbol of their wealth and livelihood, floating uselessly in the sea. In that moment, they see that healing and wholeness are not cheap. They see that to receive the love and forgiveness and healing of Jesus Christ is not always an easy thing. They could have rejoiced. And they could have said, you know what Mas-

ter, thank you, and we have a few more friends back in town who could really use your help.

But they don't; they see that healing is not always pretty; they see that receiving the gift of salvation requires hard choices. And so they ask Jesus to leave. To them, the news is not good news. The gospel is too costly. They decide that they can put up with their madmen and their demons, so long as they can live on the other side of town and so keep their swine a safe distance away. To Jesus, the townsfolk say thanks, but no thanks, and they send him on his way. Jesus casts out demons, and the Gerasenes cast out Christ.

The sin of Gerasenes, brothers and sisters, is that they have just gotten used to it all. They tolerate madness and darkness by pretending that it is not there. They prefer

using chains and shackles and locking up the problem people in places that are out of sight and away from respectable society. They love swine more than they love their neighbor, and even though life is pretty rotten in the places they pretend do not exist, life in the swine district is quite profitable and comfortable. We have our bank accounts and steady income, thank you very much. We enjoy the safety of home and church, where the stained-glass is always rose-colored, making sure that we never have to look out onto the world that needs a savior.

And as for the Gerasenes, so also for us and for all Christians. That question is so important. What have we gotten used to? What problems in our homes and neighborhoods, what problems in our parish have we learned to live with? Have we set aside the kingdom of heaven for business as usual? We see one another, but whom have we allowed to become invisible? How often do we cast out Christ and say the Church's mission will have to continue without our help.

Brothers and sisters, this morning we celebrate the Eucharistic liturgy. We give thanks to the one God and Father for the gift of salvation through his Son and for pouring out his Holy Spirit upon us and upon this world, and we choose today to receive the holy mysteries in the fear of God, and with faith and love. But on Monday, what will we choose? Will we choose salvation, or will we choose swine? Will we take up the hard work of love and mercy and justice? Will we open the doors of our church to all who need what have in abundance? Or like the Gerasenes will we beg Jesus to depart, and to go back to his own city?

(continued on p.4)

Homily on the Demoniacs, (cont'd p.3)

At the end of the Gospel this morning, the man who had been healed is sitting next to Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And scripture says that he begs Jesus to allow him to follow. And Christ says, no, return to your own house and proclaim what great things God has done for you. But interestingly, the man doesn't do this exactly. Luke says that the man went his way and proclaimed throughout the whole city, not what great things God had done for him, but what great things Jesus had done for him.

Brothers and sisters, we have been touched by the love of God and the cross of Christ. May we proclaim throughout the whole city what great things Jesus has done for us. May we proclaim the good news, not just at 30 Myers Heights on Sundays, but like Christ, may we also seek out the forbidden cemeteries in the off-limits land around us. May we choose to share with others what they really need, and what we have received in abundance. May we freely give, because we have already received so freely from our God and Savior Jesus Christ.

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The Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, continued from last issue

Two parallel universes co-exist and mutually intersect. There is interpenetration between them, they are not isolated from one another. And in earthly life we have the opportunity to come into contact with a parallel spiritual world.

A non-believer is able to perceive only the universe in which we are, only the material world. And behind the material world he does not feel, does not see and does not know the reality of the spiritual world, in contrast to a believing person who not only believes that somewhere in heaven there is some kind of good beginning, but lives a religious life, prays, participates in the sacraments of the church. And the believer has no doubts about the existence of a parallel universe. The only question is how to name it.

Of course, we do not know when our world appeared – 13 billion 800 million years ago, as scientists calculated, or earlier, or maybe later. But we know that our world was created by God and that if the universe is really expanding, which is just one of the hypotheses, it is because

The Kingdom of Heaven begins on Earth

it has an engine – God. And even if the universe originated from a big bang or several explosions, then all of this had to be started by someone, and God is the One who launched this movement.

Why is it so important for us to know that there is a parallel universe? Because sooner or later we will all be there. Often, people fear death and what awaits them beyond the threshold of death. But we have a precious and unique opportunity right now, in earthly life, to get in touch with another world, where we all will one day be. In holy scripture, we read where Apostle Paul was caught up to the third heaven and heard unspeakable words that cannot be conveyed in human language. What does the apostle tell us? And why does he talk about this, if even in human language it is impossible to describe what he came in contact with in the spiritual world, which he called the third heaven?

The Apostle Paul tells us about the reality of spiritual, church, and religious life, about the reality of contact with another world. This reality was felt and seen by Saint Andrew the Fool, when during the divine service he saw the Most Holy Virgin praying for the people and covering the city with Her honest omophorion. We also come into contact with this reality when we pray to the Lord, the Most Holy Theotokos and the saints, when we feel the presence of angels and the departed during a divine service.

The Lord gives each of us an opportunity to get near the Kingdom of Heaven, to the very least, and anticipate the bliss that awaits those who

love God in eternal life, while we are here on earth, even if we are not taken to the third heaven and hear unspeakable words. This is why we love and value worship. That is why we come to the temple of God and every time we partake of the Holy Mysteries of Christ, we feel that we have joined eternal life, a different existence, the eternal origin.

Let us treasure this special experience that the Lord gives us in worship, in the Sacraments of the Church, in the communion of the Holy Mysteries of Christ. Let us ask the Lord to give us the strength to join the spiritual world and prepare ourselves for the transition to another world that awaits each of us. Amen.

