

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

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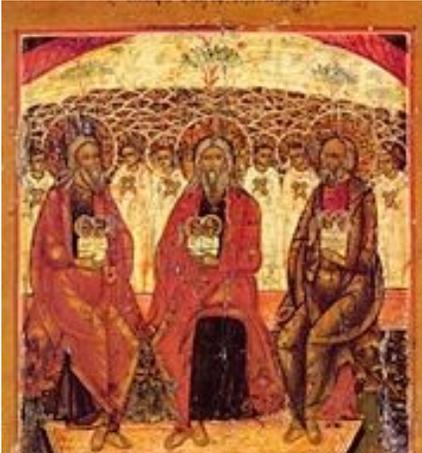
Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be Forever!



Volume 9 Issue 442

27th Sunday after Pentecost–Sunday of the Forefathers

Sunday, December 13, 2020



Today is the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers of Christ. The Lord calls on us this day to recall His earthly forefathers through whom God the Father prepares the way for the holy Incarnation of His Word, the Logos of God. It is through His Word that God creates all that was made and through whom the whole creation will be made

anew, including, and especially us, His beloved human creation, alone created in His holy image and likeness.

On this day, we begin to ponder in advance of the Feast of His holy Nativity what it means that God took on human flesh and human nature to become one of His own creation. Remarkably, in doing so, He adds Himself to the genealogy of that created human order He Himself established by the proceeding of His own Word. Think about that for one moment! This act, called kenosis in the Greek, or “self-emptying,” is God’s ultimate “condescension,” toward us, that is, it demonstrates to us the humility of God, manifested in no greater wise than through His holy Incarnation.

God, who is outside the universe He created, wills to become incarnate, one of His own creation, for the sake of us
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***27th Sunday after Pentecost ***

** St. Herman of Alaska **

Epistle: Colossians 3:4-11

Gospel: Luke 14: 16-24

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 don’t shoot the darkness-we turn on the lights, by Fr. George Dobarakis

We don’t shoot the darkness; we just turn the light on’ (St. Porphyrios) The great contemporary saint and much-loved Elder Porphyrios is talking about an ordinary experience: if we want to get out of the dark, we don’t take violent action, such as taking potshots at it. All we do is turn the light on. He said this in order to emphasize that the same is true in the spiritual life.

What’s that? Given that we live in a world which, because of sin, has lost

contact with the light which is God, and are therefore living in spiritual darkness- ‘God is light and there is no darkness in Him’ [Jn. 1, 5]- the only thing we can do is to turn to the light. In other words, to turn to God.

But what do we actually do? Do we turn to what should be considered self-evident: the light of Christ and God? We’re not talking here only about those who are outside the Christian faith and the Church- they

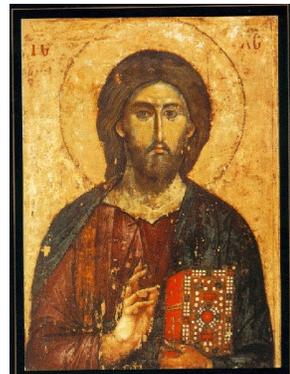
have excuses enough that keep them outside the light of Christ. We’re talking in particular about those who are in the Church, about ourselves, whose alignment with the world is often so great that we’re virtually living as atheists.

Why? Because the world has trapped us in its coils, and repentance, as the path to the Lord, seems like attempting Everest. Instead, our way is, ‘Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we
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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. 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, Jack, Stephen, Louise, Marcia, George, Evan, Ryan, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Paula, Andrea, Matthew, Corella, Mike, Ron, Renee, Daniel, Frankie, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

When God seems Absent by Fr. Tryphon

Sometimes we enter a dark place where God seems distant from us. This is only an illusion, for God is closer to us than our own breath. When you find it difficult to pray, light your lamp before your icons and sit silently before them. Say to God, I

am hurting and sad, and am unable to speak to You, so I need You to speak to my heart. Sometimes the most profitable spiritual growth can take place in such periods of brokenness because we see in these moments how very much we need God and depend upon Him.

Be not fearful, dear ones, for God is near, and will not leave you. The Lord is allowing these dry moments, where you are fearing He has left you, as the way of making you reach out to Him. When we are struggling, or even suffering, we grow stronger in our faith. Prayer will return as long as you give God moments in your life when you avail yourself in silence, and listen for His voice.

The parent who constantly does his child's homework, does him no favor, for the child never learns to stand on his own, and will forever remain dependent on his parent. The Lord wants us to grow strong in our faith, while entering into a mature relationship with Him. If we do not learn to stand on our own, we will be like the codependent child, never having the skills to reach high places, weak, and fearful.

We don't shoot the darkness..., cont'd from p. 1)

we die'. As a result our day is shrouded in the pall of our passions and the 'moonless love of sin' which, as in the case of the harlot in the Gospel, has cast its veil over us. So what do we do?

There are moments when we do want to change. This is because the grace of holy baptism continues to work in the depths of our heart, even as a mere glimmer. It's particularly the 'wages of sin', which crash over us in great waves. The sorrow, worry, melancholy, sudden rages and turmoil we feel are what often make us envision the light and wish it to be in our life.

That's a time of God's grace and we should make good use of it, because such a moment of light can stamp the whole of the rest of our life. At the moment when we remember Christ, we shouldn't waste the opportunity. 'Lord, save me', Peter cried out when he was sinking. The Lord grasped him by the hand and saved him.

And beyond that: the above words of Saint Porphyrios also hold true for

those who are more advanced, 'perfect' Christians, we might say, who at some stage or stages in their life are wearied by their spiritual



struggle, relax its intensity, become disappointed, ready to despair. It seems that the temptations of the devil are getting the upper hand.

In these instances, then, in the difficulties of the spiritual life, we need to remember the words of the holy Elder: 'We don't shoot the darkness; we

just turn the light on'. At another point, the same saint explains: 'Every time I saw temptation, i.e. the darkness coming, I did what a frightened little child does: it turns to its father and falls into his arms'. In a similar example, the holy abbot Saint John the Short says: 'When I see temptation threatening me like a wild animal coming at me, I climb up into the tree of prayer'.

The darkness does, indeed, often come to visit us: the devil doesn't take time off. And our passions aren't easy to shake off, either, for as long as we're in this world. The solution and the 'exit strategy' are well known and right before us, however. We have to turn decisively and with a fervent heart to Our Lord Jesus Christ, 'Who alone is able to save' [Heb. 5, 7] . Even just transferring our attention to the icon of Christ, Our Lady, the saints, is enough to get us started on overcoming the difficulties of these times. We just need to want the light rather than the darkness.

(Homily on Sunday of the Forefathers, cont'd from p.1)

sinner, who continuously reject and rebel against Him. Such is God's great love and mercy for us. Such are the attributes of the One, true God in Trinity.

The list of those ancestors of Christ—the holy forefathers—contains a list of the “who’s who” of the Old Testament—men and women, sinners and foreigners, all of whom manifested extraordinary faith, repentance, humility, willingness to be in this world but not of this world, who lived in the fear of God, an attribute in response to God’s mercy that we see precious little of in our own day. That respect, holy fear, was enough to motivate them to have faith and truly live for God without excuse.

The women among these ancestors, such as Rahab, a foreigner, and Ruth point to the prominent place that women will play in mankind’s redemption through the Virgin Mary, the new Eve, the new model of womanhood, along with the women disciples of the Lord—the holy Myrrh-bearers, but also, being a foreigner, Ruth demonstrates that the Messiah comes to redeem all of humanity, human nature itself, in order to create a new race of Adam—one not based on or race, but in the eternal foundation that is our new identity in Christ God, a race capable of deification, participation in the life God is, conquering sin and the passions, so that we may be able to attain to the near presence of God in His eternal Kingdom.

Yes, even before He sent His disciples to preach the good news to “all nations”, Christ Himself hails, in part, from Gentile seed. The Jew of Jews, St. Paul, reminds us of this truth in today’s Epistle, saying, “put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all” (Col. 3:11). Our new birth means that we ground our identity in the heavenly reality of life with Christ here and now, striving for growth in communion with God, fighting the temporal passions that are part of this temporal and passing life, so that we may inherit eternal life as fellow victors with the Saints.

We who worship here today are inheritors of this

promise that God made to Abraham when He declared, “in your seed, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 26:4). Many Jews, who did not follow the prophets, saw this promise as given purely through the Abrahamic blood line, grounded in this world and, in turn, partaking of the fallen race of Adam.

But God had something greater in mind: the renewal and regeneration of the human race itself where everyone is called. No one is excluded from the calling to be born anew in Christ, the new Adam, to become a co-heir with Him. St. Paul reminds us of this truth today:

“Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry... anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth... since

you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him...” (Colossians 3)

So, we see that there’s a great participation here in our salvation that you and I must muster for salvation’s sake in deed but also in mind and attitude, to exercise our free will. We strive with much effort and in the fear of God to “put to death,” as St. Paul says, all those passions, sins, that otherwise pollute our souls and keep us from communion with God, living out that calling.

God’s will is clear for us: He desires to give us a new name, a new identity, a new beginning, a new nature, to bring us to enlight-

enment, but what if we don’t avail ourselves of this great gift of God’s mercy? What if we keep putting off repentance out of fear, a form of pride, of over reliance on self and not on God, what if we take the Orthodox life in Christ on our terms, not making a priority of Christ and His Church?

Today’s Gospel is an invitation, yes; it is also a warning not to take God’s mercy and love for granted. All are called to the marriage Feast (that of Christ and His bride, the Church), but not all choose to be among His chosen, that is, to deny themselves, submit themselves and their self-will to the fullness of humanity, life in Christ, to take up the cross that is our denial of self. God’s life is

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Homily on the Sunday of the Forefather (cont'd p.3)

God's life is never forced upon us; we can choose death, that is, apartness from God and His life. None of us, even those who attend church regularly, can assume we're already among the saved because 'being saved' is the ongoing working out of our salvation, the ongoing taking up of our cross necessary for the new life in Christ and our continued journey into greater union with Him.

The message of today's Gospel, the invitation to the marriage feast, is that those who reject the fullness of the life in Christ are not worthy of that life but to those who desire it, thirst for it, our Lord says, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). He says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice, I will come into him and dine with him and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20).

Christ invites us to share in Communion with Him—the King of Kings, our Creator, our Savior who comes to be born, humble, lowly, in a manger in a cave among the beasts He created. To receive Him, to be in His near presence, we too must grow in humility and be grafted into the faith of those holy Fathers who've come before us, who did not withhold anything from God. It's because of their humility that the poor shepherds were the first to receive the news of Messiah's birth, for, as King David says, "a contrite and humble heart" God will never despise.

God loves us too much to hold back from warning us of the consequences of neglecting His life, our calling to new life in Him, that for which you and I have been

created. He is the Life, and in that life, there is no place for resting on our "laurels," or coming before the Bridegroom unprepared. We prepare ourselves by humbling ourselves and repenting, confessing our sins, changing our priorities and way of life. We prepare by struggling harder to put off the passions, all stubbornness and pride to be obedient to Christ and His Holy Church.

Advent is meant to spur us on to make our souls ready to meet Christ first, when He comes to us at Nativity in the Eucharist of the Feast, and second, as we await His glorious and awesome Second Coming. So we prayerfully beseech God daily for the things we need to lead holier, more loving, more obedient lives for Christ.

Advent by Fr. Vladimir Berzonsky

"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; on those who live in a land of deep shadow a light has shone. (ISAIAH 9:1)

Primarily, the season of Advent is a time for our concentrated preparing for the Kingdom of God's manifestation within us. By freeing ourselves from the things of this world we can better live and experience the Spirit of God dwelling in our souls. It is a time of pilgrimage—a spiritual journey to our true native land which the Lord has prepared for us.

Now it is advent, the time of His coming. Christ is on the way to my world, my city, my house and to me. How will He find it: what will He think of us; will He be

pleased? Ostensibly we are preparing for Christmas. For most of the season, we feel overwhelmed by the commercialism, external trappings, noise, and glitter of a society that has misplaced Christ in the Christmas holiday. Does this please Him?

We ought to become serious about freeing ourselves of all the material objects that are idols for so many, promising a happiness they are incapable of fulfilling; if we know that advent is just a time for learning to do without, then capitalist Xmas is a travesty of Christ's coming. It is in fact the very opposite of self-denial and spiritual preparation for communion with God in Christ. We sense His displeasure. Underneath the tinsel peeks out a sad, selfish and troubled world.

Can it be He'll find even a few who await His coming with hope and longing? Are there those who, while know-

ing themselves responsible for the world as it is, yet trust in His promise of another life and prepare themselves for it, while at the same time doing all in their capability to give content and a dimension of true values to this present world?

There were such in every age of the past, and God sought them out from their society: Abraham in Chaldea, Lot in Sodom, Moses in Midian, Elijah at the Cherith wadi and young Mary in Nazareth. While there are such remaining in the world, God's covenant with mankind is not abrogated. To fulfill advent, then, would be to make ourselves like them; a difficult task, but not impossible, for "With God, all things are possible."

