

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 12 Issue 577

8th Sunday after Pentecost-Jesus calms a storm at Galilee

July 30, 2023



Close your eyes and try to imagine the scenery. On the grassy plain, next to the lake, there are over 5,000 people. On the bank of the lake stand Jesus and His disciples. On the lake, a boat; probably a simple fishing boat. It is towards the end of the afternoon; the sun is setting, but it is still very hot. Everybody has been fed from the miraculous bread; there is satisfaction;

the stomach is full; the sick have been healed and the lepers cleansed; the blind see and the demons have been driven away. Silence is starting to settle. It seems that all could rest.

However, Jesus gives two commands. First, He sends the crowds away. The Greek word for “sending away” means: He delivers them from their bonds, He frees them from their chains. They are free to go. Then He turns towards His beloved disciples who usually never leave Him, and He tells them to get into the boat and go before Him on the other side. The Greek verb used here is very strong: it means “to compel somebody to do something”. The disciples evidently do not want to be separated from the Lord; nevertheless, Jesus compels them to embark while He retires on the hill to pray in solitude.

(continued p.3)

+ 8th Sunday after Pentecost +

+++Apostles Silas & Silvanus+++

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Gospel: Matthew 14:14-22

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, *Lorve 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.*

What does the Cross mean for us today? Fr. Robert McClean (part 2)

This is why *eros* (lust) and pride are often confused for love and results in sexual perversion and confusion when not in accordance with God’s revealed will. Christ is the One who teaches us what love is and how to love: “We love Him because He first loved us,” St. John declares in his first Epistle (I Jn. 1:9).

This Love directs us to the cross, to the ultimate sign and action of God’s love, manifested in the Incarnation, in Christ’s saving Passion, and in His calling us to share in

that new life He’s made for us who have “put Him on.”

Love is, then, both sacrificial *and* holy; true love becomes life-giving because it further unites us with God and with each other as we learn to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Christ, not only outwardly in our acts, but inwardly as we’re transformed and grow in unity with Christ, as we partake of the Divine Nature (II Peter 1:4).

True love means desiring for others what God

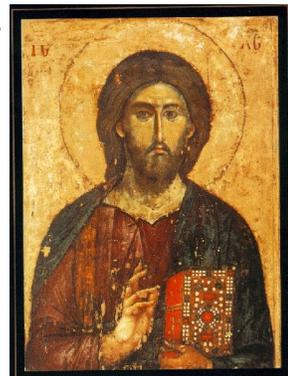
desires for them. It is a far cry from the ‘virtue signaling’ and affirmation of sinful choices and lifestyles of today’s culture. But when Christ stands at the center of our lives, our priorities, He’s at the center of our love too because always, *there stands the cross*, which defines love!

In other words, as Romanian priest-monk Fr. Arsenie Boca exclaims, “he who makes the sign of the cross, must also be prepared to carry his cross.” When we carry

(continued on 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



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 that our souls
may be saved.

News and Notes

We welcome all who are with us today and invite you to join us at our coffee social following the Divine Liturgy.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

Please keep the following in your prayers: Mother Onufria, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Mackenzie, Mike, Jessica, Lisa, Jeff, Bonnalee, Stan, David, Carol, Norris, Debbie, Linda, Daniel, Matthew, Tracy, Michael the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

From St. John Kronstadt

Faith in God's existence is closely connected with faith in the existence of our own souls, as a part of the spiritual world. God's existence is as evident to the pious mind as its own being, because every thought, good or bad, every desire, every intention, word or act of such a mind is followed by a corresponding change in the state of the heart, peace or trouble, joy or grief, and this is the result of the action upon it of the God of spirits and bodies,

Who is reflected in the pious mind as the sun is reflected in a drop of water; the purer the drop is, the better, the clearer will be the reflection; the more turbid the drop, the dimmer will be the reflection; so that in the soul's state of extreme impurity or darkness, the reflection entirely ceases and the soul is left in a state of spiritual darkness, in a state of insensibility.

In this state the man having eyes, sees not, and having ears, hears not. Again, in relation to our souls, God may be likened to the outer air in relation to the mercury of the thermometer--with this difference, that the expansion and rest, rise and fall of the mercury proceed from the change in the state of the atmosphere; whilst, in the first case, God remains unchangeable, everlasting and eternally good and just. Whilst the soul, changeable in its relation to God, suffers changes in itself, thus it unavoidably expands and obtains peace of heart when it draws nearer to God by faith and good works, and unavoidably contracts, becomes restless and wearied, when it withdraws itself from God by unlawful acts, want of faith, and unbelief.

What does the Cross mean for us?, cont'd from p.1

our cross, we claim *Christ's* victory inwardly and outwardly, we guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus from the demons and their vices, but we also witness to those around us the truth that His victory is for all mankind, that all are loved by God and called to holiness and new life in communion with Him. If we love, we are also willing to stand firm in proclaiming sin that which God has revealed as sin even as we point the way to repentance and healing with our own witness of the truth.

So, that we may gain the victory with Christ over this world and all that's passing away, we too die to ego and the world, to secular demands to keep the cross and Christ's truth hidden to ourselves. Christ calls on us to come outside ourselves, to give of ourselves, to become courageous witnesses of the life in Christ to this perishing world.

Why? Because the love of God compels us, because loving Christ, we desire healing and salvation not just for ourselves but also for those

whom God brings into our lives. This too is a cross, a self-denial in a world where we're told to keep our faith to ourselves, focus only on ourselves, where the truth of Christ is an affront



to the demands secular humanism.

Those who have denied themselves and taken up their cross to follow Christ gain the victory as fellow heirs of Christ's Kingdom. This is our Lord's great promise of love to us, "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life

for My sake and the gospel's will save it."

We proclaim this love, this hope, to a world that no longer knows what love is or how to love. We give of ourselves to witness to the truth in word and deed. In taking up our cross daily, we proclaim the reality of Christ's life and victory over sin and death. We who are struggling with our sins and persevere in that struggle bear witness to the victory of the cross. We loudly and undeniably proclaim the Truth and Reality that Christ is that life; in Him is our sure hope and healing. Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae sums up this truth when he writes, "The cross is the power of Christ, which when taken up by us, can transform the world into paradise."

So, examine your life this day. Are you truly denying yourself, taking up your cross to follow Christ? Take up your cross, follow Christ, and know that He will be with you every step of the way. His cross will protect you and guide you.

(Homily on Jesus calms the sea, (cont'd from p.1)

Now imagine yourself on the boat trying to sail straight towards the other side of the lake. The sea is rough; the wind is contrary; you have been working hard for hours, since the evening; the night is dark; and now you almost have no strength left. It is very late, almost early morning. It is that time that when people who are close to death usually die. It is the fourth watch of the night: you no longer expect anything. Though, Jesus comes walking on the water.

You heard the story. Now open the eyes of your heart, listen with the ears of your heart, and try to understand what the Lord teaches the Church. The Fathers give us the key. The disciples represent the faithful: that is, all of us gathered here. The crowds are the God-fearing people who are not members of the Church yet. The boat is the Church. And the sea represents the world. The wind which is contrary is Satan who is trying to turn us away from our goal: the kingdom of God, i.e. the other side of the lake. The rough waves of the sea are the afflictions and tribulations, the trials and temptations which assail us during all our life. You know of course that the crossing of the lake in the boat is Christian life.

Now understand: the Lord compels us, His Church, to live in the tribulations and afflictions of this world. The prayer of Christ for His people in the Gospel of Saint John shows that we should not ask the Lord for not leading us into trials, but that we should ask Him not to let us succumb to temptations: "I do not pray that

you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one." Or in the Gospel of Saint Matthew: he who endures to the end shall be saved. We have no choice. Man is tested by God, and therefore the afflictions and trials are a source of joy [See: 1 Cor 10:13; James 1:2; 1 Peter 1:6; James 1:12; 1 Peter 4:12]. It is a source of joy because we are put to the test so that our faith may be purified.

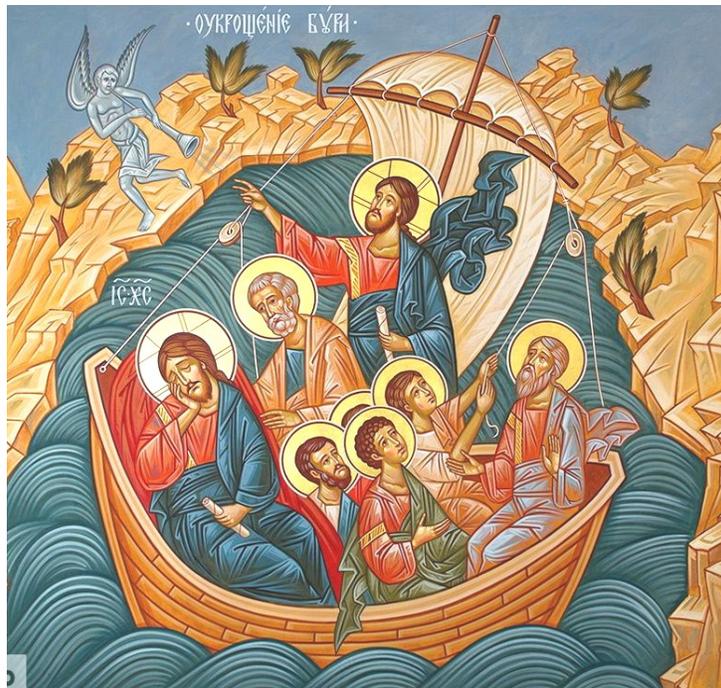
We should never forget that God has never abandoned humanity. Even now, when we are sailing through the lake, apparently alone and forgotten, the Lord Jesus is present by His prayer and His intercession while in solitude on the mountain. Finally He shows at the 4th watch of the night. The Fathers explain: at the 1st watch of the night God has sent the Law to Israel; at the 2nd watch, He has sent the prophets; at the 3rd watch, He gave His Son to the world; at the 4th watch of the night, when we

are ready to give up, He comes back in glory to lead us into the Kingdom. These are the four steps of His divine Mercy.

And the Lord arrives walking on the water. And when asked, he says His Name: "I am." This has nothing to do with some of our silly modern translations using informal and casual language: "It is I." "I am" is the Septuagint translation of the Name of God which is revealed to Moses at Sinai (Exodus 3:14). This explains the fear of the disciples: it is not only a simple fear at seeing someone walking on the water, but they are frightened at hearing the Name of God which is never used lightly, a Name that only the High Priest would pronounce only once a year in the Temple at Jerusalem.

However, Love kills fear. Peter, the chief among the Apostles, volunteers out of love for the Master to go to Him. His faith is great. But our desire to love is human

and is only a pale reflection of Divine Love: Peter's faith fails him. This limit to our faith is called doubt. Doubt may have its own positive side: it teaches us humility, it teaches us constantly that nothing is possible unless we trust fully in the Lord. Do you think that Peter walked by himself on the water because of his faith? Not at all. It is not so simple. Peter was able to walk because the Lord granted him the strength and power to do it; and because at the same time Peter hoped in the Lord. The Lord never abandons us: when Peter doubted, the Lord was still with him. If not Peter would have



drowned right away. We should always remember that faith is not given once and for all. It is a constant interaction between God and Man: a constant double movement from God to Man and from Man to God.

When we are put to the test, we are tested on our availability to God; we are tried on our ability to give ourselves totally to the Lord. Fully abandoning ourselves in trust to God is the sign that we have passed the test. Therefore, when you will go through some sort of tribulation or temptation, remember the Gospel of today and say to yourself: I am sailing in the boat towards the Kingdom, the wind and the waves are rough, however the Lord is here with me: He will give me the strength if I put my hope only on Him. And then descend into the chamber of your heart and ask yourself: am I ready to say to Him the hardest words to say: Lord, I abandon myself to Thee; not my will, but Thy will.

In volume two of the Philokalia, we find the ‘Four Hundred Texts on Love’ by Saint Maximos the Confessor. There are many sayings by the saint, but we shall focus on the first two of the first hundred: ‘Love is a holy state of the soul, disposing it to value knowledge of God above all created things. We cannot attain lasting possession of such love while we are still attached to anything worldly.’

This good disposition seeks knowledge of God, requires that we have the intention to know God, that is to love learning about God. Love is the source of this pursuit and knowledge strengthens this love and nourishes it. If our own disposition is to become good, it has to resemble the goodness of God; it’s as if we’re saying that we have God’s disposition, because he alone is good.

It was Mary Magdalene’s knowledge of Christ that made her seek him after his death, despite the fact that she was naturally in mourning, since she’d just lost the Lord. She knew, however, that the relationship with such a teacher wouldn’t die because of death. His body may have been buried, but it wasn’t possible for her faith, the relationship she’d had with him, to be buried. Everything was still alive within her. Even after his physical absence, she continued to seek him.

This frame of mind was so entrenched that the fact of his death made no difference to it. She was so faithful to Christ’s presence, even when he was dead. She was aware, inside herself, that this presence had another dimension, although she didn’t as yet know what. He was the cause of her good disposition. A disposition which didn’t retreat, didn’t look back. So, she went to the tomb at first light. In her mourning, in her waiting with the myrrh, and in the pain of her heart over her great loss, Saint Mary Magdalene expresses the feelings of everyone who’s in pain. She’s a model for all those who’ve lost someone near and dear and reminds us that the relationship remains real. She didn’t lose Christ; he was always present within her.

How often have we, too, sat like this, in pain, empty-handed, facing the loss of a loved one. She didn’t cry because she was agonizing over whether she would enter the Kingdom of God or not. She didn’t weep in a formal way over a sin and out of fear of the Law of Moses. We often weep over a sin because it affects our self

-image or because we’ve broken a rule.

But real tears are always over a relationship and its breakdown. They have to do with love, because with sin there’s always the chance that we’ll lose a relationship or that love will grow cold. The saint was praying over a presence and an absence. Naturally, her mourning over these terrible events prevented her from thinking about the resurrection. At that particular time, it was impossible for her to think about such things. Not all Christians are always ready, at a time of mourning, to see everything through the eyes of faith and the resurrection. It takes time.

Of course, love is linked to mourning. Over whom are we weeping? The person we love. But here St Maximos presents us with other dimensions of love. A love more

powerful than death. A love that lives for ever. This dispassion doesn’t end here on earth. If we focus on the word ‘love’, each of us can say something from their experience and can reveal how nourished their soul has been by love. Some might say they’ve been wounded by their love. But when a good disposition is united with love of Christ, it becomes a mystery.

The mystery of Christ’s eternal love is never going to abandon a true, good and stable disposition, even in sorrow. Christ in pain, Christ crucified, who forgave the soldiers who’d been mocking him the day before, would not have left his true disciple and her soul to writhe, without consolation. Christ knows about pain, as he also knows true love, and so he didn’t leave Magdalene sitting with the myrrh, in the solitude of her grief.

Christ is with us in our grief, in our sickness, and in our loss. He’s with us and addresses us by name, as he did Magdalene: ‘Mary!’. All we have to do is go to him and weep, to seek his face in our grief, so that he can enlighten us and explain how we should deal with what has happened. Since he experienced the most extreme pain on the cross, he knows about pain and being tested. So, he alone is able to stand by us.

Magdalene wept for Christ at his tomb. She wanted to share everything with him. And we, too, can weep with Christ over someone we love, asking to accept the event, asking for faith in the resurrection, faith that the person hasn’t been lost, but lives. We can ask God to give us a sense of the presence of the person, so that we can continue our relationship with them in a different way, giving us time and strength to deal life.

