

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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23rd Sunday after Pentecost-Parable of The Good Samaritan

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Christ gives us this parable in response to a question put to Him as a test by a lawyer: “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Now, people are putting Christ to the test all the time, asking questions like, “Why do I have it so tough? Why do I pray and (so it seems to me) nothing happens? Why do I not get what I want, what I asked for? Why does that person seem to have it so much ‘easier’ than I do?”

But all such questions are, in reality, also an ‘opportunity’: if we recognize what’s behind such questions, to make them into a cry for help from God: an admittance of lack of faith is a cry for more; a recognition of ego-centricism becomes a prayer for increased focus on Christ, of praying for others to get our focus off ourselves and the problems we often create for ourselves by turning inward instead of turning to our Savior, the only One who can really help us.

In the case of the lawyer, Jesus aids him in coming to see his own pridefulness; He helps him to gain humility by asking the lawyer a question in return: “what’s written in the Law?” In response, the lawyer quotes from Leviticus 19:18, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and
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+ 23rd Sunday after Pentecost +

St. John the Merciful of Alexandria

Epistle: Ephesians 2:4-10

Gospel: Luke 10: 25-37

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 Christ’s commandment, *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.*

What does it mean to belive in God, by St Arsenia, part 3

But still, these moments are better than imaginary peace. In these moments, the soul can truly understand its state, not deceiving itself by its imaginary goodness, and doesn’t consider the concepts of the mind as its own possessions. At this time, if the soul only relates to everything in this blessed moment correctly, the soul can descend very low.

And if it agrees to love its own baseness, its utter poverty, if it gives preference to its neighbor and the Lord—it will rejoice

that He alone is exalted and that there are parts of my nature that draw near to Him, then it will taste consolation from the good that’s not created by the ego, but rather effects it’s mortification.

State of the human soul

The state of a fallen sinner’s soul fully corresponds to the words of the Lord: *Thorns also and thistles shall [the earth] bring forth to thee* (Gen. 3:18). And the earth of our heart constantly grows passions and sins. The activity of a soul not overshadowed

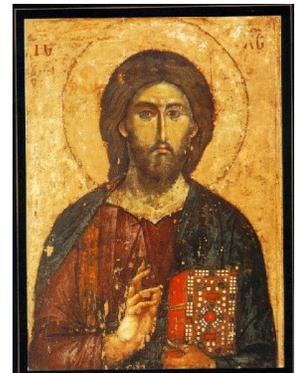
by the grace of God, directed toward the purification of the heart, is always difficult, heavy, and powerless. *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread* (Gen. 3:19).

The passions are uprooted like thorns from the ground with great difficulty and prolonged struggle and again, with a little negligence, during enticing moments, they’re ready to be re-born, and will be born, and grow in the heart, choking out the seed of the word of God that has
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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.





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.

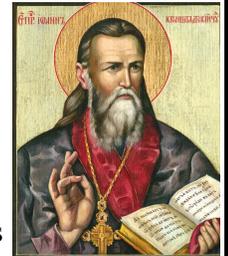
Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

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

From St. John Kronstadt

From the time when man, by his own will, fell away from God, he, like an animal that was once domestic, but afterwards grew wild in a thick forest, reluctantly looks back upon the place of his former abode, preferring the darkness of the forest--that is, of this world--to the light of the former place--that is, of God's paradise. It is difficult for him to unite himself to God, and when so united, he often falls away again from Him.

It is difficult for him to sincerely believe in God, and in all that He has opened to him, and he does not constantly strive to preserve in his heart the Heavenly gift of faith. If God does not leave a blade of grass, a flower, or a small leaf of a tree without His good providence, will He leave us? O, let every man be convinced with his whole heart that God is true to Himself in His providence for even the least of His creatures. Let him understand that the Creator invisibly dwells in all His creatures. In the words of our Savior, God clothes the grass of the field, feeds the fowls of the air.



In how many ways does not God rejoice us, His creatures, even by flowers? Like a tender mother, in His eternal power and wisdom, He every summer creates for us, out of nothing, these most beautiful plants. Let us enjoy them, not forgetting to glorify the goodness of the Creator, our heavenly Father; let us on our part, too, reply to His love by loving hearts.

What does it mean to believe in God? cont'd from p.1

not had time to take root and grow stronger in it. Then it will not only bear fruit but also to nourish the soul. As soon as the source—our mind—is cleansed with great difficulty, the streams of impure thoughts will disturb it again, fill it with impurity, and not allow the thirsting soul to drink the pure water of Divine revelations. *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.*

The soul labors and must labor with bloody sweat so as not to starve to death, so that by this constant heavy work it might not allow the thorns of its passions to grow within itself, so it might not turn into a wilderness, so that by constant purification, by cutting them off, the soul could feed on the daily bread that the Great Sower sows on its ground. The Lord doesn't leave a man's labors without recompense.

When it overshadows a soul, the grace of God burns the thorns of the passions and brings forth fruit itself. *Whoso eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, hath eternal*

life... And out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water (Jn. 6:54, 7:38). It is in this state alone that the soul no longer craves to drink from earthly springs. Our work also consists in gradually cleaning these earthly springs, to at least drink pure water from them drop by drop, and not draw up frogs and all kinds of filth from muddy water. *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,* until the Bread that has come down from Heaven feeds you.

The punishments of the Lord "The proud man's punishment is his fall," said St. John Climacus. The Lord wisely uses this punishment as a cure for pride. But all the actions of God's providence and His punitive allowances are for a man's good only when he strives to achieve unearthly goals. If he has set the salvation of the One God as the only goal of his life, then everything that happens to him serves for his success.

When deprived of all earthly goods, when enduring and accepting blows to all his senses, when enduring dis-

honor and more—where the strongest soul would be crushed—but having set some earthly good as the goal of his searches, there the God-loving soul receives strength, wisdom, and freedom. And if it loses anything in these sorrows that occur, it loses only that connection with the passions that bound it which it could not break by its own will alone, but because of the passions is only destroyed by the work of God.



It's a great blessing not to be enslaved to anything earthly, even in the soul's aspirations. Then every action of God, directed towards salvation, acts beneficially. The soul that renounces the passions receives a sense of virtues. Having renounced
(continued p.4, col. 2)

Homily on the Good Samaritan, (cont'd from p.1)

with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus affirms his answer, but in his pridefulness, the lawyer’s still not satisfied: he’s still hoping to stump Jesus so he asks Him yet another question: “And who is my neighbor?”

The parable of the Good Samaritan is Jesus’ final response. But Jesus turns the lawyer’s question on its head: instead of answering the question, “who is my neighbor?” Jesus shows the lawyer what it means to be a godly neighbor, and, he calls on all of us to do likewise. Jesus teaches us throughout the Gospels to prioritize those people we meet who are in need, both physically and spiritually. In fact, the two are inseparable in the Gospels. Now, this is not some ‘social gospel’ that Christ is teaching, which generally ministers exclusively to the physical and temporal aspects of need. The priority with Christ is always on a person’s immortal soul, on their finding life in Him, repentance from their sins, which, if left unrepented of, would keep them from being able to be in His holy presence and find healing and glory for their souls.

An African proverb says, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” I like that proverb, but we can put an Orthodox twist on it that strengthens it further: feed a man for a day and you aid his temporal body; bring a man to Christ and His Church and you feed his soul for eternity. In other words, bring a person to the Church and Christ gives him the tools he needs to address his greatest needs—even physical needs as the two are intricately connected. Bring such a man to the Church and Christ feeds his soul while also providing him with a family to love him and help care for him, challenge him and encourage him, love him—body and soul, coming to know Him who is Eternal Life.

The fact is though that someone lying on the side of the road, beaten and bloody cannot escape our notice, but the spiritual needs of those ‘storm-tossed’ by our culture, ravaged by the ‘thieves’ of the truth: secularism and nihilism, and all godlessness, is something so ubiquitous, we can easily find ourselves numb to their need and suffering. We can easily find ourselves just like that priest and Levite, who pass by indifferent to the needs of the dying souls around us. The goodness of the Samari-

tan can be summed up in one word, “mercy.” He showed mercy on the man who fell among robbers. Mercy and love are very closely related. Mercy and love, when they’ve taken root in us through Christ, produce compassion and overcome indifference.

Some of the Fathers interpret the Good Samaritan to be a figure of Christ Himself: the bandages, oil and wine are sacramental images for the clothing of the neophyte at Baptism in a garment of white, signifying new birth, which heals us of the wounds of sin, the oil of Chrismation, gives us new life going forward in the Holy Spirit by whom we are sealed, the wine, which is the communion of the divine Blood of Christ, deifies us and leads us to eternal life with Christ God.

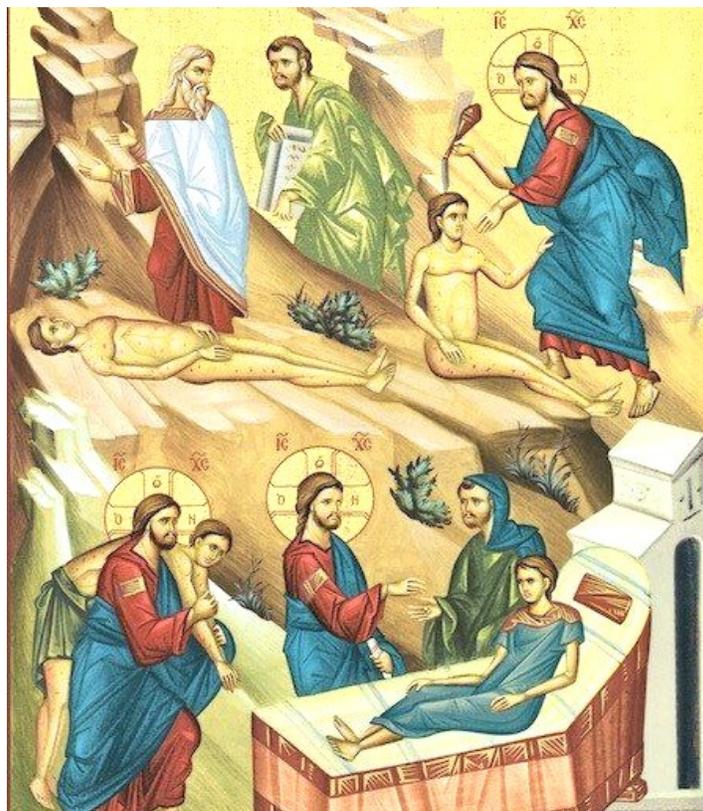
St. John Chrysostom says of the moral of this Parable, “Let us make our mercifulness abundant, let us give

proof of much love to man, both by the use of our money, and by our actions.” Yes, this is part of it.” During the Fast, we focus even more on giving alms, giving to the Church, and serving with our gifts because it’s an opportunity to grow in mercy and compassion. But it’s easier to give money to a cause we believe in. When we see Christ tangibly ministering to our needs or those of others, we naturally want to support and further that work. This is why we tithe. But St. John urges us beyond what is easy, however, saying, “Go then, and put a stop to the evil; pull out those who are drowning, though you descend into the very depth of the surge...”

Now here’s a challenge to us: do we love enough to ad-

dress with the love and truth of Christ the evil we see harming those around us? Are we willing to go that extra mile and really address the core issues in our own life, so we too can become an inspiration, an example, and a vehicle through which God can work in the lives of those around us? We don’t have to be already healed to minister to others; we do need, however, to be healING. In other words, we have to be taking our spiritual medicine if we’re going to have credibility with others whom we urge to do the same. We need to fight to make use of the tools of salvation Christ gives us if we’re to impact the world and the people around us with the Gospel of Christ.

When we come outside ourselves, our own struggles
(continued p.4, column 1)



and problems to love and care for those around us in body and in soul, when we really strive to love and serve, when we speak the Truth to those who need to hear it by authentically struggling to live that Truth—where else are they going to hear it if not from us in the Church—then we're assured that God will always supply in us what is lacking; He'll use such opportunities to work in us and through us.

Having finished His parable, Jesus asks the lawyer, "which of these was a neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And the lawyer responds, "he who showed mercy." Christ says, "Go and do the same." Pray to God for such opportunities to be used; pray for eyes of mercy. He who is Himself the Good Samaritan and calls on us to be the same, will give them to us.

Amen

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sensuality, it will come to experience humility, and so on. Having renounced its desires, its sin-loving will, its reasonings, it is led into the knowledge of the will of God. In the active fulfillment of the will of God, which is revealed to it for the salvific benefit of another, it's enlightened by Divine revelations. And once enlightened by them, it enters not only into purity, but also into passionlessness.

On different spiritual states

There can be no proper view of our sinfulness in a state of deadness. A dead man has no eyes with which to see, no tongue with which to entreat. In this state there can be only faith—not living, but firm and unshakeable—that the Creator can recreate again, if it pleases His goodness and His all-holy will, which arranges everything for the salvation of man. When the eyes begin to open, then the vision of one's sinfulness isn't forced, but is the natural state of the soul; and the soul's constant cry of mercy is also natural. But the transition from one state to another can't be self-willed.

You can, of course, come to this vision yourself, because the mind, enriched by reading the word of God, can enter into any spiritual state with the imagination, can stir the senses, move them for a while, and find comfort in this, but this is not the right path, and this labor is fruitless. What you take yourself, you yourself must keep and will surely lose at the slightest collision with life, with reality, because the state was false,

dreamy, imaginary. And that which comes from the Lord, that state into which the soul is led by the Lord Himself, is eternal, unchanging. It's not an action taken by the soul, but its condition. It can lose it only if it completely deviates from the correct spiritual path; and external conflicts, even its own infirmities and passions, will not take from it what has become its eternal inheritance.

The one thing needful

The only thing necessary, the one thing needful, the only thing that gives salvation and life to the spirit, the only goal that all souls and all angelic spirits strive for is the Lord. But it requires comprehensive work for everything to come to this single goal, for everything in the soul to unite in the One being sought, so the soul might seek the Lord in everything, seek the good that leads to Him, and renounce itself and the evil that alienates it from the Lord and gives growth to the ego.

On asceticism

What should our asceticism be like? And what is its goal? Our asceticism should consist in sobering up the body from drowsiness, from laziness, so it would attentively stand in church; in helping the body recover from despondency, the mind from vain thoughts, the heart from passionate feelings, so the inner man might completely stand before the Lord. This is the goal of all asceticism. But will the Lord lead us to achieve this desired

goal? Again, it's not for us to reason about this, but it would be sinful to give up our asceticism; and only despondency, reinforced by unbelief, based on pleasure, can neglect it, having made it its goal to satisfy its passionate desires.

The asceticism of repentance

This asceticism is difficult and long-lasting, but great and true. And if it's true, then it's possible with the help of the grace of God. Indeed, this path is the only true one. We must bring forth fruits of repentance; we must labor where we sinned, arise where we fell, amend that which was ruined, save that which we lost by our own negligence, by our own passions. Salvation is possible in every place and in every affair; it need not be sought outside of us; everything can be found in our souls—both Heaven and Hell.

(continued next issue)

