

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor



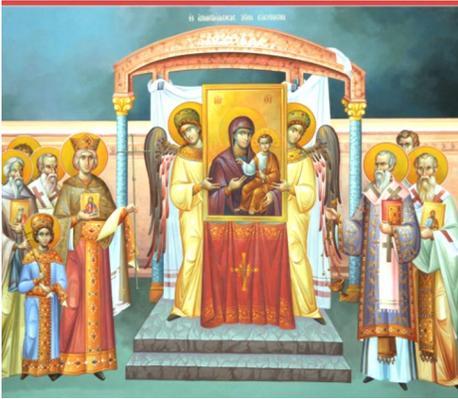
Glory be to Jesus Christ!

Glory be Forever!

Volume 13 Issue 606

1st Sunday of Great Lent-Triumph of Orthodoxy

February 18, 2024



Rejoicing today in the triumph of Orthodoxy on this first Sunday of Lent, we joyfully commemorate three events: one event belonging to the past; one event to the present; and one event which still belongs to the future. Whenever we have any feast or joy in the Church, we Orthodox first of all look back — for in our present life we depend on what happened in the past. We depend first of all, of course, on

the first and the ultimate triumph -- that of Christ Himself.

Our faith is rooted in that strange defeat which became the most glorious victory — the defeat of a man nailed to the cross, who rose again from the dead, who is the Lord and the Master of the world. This is the first triumph of Orthodoxy. This is the content of all our commemorations and of all our joy. This man selected and chose twelve men, gave them power to preach about that defeat and that victory, and sent them to the whole world saying preach and baptize, build up the Church, announce the Kingdom of God.

And you know, how those twelve men, very simple men indeed, simple fishermen, went out and preached. The world hated them, the Roman Empire persecuted them, and were covered in
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++ 1st Sunday of Great Lent ++

+St. Leo the Great, Pope of Rome+

Epistle: Heb: 11:24-26, 32-12:2

Gospel: John 1: 43-51

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.*

Homily on the Beatitudes by St. John Kronstadt

Beloved brothers, sisters and children in Christ, incline your ear—not just the external, but, more importantly, the one within, about which our Lord Jesus Christ said, *He that has ears to hear, let him hear* (Mt. 11:15).

Incline, I say, your ear to listening to the commandments of our Lord to attain beatitude. In the beginning, God created the human being in and for beatitude, for the beatitude that is eternal; but the sin that appeared in the world and penetrated in all people through a

single person, destroyed the beatitude of the people and subjected them to damnation, all kinds of sorrows, misfortunes, diseases and, finally, temporary and eternal death. Only the infinite love of God the Creator for his fallen creature, honored to be made in the image and likeness of God, could find a way to open a return path to the lost beatitude.

This way to restoration of the fallen is the incarnation, the life among people, the divine teaching and miracles, suffer-

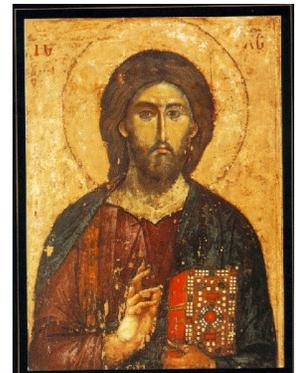
ing, death on the cross and the resurrection from the dead of the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ; and the way back to beatitude lies through abiding to his teaching, adhering to his ordinances, and obedience to lawful pastors and teachers of the churches. There is no other way to beatitude, as Christ says: *I am the way and the truth and the life: no one comes to the Father, but by me. I am the door: by me if any one enter in, he shall be saved* (Jn. 14:6, 10:9).

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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, Tamam, Catherine, Chuck, Theresa, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

From St. John Kronstadt

God's saints are near to believing hearts and, like the truest and kindest of friends, are ready in a moment to help the faithful and pious who call upon them with faith and love. We have for the most part to send, and have sometimes to wait long for earthly helpers, whilst we have not to send for nor wait long for spiritual helpers: the faith of Him who prays can place them close to his very heart in a moment, and he

will as speedily receive through faith full spiritual help.

In saying this, I speak by experience; by this I mean the frequent deliverance from affliction of heart through the intercession and patronage of the saints, and especially through the intercession of Our Lady, the Holy Virgin Mary. Probably some would say that this is the action of simple and firm faith, and a determined assurance in our deliverance from affliction, and not the intercession of the saints for us before God. No, it is not so. How can this be proved? It can be proved by the fact that if I do not call upon the saints known to me in hearty prayer, without making any distinction, if I do not see them with my spiritual vision, then I shall obtain no help, however great assurance I may have felt of being saved without their help.

I recognize, I feel clearly, that I receive help through the names of those saints upon whom I have called, because of my lively faith in them. First, I see my helpers by means of earnest faith; then, seeing them, I pray to them also with my whole heart, invisibly but intelligibly to myself.

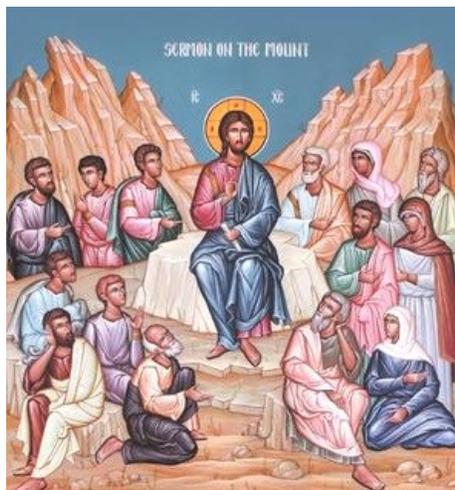
Homily on the Beatitudes, cont'd from p.1

How much do all of us crave for beatitude! How much do we fear and avoid sorrows and sicknesses! Though, unfortunately, we crave and seek beatitude on earth, where there is none, and not in Heaven, where it abides forever. We fear and avoid sorrows and sicknesses, while they are mostly, if not necessary, useful for us, for they heal the immortal soul suffering with many different passions. And, for sure, what beatitude can be in expulsion, in exile, in prison? This is our condition, our sins have banished all of us from paradise to this world, as though to a prison. What beatitude is there for those condemned to death?

You may say: there are many innocent pleasures on earth, which God does not forbid: for example, God gave wine that delights the heart of man, and opened the art of playing the psaltery, harp, organ, cymbals and many other musical instruments. he taught us to form choirs and sing with jubilation; he surrounded us with the birds that sing, as calling us to bliss

and joy; and before our eyes he spread the majestic spectacle of nature, in which we see the joy and happiness of creatures everywhere who call us to rejoice with them.

So, by the goodness of God, in this



world there are some innocent consolations for us, wounded by a sting of mortality, to relieve our wanderer's fate and sorrows. But these consolations must be used with moderation, without holding on to them in any way. We must strive for the promised

beatitude through the hardest way of labor, vigil, prayer, abstinence, purity and every virtue in which it is impossible to succeed without great suffering and temptation.

Beloved, our true, complete and eternal beatitude is in Heaven, where the All-Blessed God lives in unapproachable light, where the forefathers, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, hierarchs, martyrs, monks, the righteous and all the saints dwell; where the queen of Heaven and Earth, the Most Holy Mother of God, reigns together with her Son. The beatitude we have here, the earthly, bodily, and evanescent fleets like a dream; it is often coarse and impure. Only true virtue may anticipate the Heavenly beatitude on earth.

So, where can we seek the true way to beatitude? What guidance and which commandments should we observe to achieve it? Under the guidance of the Lord's nine Beatitudes, which he recounted on the mount to his disciples and people.

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

blood. But that blood was another victory.

The Church grew, the Church covered the universe with the true faith. After 300 years of the most unequal conflict between the powerful Roman Empire and the powerless Christian Church, the Roman Empire accepted Christ as Lord and Master. That was the second triumph of Orthodoxy. The Roman Empire recognized the one whom it crucified and those whom it persecuted as the bearers of truth, and their teaching as the teaching of life eternal. The Church triumphed. But then the second period of troubles began.

The following centuries saw many attempts to distort the faith, to adjust it to human needs, to fill it with human content. In each generation there were those who could not accept that message of the cross and resurrection and life eternal. They tried to change it, and those changes we call heresies. Again there were persecutions. Again, Orthodox bishops, monks and laymen defended their faith and were condemned and went into exile and were covered with blood. And after five centuries of those conflicts and persecutions and discussions, the day came which we commemorate today, the day of the final victory of Orthodoxy as the true faith over all the heresies.

It happened on the first Sunday of Lent in the year 843 in Constantinople. After almost 100 years of persecution directed against the worship of the holy icons, the Church finally proclaimed that the truth had been defined, that the truth was fully in the possession of the Church. And since then all Orthodox people, wherever they live, have gathered on this Sunday to proclaim before the world their faith in that truth, their belief that their Church is truly apostolic, truly Orthodox, truly universal. This is the event of the past that we commemorate today.

But let us ask ourselves one question: Do all the triumphs of Orthodoxy, all the victories, belong to the past? Looking at the present today, we sometimes feel that our only consolation is to remember the past. Then Orthodoxy was glorious, then the Orthodox Church was powerful, then it dominated. But what about the present? My dear friends, if the triumph of Orthodoxy belongs to the past only, if there is nothing else for us to do but commemorate, to repeat to ourselves how glorious was the past, then Orthodoxy is dead.

But we are here to witness to the fact that Orthodoxy

not only is not dead but also that it is once more and forever celebrating its own triumph — the triumph of Orthodoxy. We don't have to fight heresies among ourselves, but we have other things that once more challenge our Orthodox faith.

Today, gathered here together, Orthodox of various national backgrounds, we proclaim and we glorify first of all our unity in Orthodoxy. This is the triumph of Orthodoxy in the present. This is a most wonderful event: that all of us, with all our differences, with all our limitations, with all our weaknesses, can come together and say we belong to that Orthodox faith, that we are one in Christ and in Orthodoxy. We are living very far from the traditional centers of Orthodoxy. We call ourselves Eastern Orthodox, and yet we are here in the West, so far from those glorious cities which were centers of the Orthodox faith for centuries — Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Moscow.

How far are those cities. And yet, don't we have the feeling that something of a miracle has happened, that God has sent us here, far into the West, not just in order to settle here, to increase our income, to build up a community. He also has sent us as apostles of Orthodoxy, so that this faith, which historically was limited to the East, now is becoming a faith which is truly and completely universal.

This is a thrilling moment in the history of Orthodoxy. That is why it is so important for us to be here tonight and to understand, to realize, to have that vision of what is going on. People were crossing the ocean, coming here, not thinking so much about their faith as about themselves, about their lives, about their future. They were usually poor

people, they had a difficult life, and they built those little Orthodox churches everywhere in America not for other people but for themselves, just to remember their homes, to perpetuate their tradition. They didn't think of the future.

And yet this is what happened: the Orthodox Church was sent here through and with those poor men. The truth itself, the fullness of the apostolic faith -- all this came here, and here we are now, the faith that has strengthened the universe. And this leads us to the event which still belongs to the future. If today we can only proclaim, if we can only pray for that coming triumph of Orthodoxy in this country and in the world, our faith

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Homily on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, cont'd p.3

forces us to believe that it is not by accident but by divine providence that the Orthodox faith today has reached all countries, all cities, all continents of the universe. After that historic weakness of our religion, after the persecutions by the Roman Empire, by the Turks, by the godless atheists, after all the troubles that we had to go through, today a new day begins. Something new is going to happen. And it is this future of Orthodoxy that we have to rejoice about today.

You know that our world today is so complex. It is changing all the time. And the more it changes, the more people fear, the more they are frightened by the future, the more they are pre-

occupied by what will happen to them. And this is where Orthodoxy must answer their problem; this is where Orthodoxy must accept the challenge of modern civilization and reveal to all nations, that it has remained the force of God left in history for the transformation, for the deification, for the transfiguration of human life.

The past, the present, the future: At the beginning, one lonely man on the cross — the complete defeat. And if at that time we had been there with all our human calculations, we probably would have said: "That's the end. Nothing else will happen." The twelve left Him. There was no one, no one to hope. The world was in darkness. Everything seemed finished. And you know what happened three days later. Three days later He appeared. He appeared to His disciples, and their hearts were burning within them because they knew that He was the risen Lord. And since then, in every generation, there have been people with burning hearts, people who have felt that this victory of Christ had to be carried again and again into this world, to be proclaimed in order to win new human souls and to be the transforming force in history.

Today this responsibility belongs to us. We feel that we are weak. We feel that we are limited, we are divided, we are still separated in so many groups, we have so many obstacles to overcome. But today, on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, we close our eyes for a second and we rejoice in that unity which is already here: priests of various national churches praying together, people of all

backgrounds uniting in prayer for the triumph of Orthodoxy.

We are already in a triumph, and may God help us keep that triumph in our hearts, so that we never give up hope in that future event in the history of orthodoxy when Orthodoxy will become the victory which eternally overcomes all the obstacles, because that victory is the victory of Christ Himself.

As we approach the most important moment of the Eucharist, the priest says, "Let us love one another, that with one mind we may confess...." What is the condition of the real triumph of Orthodoxy? What is the way leading to the real, the final, the ultimate victory of our faith? The answer comes from the Gospel. The answer comes from Christ Himself and from the whole tradition of Orthodoxy. It is love. Let us love one another, that with one mind we may confess . . . confess our faith, our Orthodoxy. Let us, from now on, feel responsible for each other. Let us understand that even if we are divided in small parishes, in small dioceses, we first of all belong to one another.

We belong together, to Christ, to His Body, to the Church. Let us feel responsible for each other, and let us love one another. Let us put above everything else the interests of Orthodoxy in this country. Let us understand that each one of us today has to be the apostle of Orthodoxy in a country which is not yet Orthodox, in a society which is asking us: "What do you believe?" "What is your

faith?" And let us, above everything else, keep the memory, keep the experience, keep the taste of that unity which we are anticipating tonight.

Today is the triumph of Orthodoxy, and a hymn sung today states solemnly and simply: "This is the Apostolic faith, this is the Orthodox faith, this is the faith of the Fathers, this is the faith that is the foundation of the world." My dear brothers and sisters, this is also our own faith. We are chosen. We are elected. We are the happy few that can say of our faith, "apostolic," "universal," "the faith of our fathers," "Orthodoxy," "the truth." Having this wonderful treasure, let us preserve it, let us keep it, and let us also use it in such a way that this treasure becomes the victory of Christ in us and in His Church. Amen.

