

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 609

4th Sunday of Great Lent-St. John of the Ladder

March 10, 2024



“Then one of the crowd answered and said, “Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not.”

If God desires to give us everything we need, why then does it seem that

our prayers sometimes go unanswered, that healing remains a mystery. Today’s Gospel is instructive in this regard: A despairing father comes before the Lord, beseeching Him on behalf of His mute and demon-possessed son.

The father describes a heartbreaking image of the evident pain the demon is causing his son as it seizes him, throws him down, and leaves him still barely alive. Those of us who are parents can feel the fathers anguish at his son’s ailment. The father confesses to Christ that he’d brought his son to Christ’s disciplines but they couldn’t cast the demon out. So, in utter desperation, the father comes to Jesus when all other avenues for his son’s healing have failed.

So how does Christ respond: does he heal the son immediately? No, he says
(continued p.3)

++ 4th Sunday of Great Lent ++

+Martyr Quadratus & Companions

Epistle: Hebrews 6: 13-20

Gospel: Mark 9: 17-31

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 (part 4)

Only poverty of spirit, or humility, can return the kingdom of God to the people’s hearts, which was lost due to his self-conceit and pride, and all the saints of God in their earthly life have been distinguished with profound poverty of spirit. The apostle Paul himself, who was lifted up to the third Heaven, called himself “the first among sinners” (Tim. 1:15).

The holy apostle James also names himself among sinners, saying: “All of us go wrong again and again” (James

3:2). The holy apostle John writes: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8), also reckoning himself among those who sin.

But who were the apostles? The living cloisters of the Holy Trinity, the verbal organs of the Holy Spirit, friends of Christ, and, above all, the holy people. So, if they put themselves in such a humble way, what should we think of ourselves? Shouldn’t we say frankly that all we are is a sinful

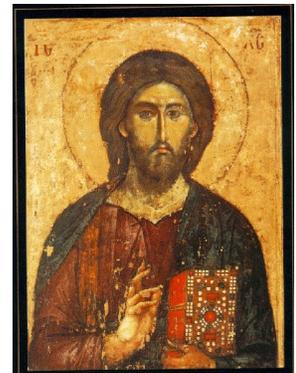
shell of passions, alien to true virtue, that we are cursed, poor, blind and naked, and constantly praying to the Lord to relieve our souls and bodies from the passions with the Holy Spirit, to fill them with a bliss of virtues and holiness of the Divine Spirit?

For “without him we can do nothing” (John 15:5). Those who want to achieve true and deep humility, need to explore themselves often, looking deeper into themselves. They need to impartially
(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 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, Lisa, Jeff, Bonnalee, David, Carol, Norris, Debbie, Linda, Daniel, Michael, Abraham, Katrina, George, Rochelle, Brianna, Tamam, Catherine, Chuck, Theresa, Sally Lou the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

Being Small

Haggai and his contemporaries must have repeatedly asked themselves, where was all this glory anyway? A few brave souls left their thriving family businesses in Babylon and Persia and straggled back to a ruined land. There they found themselves surrounded by hostile neighbors, both at home and abroad, with Israel a backwater province. The promised glory never arrived. The world was still full of big pow-

erful players, and Israel was still small and powerless. The people of Israel now were mostly confined to the land formerly occupied by the tribe of Judah, the land surrounding Jerusalem. Some glorious future!

We see this frustration and this temptation to despair in every line of Haggai's message. The people who trickled back complained that they were not working on building the Temple because "the time has not yet come to build the House of Yahweh". Haggai rounded on them, and retorted, "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled house while this House lies in ruins?" He pointed out the results of their negligence: they had sown much and harvested little and were struggling. That, he declared, was because of God's judgment—when you brought the harvest home, God blew it away (Haggai 1:2-9). The answer was to repent and attend to building God's House.

Finally they did work and build the House, but it was depressingly tiny and poor compared to the previous House built by Solomon. But Haggai reassured them the Glory of God would return-in Christ.

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

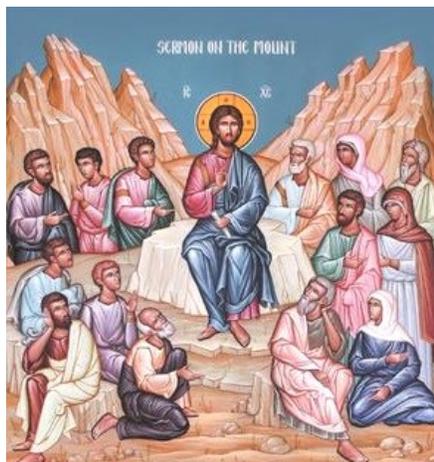
consider with their inner eyes all of their sinful thoughts, desires, intentions, and affairs from the earliest youth to the present; then will they see that they are drowning in the abyss of sins.

The literate can be advised to read more. Besides the morning and evening prayers that present the poverty of prayers quite clearly, they should also read the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete, canons and akathists to the Savior and the Holy Mother of God, the canon to the Guardian Angel and canons for every day of the week; of course, never neglect the Gospel and the Psalter, which are the finest schools of humility.

Can rich people be poor in spirit? Indeed, they can, unless they consider themselves great people just for possessing perishable wealth to pay for anything they want. How can they be poor in spirit? When they sincerely realize that their fortune, and the whole world's fortune does not mean a thing compared with the immortal soul; that this is the gift of God not

only to us, but also to our neighbors, as the material abundance is given to help the poor.

Once they accept that with all their wealth they are extremely poor in spirit, they will not be high-minded,



"nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy"; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the

time to come, "that they may lay hold on eternal life" (1Tim. 6:17-19). This is what the rich Abraham was like, that was what Job and many others, both in the Old and New Testaments, were like.

However, since wealth creates many temptations, those striving for the Christian perfection, craving deep poverty of spirit and no stumbling-blocks on the path of salvation, usually sold their property and distributed their fortune to the poor, and retired in silence to serve the God day and night without rest and entertainment. This is why the Lord said to one rich man: "If you will be perfect, go and sell what you have and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in Heaven, and come and follow me" (Matthew 19:21).

So, the Scripture says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven": not "theirs will be the kingdom of Heaven", but theirs is, because here, on earth, God rests and reigns in the humble hearts,

(continued p.4)

Homily on St. John of the Ladder Sunday, (cont'd from p.1)

“O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?” Christ confesses the faithlessness He sees around him. He then has the boy brought to Him. The father, meanwhile, pleads with him, saying, “If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” If? If Christ can do anything? If the Creator of the universe can do anything? If the Creator of all can do anything? The One who brought us to life in the first place?

Christ tests the father’s faith; He pushes him toward greater faith, as is often the case with Christ. He indicates to us here that the father has a part to play in whether or how his child is healed. The Lord says these poignant words, ““If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.” And it’s at that point, that the father understands and gives an answer that bespeaks the humility indicative of deeper understanding and faith, saying, “Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief!” And Christ heals the boy of his condition at that very moment, casting out the demon.

Learning to give ourselves, our physical and spiritual needs, to the Lord is indeed a journey of faith, of trust in God. This trust is certainly needed with regard to our material provision but also, certainly, for our spiritual provision also. God works through such persevering prayers. But how do we come to possess such faith? Jesus Himself gives us the answer: The disciples are bewildered as to why they could not cast out the demon. They come before Him to ask why: Why, Lord, could we not cast him out?

And He answers, “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.” Lent is the season of great effort but it is also the season of great potential progress in opening ourselves up to repentance and growth in faith, our communion with the God of the universe who became incarnate to save us. When we fast, we’re more vulnerable, open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to receive the change and growth we need.

Just as our fasting needs to be prolonged and consistent during the 40 days and Holy Week, so too our prayers need to be strong and consistent as we cry out to the Lord for the change He would work in us, for the healing we need. This act of contrition, humility, patience, perseverance, is precisely the door through which

our faith is strengthened as we cooperate with the Lord in His response to our prayers, our pleading. For this reason too, the virtues we need to gain and the vices we need to expunge, are repeatedly prayed through the Prayer of St. Ephraim.

The fact is that this cooperation, this humbling of ourselves as we come before the Lord to beseech Him for what we need, opens our hearts to Him, to His gracious work in us, it pushes us to faith, without which no mountains—either physical or spiritual—can be moved.

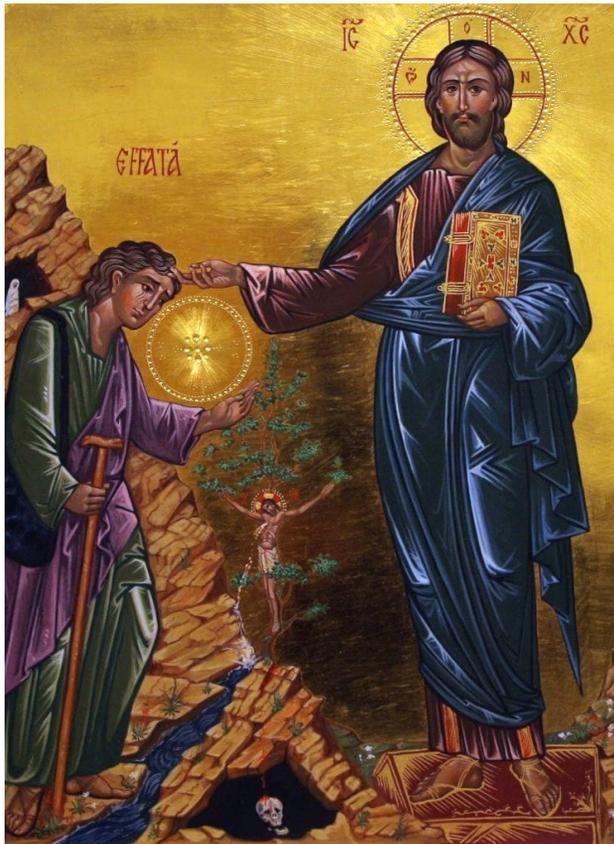
This is true for all that we need in Christ for our healing and salvation: God can take the stingy person, and with faith, can make him generous; God can take the prideful person, and with faith, can give him a humble heart; God can take the obstinate and self-willed person, and with faith, can make him obedient, implanting in him a teachable spirit; God can take the lustful person, and with faith, give him purity and whole-mindedness; God can take the insecure person, whose identity is grounded in this world and all its affiliations and false identities and, with faith, give him the gift of sonship, the worth of which is beyond compare.

The truth is that fervency and consistency of prayer will increase faith. When we’re put to the test, as this father was, our faith grows. When we don’t immediately receive what we believe we need, we pray more. Don’t give up, but expect that God will work to increase your faith, to push you so that you grow in faith, so that He furthers you in communion with Him and in His ultimate aim: the healing and salvation of our souls. God

knows what He’s doing in the soul of each of us to conform us more into His likeness and to make us heirs of His eternal Kingdom, which is His chief aim and why he says to St. Paul, who beseeches him unsuccessfully for physical healing, “my grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

“Everything is in the power of the one who believes” (Mk. 9:23). These are the words of truth, consolation and encouragement the Lord offers us today from His Gospel. St. John of Kronstadt asks of these words, “Do you see what power the Lord gives to faith and to the faithful?” But you have to ask yourself the following question: how much do I really desire Christ and His Kingdom? How much do I believe? Most of the time, we’re

(continued p.4)



Most of the time, we're like the father in today's Gospel who says to the God of the universe, the Maker of heaven and earth, "If you are able to do anything." Often I hear people say, "well, if nothing else, we can pray." We're tempted to think this is the last resort along the lines of "Well, if nothing else works, I might as well try prayer." "If You can do anything, Lord..." "O faithless generation, how long shall I bear with you?" The father's faith didn't stay in that place of doubt. We hear his heart-felt confession: "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief." The cry of the heart is enough. The Lord responds to his tearful cries, the faith that begins with a desire for the healing work of the Lord is received as cooperation with the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives too: "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief." Brothers and sisters, If we want to see the Lord at work in our lives, giving us healing, hearing the cries of our hearts, then we also need to make use of prayer, fasting and worship to defeat the evil one's influence over us and find freedom from the passions and this world and our reliance on all that is temporal. The power that Christ gives to the one who believes, the one who desires the faith to believe, is more powerful than the one who tempts us, deceives us, and wars against us. "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." Beseech the Lord and know that He loves you and hears you, but that He desires more than anything to bring us to that point when He can hear you cry, "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief." Amen.

***** ***** *****

(Homily on the Beatitudes, cont'd from p.2)
and in the future life will he reign forever and glorify them with his imperishable glory. Gather up the wealth of humility here on earth, my brothers, to enjoy the wealth of glory in Heaven. Amen.

Homily 3 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Now the Church offers us, her prodigal sons, the Parable of the Prodigal Son told by the Savior. To remind us that we are all captives and pitiable slaves of sin, at Matins the Church sings the lament of the captive children of Zion: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion".

The Judeans enslaved by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, represent us, brothers, as slaves of the spiritual Nebuchadnezzar, the devil. The rivers of Babylon stand for our passions rushing to sin, or the rivers of passions flowing from the mouth of the spiritual dragon, the Satan, and pulling us into the abyss of hell. The bitter cry of the children of Israel represents the wail of true Christians, the sons of the New Israel, over their spiritual slavery to sin.

The days of fasting and repentance, the Great Lent, are close upon us with this reading. With the effort to guide us gradually into this feat, the Church, reminds us of our captivity and expulsion from our heavenly fatherland and about the need for these bitter tears of repentance. So, accept this reminder from the Most Holy Mother with gratitude, and begin the spiritual repentance with God's help.

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion." The Israelites wept over their earthly Zion, where their temple of the true God used to stand, and the ark of the covenant with the tablets written by God, the jar of manna, and the wondrously blooming rod of Aaron that were there. We must weep over our Heavenly Zion, the city of the living God; our heavenly Jerusalem, the genuine fatherland of Christians, from which we were banished for our sins; we must weep over our negligence in fulfilling the commandments

of God, over our indifference to the Heavenly manna – the Body and Blood of God and what he did for us on the Cross.

And whose soul does not weep when this lament is sung? Whose soul does not wake from the sinful sleep? Whose soul does not feel that it is enslaved by the devil, spending every day by the side of this fierce enemy, tied every day with his spiritual fetters of sinful habits and passions, hurt by him, enduring all the slander, misfortune, and torment? Going through all this and feeling this, our soul sends to God its sighs of repentance for the sins and weeps with sincere and bitter tears. Oh, the rivers of Babylon! Oh, these passions that carry us away! Where are you carrying us? "On the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept."

(continued next issue)

