

# A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



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*Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen! Al Masih Kham! Hakken Kham*

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4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pascha-Sunday of the Paralytic

April 21, 2024



My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today is the Sunday of the Paralytic. In today's Gospel, we hear of a man that has been paralyzed for thirty-eight years. He has been waiting at the pool of Bethesda for the stirring of the waters by the angel so he can be healed. The man then encounters our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, who asks him if he will be made whole.

The man then explains that he has

no one to help him enter the water when it is stirred. Jesus then immediately heals him by saying, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." This healing occurred on the Sabbath. The man then encounters the Jews, who are only interested keeping the law, who ask him why he is carrying his bed on the Sabbath. He tells them that the man who healed him told him to carry his bed. Upon further questioning, he tells them that he does not know who it was that healed him.

Jesus finds him and then tells him to sin no more, lest something worse come upon him. The man then tells the Jewish Elders that it was Jesus who healed him. The Gospel then concludes with the authorities seeking to kill Jesus because he had healed this man on the Sabbath day.

The paralysis of this man prevents  
*(continued p.3)*

+++ 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pascha +++

+ Bishop Martyr Januarius +

Epistle: Acts 9: 32-42

Gospel: John 5:1-15

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, St. John of Kronstadt

So does a wanderer in a burning desert, exhausted by the long trip and the scorching sun, crave a refreshing drink. Oh, what a terrible poison is a sin for the immortal soul, created after the image and likeness of righteous and all-blessed God!

To what rage, to what fury it sometimes leads man, what fiery and destructive force it pours into the innards and limbs of the body! But what do we see then? We see many people playing with this fire, fanning it, unaware of hastening

their own ruin. Brothers! Is deadly poison a toy to play with? Is it right to play with fire?

But if it is certain that all descendants of Adam are born with this sinful poison inside, if this poison has a disastrous effect on the soul and body, if every man was given the inner voice of conscience that denounces sin, then why do many people not feel their sins or hunger for righteousness?

This happens because this fleshly (so-called liberal) philosophizing and

ever-sinful, passion-loving, dissipated and mercenary lives put their conscience down and finally drown it out. This unfeeling state of soul is the sinful death of a person, which can go from temporary to eternal.

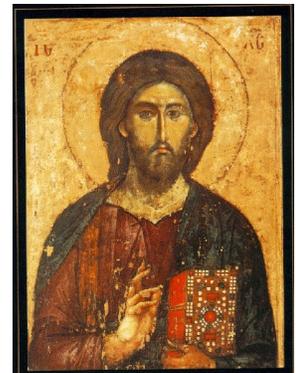
Therefore, a strong shock is needed to awaken a sleeping conscience; to wake up a sinner sleeping in sinful slumber the blinded eyes of his heart need to be opened, for he doesn't see the multitude of his sins and the severity of God's

*(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 our coffee social in the church basement immediately 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, George, Rochelle, Brianna, Tamam, Catherine, Chuck, Theresa, Sally Lou, Mason, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

**Christ's Presence in our Life, from St. Silouan of Mt. Athos**

“Glory be to the merciful Lord, that He loves us so much and gives us His grace. It teaches us to know the Lord and helps us to keep the holy commandments. In them the soul obtains rest in God. Our joy, our merciful Lord loves sinners and gives them His grace of the Holy Spirit. He is sweet, He cannot be compared to anything

on earth.

See, this is what the Lord has bestowed upon us in His mercy,” as St. Silouan testified from the depths of his heart. This means that when sorrows visit us, the Lord Himself is near. It means that God has once more entrusted to us what he cannot entrust to others. God entrusts the witness of Him only to His closest friends. Therefore we also should be ready for the time when the Lord will accept us as worthy to bring the news of our God’s love and mercy to the lost and despairing world. And then, wiping the tears from our faces, we must go out to people and witness that we are beloved of God, despite all the difficulties and temporary hardships—we still believe that our God wishes us only good, and orders everything for the salvation of our souls!

In the heaviest moments of our lives, God believes in us, loves us, and wants to make us His own. Even in sadness, pain and suffering, let us not forget that we are beloved of God. “It is a great joy to know God. The soul desires Him insatiably. Great is God’s mercy for all humanity.

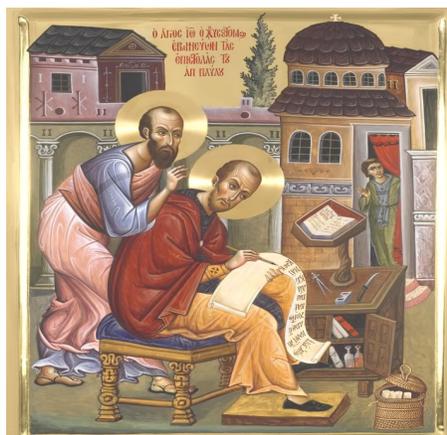
**Homily on the Beatitudes, cont'd from p.1**

righteousness that will judge him after death. Give us, oh Lord, the hunger and thirst for righteousness while we are here on earth so that we could reject all the unrighteousness through sincere repentance and avert his dread and righteous judgment! For blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness this way.

Brothers and sister, let us open the book of conscience and dispassionately recite all our sinful thoughts, desires, intentions, words, and deeds we have ever had, said or committed. Let us then imagine that we are standing at the Last Judgment of Jesus Christ, who knows down to the speck all of our innermost thoughts, deeds, and words, and who will judge us not only for our deeds, but for every idle word we ever uttered; who will “bring to light what darkness hides and disclose our inward motives” (1 Corinthians 4:5), and will render unto each according to his works and the strictest justice.

Tell me in all conscience: is there much pure good in us that is worth

the most holy and luminous eyes of God? Is there much truth? Are there enough good thoughts, desires, intentions, words, deeds coming from the living faith in God, from the heartfelt love for Him, from reverence for



Him, from gratitude to Him and from pure love for our neighbor? Would not there be a thousand times more unrighteousness instead?

And for any deliberate, stubborn lie, not effaced with repentance, the righteousness of God will punish us with eternal torment. This is why,

having imagined the multitude of our sins before the dreaded judgment of God, whose judgment seat is already prepared, and yourselves, standing before this judgment in the presence of all the heavenly ranks of angels and the entire human race, will we remain dispassionate to our sins, will we not desire to spend the remainder of our lives in repentance and virtue, for the sake of God and for eternity? Let us hasten to expose ourselves to the committed sins without mercy, let us feel their vileness, stop enjoying them, loving them, and doing them.

Let us recall the suffering of Christ the Savior and his death on the Cross. What brought Jesus Christ to such torment and such a painful and shameful death which he willingly accepted? That was the righteousness of God. But who and what was it for? It was for us and our sins. And if God's righteousness worked like this with the verdant tree that Jesus Christ was, what would happen to dry trees like us, for we are all sinners?

*(continued p.4)*

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

prevents him from receiving God's grace in the pool of Bethesda. This man suffers in loneliness because he has no one to help him. He understands that he cannot bring about his healing through his own efforts.

Many of us are like this man in that we suffer from physical ailments that keep us from doing the things that we want to do. Those of us that are less fortunate find ourselves with no one to help us, much like this man. However, there is a deeper type of suffering that we can suffer. This type of suffering comes by many names. What it is, in reality, is a soul sickness that paralyzes the soul and keeps it from God and other people.

We can make two choices in our suffering. The first is to become angry because no one is helping us. The second is to patiently endure the suffering, looking for God's mercy.

The wise person will examine his suffering to determine its causes. We are reminded by many examples in scripture of the various causes of suffering: King David suffered because of his own sins. Rehoboam suffered because of the sins of his father King Solomon The Prophets suffered because of the sins of their neighbors Adam and Eve suffered because of their faithlessness in God The Righteous Job suffered because of the dark malicious spirit of evil Finally, the young man that was born blind, whose eyes were healed by the merciful Lord, suffered to the Glory of God and his own salvation.

All too often, when we examine the causes of our sufferings, we try to find causes outside of ourselves. In short, we try to place blame on someone or something other than ourselves. This is because we do not want to look at ourselves, because we do not want to see our own selfish, self-centered behaviors that put us into conflict with others or caused us to abuse our own bodies. If we look honestly at our lives, we will find that some aspect of this type of behavior is the cause of all of our suffering, no matter how much fault we can find with someone or something other than ourselves as the cause of our suffering.

Selfish, self-centered behaviors are sinful behaviors. The question is, how long are we going to let sin bring us suffering? If we let sin run its course in our lives, it

will bring us to death, both a spiritual and physical death. Saint Paul reminds us of this in his epistle to James: "and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death," (James 1:15) or again in the epistle to the Romans, "For the wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23)

If we have become paralyzed because of our sin, we have reached a bottom where there is no one to help us, which is like there being no one to help the man in the Gospel. However, we all have someone who is all powerful and merciful, not only to help us in our paralysis, but to heal us of it. That one is our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ. In other words, our sufferings bring us to God. Thus, we should embrace our sufferings as a gift from God because they bring us to Him.

The Holy King David reminds us of this when he says in the Psalms, "You, which have shown me great and sore troubles, shall enliven me again, and shall bring me up again from the depths of the earth. ....unto You will I sing with the harp ....My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto You; and my soul, which You have redeemed." (Psalm 70:20-23). Saint John Chrysostom further reminds us of this when he says, "Glory to God for everything," as he was dying in exile, despised by the men of his day. So, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, my prayer for you is that you will be able to see your sins in your suffering and that, as a result, you may able to embrace your sufferings by coming to God and rejoicing in Him for them.

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"Silence is the mother of prayer, and a friend of tears." It is: "an aid to anguish, a creator of contemplation, and the unseen progress of divine ascent...The friend of silence draws near to God, he who knows the fragrance of the Fire from on high" (11.3-11). "Let your prayer be completely simple," St. John teaches us: "for both the Publican and the Prodigal Son were reconciled to God by a single phrase." Indeed, "faith gives wings to prayer, and without it we cannot fly up to heaven...Do not attempt to talk much when you pray, lest your mind be distracted in searching for words... And, if you feel some sweetness or compunction at some word of your prayer, dwell on it; for then our guardian angel is praying with us" (28.5-11). (From the Ladder by St. John of the Ladder).



What would our torments be if we did not turn in and repent? Do Judgment and Gehenna frighten you now, my brother? Will you now hunger and thirst after God's justification, for the incorruptible justice of God not to condemn you for eternal torment? Let us rise from this sinful slumber and reform ourselves. Oh, if only those scorched and dejected by the passions of life, tormented by this unbearable hunger and thirst, could crave justification, reformation of their hearts and lives with all the might of their souls, as the Gospel requires and as says our God, relentlessly calling us to turn from the path of destruction to the path of salvation!

Oh, if only all those scorched with the affliction of

schism in our town would hunger and thirst after the truth of the only holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, unity with it, sanctification of it through divine service, sacraments and teachings through the word of God! Do they really not languish with the saving hunger and thirst after the motherly, life-giving milk of the Church? Have they abandoned the springs of living water to dig out some broken vessels that don't hold water?

The faithful children of the Church enjoy the ever-flowing source of living water here, in church, while the others, alas, are constantly yearning for the grace of God and cannot fill themselves unless they come back to the mother who once gave them birth and who they left by ignorance, delusion and stubbornness.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." But can those hungry and thirsty for righteousness be filled? Just like those who feel bodily hunger and thirst. Physically satisfied, one does not feel hunger or thirst but feels his body getting stronger through food and drink. Satisfaction of the soul is achieved through calming our spiritual powers and heartfelt repentance, cleansing our sins through grace, acquiring the strength to do good that we did not know as we lived in sin, the strength given to us by Jesus Christ, our peace, our righteousness and power. Only in the tearful repentance of our sins we could fill ourselves with the righteousness of God.

**Homily 6. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."**

A while ago, we discussed the beatitude of those who hunger and thirst for God's righteousness and the justification of Christ. I guess that you, absorbed in your eve-

ryday chores, could have forgotten what I said in that homily and, perhaps, in the previous ones too. It is my duty to remind you briefly so that you can thus compose the divine commandments in your hearts "and remember them, so as to do them" (Psalm 108:18).

We have mentioned the four Lord's commandments for the beatitudes, in the first of which our Lord commands his followers to spiritual poverty, humility. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." According to this commandment, we must think of ourselves humbly, seeing ourselves as full of countless sins and weaknesses, incapable of any direct, pure good without the help of the grace of God; we

must regard everything we have not as our own, but as a gift of God; for everything we have, we must thank God, the giver of all good, and resort to his mercy.

In the second commandment, God calls blessed those who grieve and weep sincerely for their voluntary and involuntary sins, promising them the consolation of grace, forgiveness of sins and comfort of conscience. "Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted." This divine commandment obliges us to keep all of our sins, the distraction from the Lord's commandments before our eyes, remember the great responsibility for our sins before God, the awesome judgment; it inspires us to live in ceaseless repentance.

In the third commandment, the Lord blesses the meek, promising them the inheritance of the earth. This divine commandment teaches us to be always meek and gentle, following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was as gentle as a lamb – "When reproached, he did not reproach; when suffering, he did not whine; but left everything up to God, Who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). he taught us never to be irritated and irritate, never offend, restraining our outbursts of anger in every possible way; to treat everyone kindly, patiently, leniently; to conquer evil with good, and to correct the wrong with patience and reasoning. Our Lord promises to reward meekness and patience with the inheritance of the earth, i.e. first of all, long life and well-being here on earth, as meekness and restraining of anger, calmness and kindness are good for the health and longevity of man, and, secondly, blessed and eternal life in the Heavenly fatherland.

(continued next issue)

