

# 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!*

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10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost-Jesus Heals a Young Man

August 13, 2023



Today's Gospel begins immediately after our Lord descends from Mount Tabor with His disciples, Peter, James, and John. At the base of the mountain, they encounter a multitude of people, one of whom comes to Christ and kneels down before Him, asking Him to heal his son who suffers as an epileptic, who often times falls into the fire and often times into the water.

The man then goes on to say that he brought his son to the disciples but they could not cure him. To this the Lord responds, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me." In saying this, the Lord upbraids the man, not only for his lack of faith, but also because he shifted the blame for his own lack of faith to the disciples.

When we think of the miracles of Christ, when He cured the sick, raised the dead, gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the mute, the ability to walk to the lame, how many times did we see our Lord ask for a display of faith before imparting healing? The answer is in almost every case. And this case is no different.

When we look at the account of the healing in the Gospel of St. Mark, *(continued p.3)*

+ 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost +  
+++ St. Tikhon of Zadonsk +++

Epistle: 1 Cor. 4: 9-16

Gospel: Matthew 17: 14-23

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.*

## ***Christ Our True Nourishment by Fr. Barnabas Lambropoulos***

Clearly the impressive number of people who went to meet Christ didn't do so in the expectation of a free meal. They went to satisfy a different hunger: the hunger for his teaching, sweeter than 'honey and beeswax'. When Christ saw their ardent desire, he took pity on them. First, he healed their sick without asking for proof or confession of their faith.

Indeed, as Saint John Chrysostom asks, what greater proof of their faith was required when they'd left their homes

and villages in order to seek him. They walked so far, all around the lake and stayed with him for so long, without eating, indifferent to the hunger which had begun to gnaw at them.

As evening approached, the disciples also showed their own pity for the crowd and urged Christ to let them go and eat. Much to their surprise, Christ said to them, 'There's no need for them to go anywhere. Give them food yourselves'.

In other words, Christ

says to them and us, 'Even in the face of the most unsurmountable problem, don't stand by idly and wait for some solutions from heaven. First exhaust all your own resources, however few these may seem to you. And I'll multiply this minimal contribution of yours in a way beyond your imagination'.

Christ attributes inestimable value to our smallest contribution, especially when this is made in the spirit of genuine love and sacrifice. In this

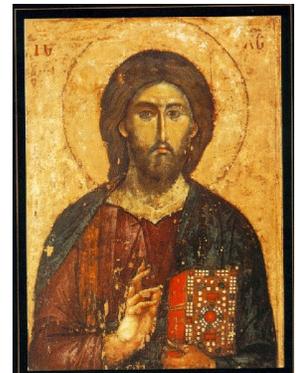
*(continued on p.2)*

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

**From St. John Kronstadt**

Wherever I am, as soon as I raise the eyes of my heart in my affliction to God, the Lover of men immediately answers my faith and prayer, and the sorrow immediately departs. He is at every time and every hour near me, only I do not see it, but I feel it vividly in my heart. Sorrow is the death of the heart, and it is a falling away from God. The expansion, the peace of heart through lively faith in Him, prove more clearly than the day, that God is

constantly present near me, and that He dwells within me.

What intercessor or angel can set us free from our sins or sorrows? None, but God alone. This is from experience. Let us measure the worth of our prayers by human measure or by the quality of our relation to other men. How do we behave to other people? Sometimes we express our requests, praises and gratitude to them coldly, heartlessly, out of duty or simply out of politeness, and it is the same when we do anything for them; whilst at other times we do so with warmth, heartily, and lovingly, often only feigning, often really sincerely.

We are similarly unequal with God. But this should not be. We must always, from our whole hearts, sing and express to God our praises, our gratitude and our requests; every work must be done before Him with the whole heart. He must be loved and trusted with the whole heart. In the well-intentioned works of men, esteem the light of Christ--"the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" and read them with love.

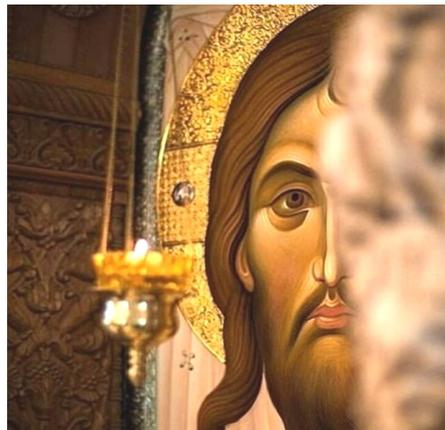
**Christ our true nourishment, cont'd from p.1**

spirit, the disciples willingly offered their own food, preferring to go without themselves so that even a few could eat well. And even though Christ would have been able to turn the stones there into bread or to bring down manna from heaven, he preferred their five loaves and two fish. When he'd multiplied them, he told the disciples to assist in the great miracle with their own hands. It's a great honor and, at the same time, a great responsibility that God wants us to work with him in his wondrous works.

Apart from giving yet more convincing proof of his divinity through this astonishing miracle, Christ also wanted to recognize and encourage the fervor of the multitude who had come to hear him and of all those who hunger and thirst for his righteousness. Such people corroborated in the most irrefutable manner his answer to the first of the devil's temptations. When the latter challenged Christ to make the stones into bread in order to satisfy his hunger

after fasting for forty days, Christ answered that people don't live on material bread alone but on the word of God'.

The deeper meaning of this temptation is in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. In it, the devil, through



the mouth of the Grand Inquisitor, challenges Christ: 'Make these stones into bread and the whole of humankind will follow you like a mindless flock. For most people, the gift of freedom is unbearable, because it creates responsibilities. So, remove their

freedom and make them obey you blindly by filling them with bread'. As the only source of true freedom, however, Christ didn't want to buy our freedom with bread. And Christ didn't perform the miracle mentioned in today's Gospel reading in order to make us his mindless, but satisfied, followers. A life with bread alone, without freedom, has no meaning. It's an unlived life.

In the end the miraculous feeding of the five thousand didn't have as its purpose any magical solutions to social problems. Such a misinterpretation of the miracle very quickly circulated and Christ condemned it in no uncertain terms: when they found him on the other side of the lake, Christ told them, 'I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life'. Without this food that endures, people's lives will be empty and without meaning.

## Homily on Jesus Healing a young man (cont'd from p.1)

we see some more details, we see that the Lord did in fact challenge the faith of the man, saying, "If you can believe, all things are possible." And to this the man responded, "Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief!" This was an important moment in the development of the man's spiritual life, for he had come clean, he had revealed that while he believed, his faith was in fact very weak.

And in doing so, he humbled himself and he placed himself, with all his own deficiencies, and the fate of his son, who suffered as St. Mark reveals since childhood, in the hands of the Lord. If we think about it, how different was this man from the Apostle Peter, who in last week's Gospel, proclaimed, "Lord if it is You, let me come to You walking on the water" and then a moment later when he began to sink he cried, "Lord save me!"

Here is one of the sad and unfortunate truths of the spiritual life: We, as imperfect men and women, bear within ourselves a mixture of faith and doubt. At times our faith is strong, and then at other times it is weak. At times we walk on water and at times we sink. Yet, the man in today's Gospel, having been chastised by the Lord, acknowledged both his faith and his unbelief. But he did more than acknowledge his unbelief, he did all that we can do when our faith is weak, he asked for the Lord's help – he asked for the Lord to strengthen his faith.

Faith is a gift of God. Often, when think of faith we think of doctrines and dogmas as revealed through the Church in Her Scriptures, Patristic writings, and Creed. But there is a second understanding of the word faith, and that is faith as trust – trust in the living God. This type of faith varies in us to greater or lesser degrees depending upon our closeness to God. The man in today's Gospel was not a Baptized and Chrismated Orthodox Christian, he did not have the grace of God residing in his heart, but he did recognize that he was in the presence of the One from whom this grace flows – He was in the presence of Christ. And he cried out to the Lord, "I believe that you can heal my son! But I need you to grant assurance of this to my heart!"

The Apostle Peter when he began to sink after walking on the water had not yet received the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. He had not yet been solidified in his trust in God. But after receiving the Spirit in the upper room, he not only never again wavered in his faith, but

he exemplified the faith on which Christ said He would build His Church – that is the confession of and trust in Christ as the Son of God.

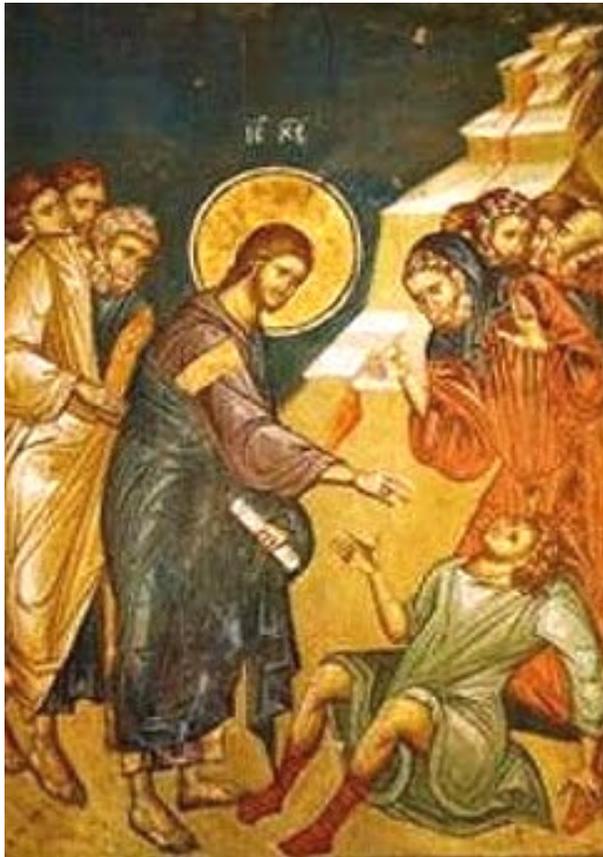
And so today's Gospel continues, telling of how the Lord rebuked the demon and it came out of the young man never to enter him again. Then the disciples approached the Lord privately and asked Him why they could not cast out the demon. And the Lord gave them two reasons. First because of their lack of faith, but also because they were not strengthened by prayer and fasting. But today, they encountered a demon they could not cast out. Was the demon's power greater than the power the disciples received from the Lord? Certainly not! But

the disciples needed to become more faithful instruments of the Lord's power through prayer and fasting. Spiritually they needed to rise to the occasion. The power to cast out the demon had already been given to them, but they were not prepared for the struggle of this exorcism.

There is of course a great lesson for us here. When we seek to be freed from a particular passion, whether it be greed, gluttony, lust, pride, or whatever, we have to work with the grace of God which has been given to us in our baptism. We have to rise above the earthly desires which so often cast us first into the uncontrollable fires of sinful passions and then into the waters of dejection and despair. And we have to rise up by making our soul light through fasting and giving it wings through prayer. Did not the Prophet David also pray for these wings of virtue

when he said, "Who will give me wings like a dove? And I will fly away, and be at rest."

And so brothers and sisters, the power to be freed from our passions has been given to us as disciples of Christ through baptism. So, if our faith is weak, let us turn to the Lord like the man in today's Gospel and let us ask Him to strengthen our faith. Let us ask Him for assurance that He will cast out our passions from us once and for all like the demon in today's Gospel. But let us also remember that we need to do our part. The Lord requires not only our faith, but He also requires our action. For if we do not rise up above the base desires of the earth on the wings of prayer and fasting, then we will never ascend to the heavenly kingdom where we can find eternal rest with Christ.



As a student Alexandra Oberucheveva attended lectures by the famous philosopher Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900), whose religious views were very close to hers. She thanked God for sending this meeting in her life. She went to church and was not afraid of being mocked by her godless fellow students and of being labelled as an obscurantist. And in later life, Alexandra remained true to herself, showed an unbending will and courage in defending her ideals and beliefs—both religious and social.

In the fifth year, the students had an internship at the hospital. Here she first encountered human suffering. Some dying people asked Oberucheveva to be with them at the time of their deaths.

“Since that time, I have had a special attitude to the hour of death. It was not something gloomy; to the contrary, I felt that a mysterious fusion of the earthly and the Heavenly was taking place,” we read in her diary.

Before taking the State exams she visited Optina Monastery for the first time. The Elder Archimandrite Benedict (Dyakonov) and the Elder Fr. Joseph (Litovkin) advised her to enter a convent. Elder Joseph’s cell attendant, Fr. Anatoly (Potapov), later became her father-confessor.

After graduating from the institute, Alexandra Dmitrievna began to work tirelessly as a local government doctor in a village of Smolensk province. Setting to work, she wrote down in her diary: “I will treat everyone as my next of kin! Something great and holy awaits me!” Later in life, Alexandra Oberucheveva treated every person whom she met on her life path with respect, attention, and Christian love.

The fame of the new doctor spread around the whole neighborhood quickly, and within a few days people started flocking to her outpatient clinic. Aware of her responsibility as a doctor, she did not refuse to help anyone, receiving up to 300 people a day. Patients were brought even from faraway villages on wagons, and then, because of the cramped space in the medical room, they were placed on mattresses on the ground, and Oberucheveva would make her rounds, diagnose the patients, giving them prescriptions and the necessary medicine (which were free of charge).

Having once come to visit her district, the chairman of the council said, “This is something special—people are coming here as if on a pilgrimage rather than to an outpatient clinic.” After the appointments, which ended at eleven in the evening, she would make night house calls. Returning home early in the morning, she would wake up at the arrival of the first patients. Soon she nearly wore herself out and was often semi-conscious, so Alexandra Dmitrievna was transferred to a new place six months later—to the newly opened Odessa hospital for workers with 5,000 beds.

Here she lived in a hostel for doctors and had lunch in the cafeteria for medical staff. When Alexandra

Dmitrievna entered the cafeteria for the first time and did not see any icons, she made the sign of the cross facing East, which astonished her non-religious colleagues. Afterwards everyone got used to the fact that Oberucheveva never sat down at the table without prayer.

In Odessa a male doctor proposed to her (according to Alexandra, he was “a good doctor and a wonderful person”), but she refused, believing that the duties of a wife and a mother were incompatible with the duties of a doctor, which required devoting herself entirely to her patients. In the Odessa hospital, under the guidance of experienced doctors, for two years Alexandra gained medical experience not only as a therapist, but also as a surgeon. However, her father’s illness made her leave Odessa.

The Oberuchev family moved to their small estate near the town of Yelnya, Smolensk province. On November 9, 1905, her father died, and immediately after that her mother became seriously ill.

Alexandra took good care of her with great patience and treated her. She was employed as a doctor at the hospital in Yelnya, where she served for six years. After a work day at the hospital Alexandra Dmitrievna would make house calls and return home late—at nine or ten in the evening. She treated everyone for free and lived only on her salary—she was unmercenary. “I didn’t take money from patients when they offered it and even insisted... When someone still gave me money, I would say that my mood had been spoiled and I was unable to treat patients.”

*(continued next issue)*

