

# 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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22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost-Christ performs 2 Miracles

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Even in a small parish like ours, it is not hard to see that people are different from another in many ways. We have different interests, personal backgrounds, and opinions on all kinds of things. We do not all look or dress alike. But what we have in common as Orthodox Christians is far more profound than any of that. Our salvation is not in any conventional human characteristic or endeavor, but in the

healing mercy of Jesus Christ.

In today's gospel passage, two very different people approached Him in humble faith and received new life as a result. Jairus was a ruler of the synagogue, an upstanding man in the Jewish community. We do not know the name of the other person, but she had little in common with Jairus. She was a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years, and had spent all her money on treatments that did not help her. She was not only poor, but also considered unclean because of the flow of blood. As a result, she would have been alone, for anyone who had physical contact with her would also become unclean. She could not even enter the Temple or have a normal social life. For twelve years, she had lived as someone cut off from God and from everyone else.

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+ 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost +

Martyrs Galacteon and Epistemis

Epistle: Galatians: 6: 11-18

Gospel: Luke 8: 41-56

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 2***

The coldness will pass, and there comes joy that excites the senses and disturbs our peace. Then deep humility is needed, even a temporary laying aside of prayer due to unworthiness, selflessness to one's neighbor in word or deed. It is only in the depths of humility and self-deprecation that the inner peace that facilitates true prayer is to be found.

### *On repentance*

Repentance, like prayer, must not be wistful. True repentance is a gift of God, full of contrition.

Our repentance must only be the consciousness and assurance of our sinfulness, and a lack of self-reliance. This is what leads to faith.

### *The purpose of life*

The purpose of human life is communion with God, which is the salvation of our souls—their eternal beatitude. And the means of fulfilling His commandments: submission to His will, which reveals itself in the circumstances of life; labor: the purification of the heart from passions; and humility that leads to

faith, to accepting His grace, without which nothing good or holy can be accomplished in us. *The commandments of God*

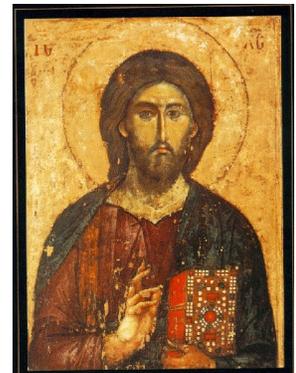
The Lord indicated two main commandments that contain everything: love for God and love for neighbor. But there are commandments indicated by Him in the Beatitudes, when He said blessed are the pure in spirit, and so on. These words of Christ indicate the qualities of heart and soul that we must acquire, and only

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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**

Men have fallen into unbelief because they have either completely lost the spirit of prayer, or never had it at all, nor have it now--in short, because they do not pray. The prince of this world has full scope for action in the hearts of such men; he becomes their master. They have not asked and do not ask God's grace in prayer (for God's gifts are only given to those who ask and seek), and thus their hearts, corrupt by nature, become dried up without

the vivifying dew of the Holy Ghost, and at last from their extreme dryness they take fire, and blaze with the infernal flame of unbelief and various passions, and the Devil only knows how to inflame the passions that keep up this terrible fire, and triumphs at the sight of the ruin of the unfortunate souls that were redeemed by the blood of Him who has trampled the power of Satan under foot.

A morning prayer. O, God! Creator and Master of the World! Mercifully protect Thy creature, adorned with Thy Godly image, in these morning hours: Let Thine eyes, millions and millions of times brighter than the rays of the sun, vivify and enlighten my soul, darkened and slain by sin. Deliver me from despondency and slothfulness, grant me joy and vigour of soul, so that with a glad heart I may praise Thy mercy, Thy holiness, Thy boundless greatness, and Thy infinite perfections, at every hour and in every place. For Thou, Lord, art my Creator and the Master of my life, and to Thee Thy reasonable creatures every hour ascribe glory and praise, both now and for ever and to ages of ages.

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

then can be fulfilled those higher commandments, of which it's said that everything is contained within them.

Begin with the first: poverty of spirit consists in destroying one's ego in order to see all the impotence of our soul, all its infirmities, sinfulness. If the soul sees, knows, and senses itself this way, then it will certainly come to faith, to the conviction that in God, and in Him alone, is its strength, its purification, its salvation; and this faith of the soul is the door of the Kingdom of Heaven—not only to the Heavenly Kingdom that will be the inheritance of holy souls in eternity, but to that Kingdom that is within us.

This poverty of spirit is truly blessed, because the soul, having seen its powerlessness, its impurity, and its inadequacy for anything good, loses faith in itself, ceases to hope in itself—and this is the beginning of faith and hope in God. It finds Him there where it loses itself. It's difficult, it's bitter to remain in this poverty, in this hopelessness; the soul

feels that it's perishing, that it has no salvation, no help from anywhere.

But this state of hopelessness must be overcome in order to come to faith. We must not only know our infirmity with the mind, but sense it with our entire being, live in it, and only then does the soul come to living faith in God. It will see Him acting in everything, when it itself ceases, with all its egotism, to act in everything. It will see Him reigning when it stops relying on its own reasoning for everything.

Open the Gospel, read it, delve into what the Lord taught His disciples, and you'll learn what commandments He gave His followers. He taught them to renounce everything, mainly themselves, even to the point of rejecting their own soul. This renunciation is necessary because the soul has so much impurity, so many passions contrary to the spirit of Christ, that without cutting them off, communion with Christ is impossible.

This renunciation of self is possible only when we have a goal for which

we can renounce ourselves and reject our passions. This goal is love of neighbor. In order to fulfill the duty of loving our neighbor, we must abandon ourselves, renounce our own souls. The Lord showed this love in both word and example. He taught us to forgive our enemies, to have mercy on the weak, not to condemn sinners, to sacrifice ourselves for the good of others.

This commandment about loving one's neighbors can't be fulfilled without renouncing our predilections for earthly goods. We can renounce our own selves and yield in everything to our neighbor only when we see eternal life, when we strive to love the eternal One, the unchanging Good, the only perfect One—God.



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## Homily on Christ's 2 Healings, (cont'd from p.1)

Jairus sought out the Lord and asked Him to heal his daughter, who was dying. But the woman could not even do that. She knew how others viewed her and perhaps she even viewed herself as a miserable, isolated, unclean woman not worthy of the attention of the Messiah. She did not ask Him to lay hands on her for healing, for that would make Him unclean also. She may have thought that He would have refused to heal her for that very reason. She was understandably embarrassed to have a public discussion with Christ about her medical condition. But she had enough faith and hope in Him to reach out and touch the hem of His clothing in the middle of a large crowd. Perhaps she could get what she wanted without drawing attention to herself.

And when she did reach out to Him in that way, she was healed. She had not made Christ unclean or been refused or humiliated by

Him; instead, He had made her well. Of course, she was terrified when the Savior asked, "Who touched me?" She knelt before Him in humility, shaking with fear, and confessed to Him—and to everyone else—that she was the one. Who knows just what was going through her mind in that moment when the Lord said, "Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well. Go in peace."

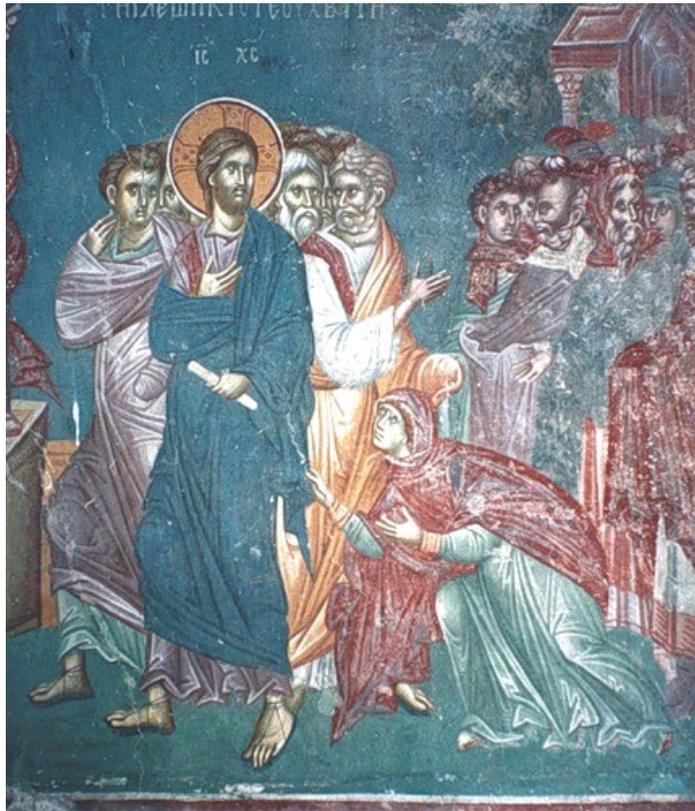
Did you notice that, before her healing, she had not said anything to Christ, not even identifying herself to Him? She never asked Him for anything, probably because she was too embarrassed and afraid to do those things. But she still did

what little she could, at least reaching out to Him in faith. The Son of God knew who had touched Him, of course, but asked who it was in order to give her an opportunity to confess her faith, to make clear to herself and everyone else that His healing mercy extended even to her. In doing so, He showed that His abundant mercy extends even to those so broken and discouraged that they can just barely bring themselves to reach out to Him.

If we are honest, we will recognize ourselves in her humble example. Who is not embarrassed and discouraged due to some long-term struggle, some weakness or burden that we have virtually lost hope of overcoming? We may have experienced an embarrassment or humiliation so profound that we can barely acknowledge it to

ourselves, much less to God or to other people. For whatever reason, we may have come to believe that we are unclean and unworthy of His mercy or of healthy relationships with others. It may seem impossible to find the words to express our sufferings either in conversations with those closest to us or in prayer. Like that poor woman, we may feel alone, unworthy, and ashamed.

When that is our situation, we must follow her example of touching the hem of His garment, of reaching out to Christ for help as best we can. Even as He did not embarrass or reject her, He will not turn us away. He will respond graciously, as He always does to humble, sincere people who come to Him with faith, love, and repentance. Instead of us somehow making Him unclean, He will work through our faith to bring healing, mercy, and strength.



Jairus approached the Savior differently, openly asking Him to heal his dying daughter. But his faith was then put to a very difficult test. The girl died, but the Lord said that she was only sleeping. Everyone ridiculed Christ for that statement, but Jairus somehow believed the astonishing word of the Lord: "Do not be afraid; only believe, and she will be made well."

How hard it must have been for Jairus and his wife to hear this news and to believe in the Lord's promise. Their daughter had just died and the mourning had already begun. It was time to get ready for the funeral, and here was Christ denying the obvious. Their faith was put to the test, but they somehow still believed. And the Lord did as He said:

He brought the girl back to life.

This healing was not as simple as Jairus had hoped. He was probably the kind of person used to getting what he wanted. If anyone could expect the help of the Messiah, it was an upstanding leader of the synagogue. But just as Abraham's faith was tested by the command to sacrifice Isaac, his faith was tested when his daughter actually died. It is one thing to heal the sick, but quite another to believe that someone can raise the dead. But probably with great fear and doubt, Jairus still managed to believe. He trusted Christ as best he could. And through that little bit of faith, the Lord showed His power over the grave and His unfathomable mercy for those who are suffering.

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The differences between Jairus and the bleeding woman in social standing and reputation were ultimately irrelevant for how they stood before the Lord. The key point is that they did not stand; instead, they kneeled before Him in humble faith. Human characteristics and differences are ultimately irrelevant when it comes to our ability to follow the example of these two people. Though we will all do it differently in some ways, we can all open the wounds and sorrows of our lives to Him for healing as best we can in humble faith. We may still doubt, but there is no doubt that He will hear us and respond as is best for our salvation, for the healing of our souls. We must not judge ourselves or others as though it were up to us to determine who is worthy of Christ's blessing.

Let this sink in: None of us is worthy or deserves anything from Him. Our hope is not in ourselves or what anyone owes us, but in the gracious mercy which He gives to all who reach out to Him from the depths of their souls with even a small bit of humble faith.

If you ever despair of the possibility of being healed and transformed by our merciful Savior, remember the woman who merely touched the hem of His garment and the man who somehow trusted that Christ could bring his daughter back to life.

If you ever think that sin and death will have the last word about you, turn to the One Who went to the Cross, the tomb, and Hades in order to bring us into the eternal joy of His resurrection. If we come to Him in humble faith, presenting all our wounds for His healing as best we can, He will not send us away. Instead, He will heal our souls by His gracious mercy and make us already participants in life eternal. Amen.

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And here is the first and most important commandment of Christ: to love God with all our heart, mind, and strength. In a nutshell, the Lord indicated the perfection of the spiritual path, but a whole human lifetime isn't enough to master, to fulfill this word from Christ. Renounce yourself. But what does this mean? To know yourself properly, to see all the impurity of your soul, all its passion, all its infirmity—this is the lifetime task for those who seek salvation. I said salvation, but what are we being saved from? We are being saved from the

perdition we find ourselves in. That means that finding out what kind of perdition surrounds us is the most pressing question. This is our common perdition—a perdition we have built for ourselves out of our passions and sins; a perdition that we don't see within ourselves, and don't even suspect. Meanwhile, that which lives in us prevents us from following Christ, despite our determination and desire. Thus, we must first of all purify the secret places of the soul; purify the vessel from which, according to the Lord, come fornication, murder, thievery, and all kinds of passions and sins.

*Humility*

Humility is the sole state of spirit through which all the spiritual gifts can come to a man. It's a door that opens the heart and makes it capable of spiritual sensations. Humility brings imperturbable calm to the heart, peace to the mind, wakefulness to the thoughts. Humility is a power that embraces the heart, giving it an idea of that feeling of eternal life that can't enter the heart of a carnal man. Humility gives the mind its original purity. It clearly begins to see the difference between good and evil in everything. There can be no pure, spiritual prayer until the heart feels humility.

*Self-knowledge*

In the soil of **humility** good fruits grow. In the awareness of its sinfulness, the soul comes to know the Lord by faith. But in **egotism**—what will it see or know how to save itself? And your "I," no matter how good and adorned with goodness it is—what can it give? Neither light nor life. There is a terrible power in it, fighting against all the commandments of God, against others, against God Himself; a power that kills the soul itself, depriving it of goodness, life, God. In moments of peace, it's difficult to see what kind of spirit drives all human actions, even the good ones, even the desire for salvation, for goodness, for God. But during temptations, things are revealed that were before unclear. If the Lord ruled the soul, then the time of temptations would be a time of victories and crowns for the soul, a time of great prosperity. If the ego controlled a man's actions, then during temptations its power turns on—and torments the poor soul, as a prisoner, leading it to the very depths of hell.

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