

# A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



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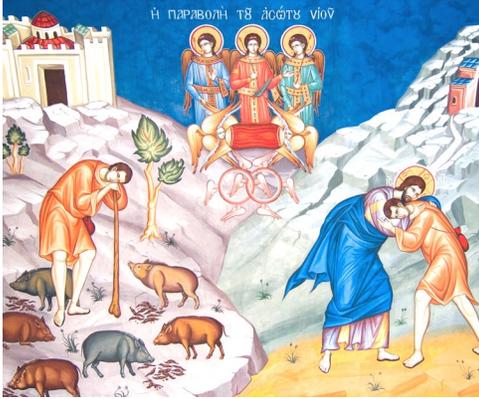
*Glory be to Jesus Christ!*

*Glory be Forever!*

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35<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost-The Last Judgment

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ment a great ‘stumbling block’ to the Christian faith, together with the idea of sin, which has been greatly subjectified according to modern, popular cultural beliefs, if even acknowledged at all. And so, in an effort to be more ‘appealing’, these groups avoid discussion of what we call sin and judgment, along with other Gospel teachings that challenge and convict us to repent and recognize God as our Judge.

Today is the Sunday of the Last Judgment. Many in today’s world avoid discussing topics like Judgment, sin, hell. The erroneous thought is that God, being a “God of love,” would never condemn anyone to eternal damnation even if they have rejected and blasphemed Him, lived a life apart from Him, and persecuted the Church and Christ’s followers.

Many consider the very idea of judgment

In the Creed, we devoutly affirm our belief that Christ God will “come again to judge the living and the dead.” This revealed truth is part of Holy Tradition and the Gospels. As such, the question arises, how is God both the ‘only Lover of mankind’ as well as the ‘Righteous Judge?’ The answer to this important question, so pertinent to the Sunday of the Last

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++ 35<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost ++

Martyr Quadratus & Companions

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 8:8-9:2

Gospel: Matthew 25: 31-46

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.*

## ***Feast of the Presentation of the Lord into the Temple***

The Feast of the Presentation of Christ commemorates the Presentation of Christ by His Mother in the Temple at Jerusalem exactly forty days after His Birth. As we can see from the icon of the Feast, Christ was brought to the Temple by His mother and accompanied by His guardian Joseph, who holds the customary sacrifice of two turtle doves.

In the Temple Christ was carried in the arms of the Righteous Simeon and watched over by the Prophetess Anna. This

Feast is yet more proof that the Son of God truly became man. Today an infant, not a spirit or an angel, is brought to the Temple.

This meeting between the Righteous Simeon and Anna and the Saviour is why this Feast has another, very common name: 'The Meeting of the Lord'. According to age-old tradition, Simeon was one of those Seventy translators who in the third century before Christ had translated the Scriptures of the Old Testament into Greek.

Coming to the words in the seventh chapter of Isaiah the Prophet, he had been awestruck by the affirmation that a Virgin would give birth. He had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would live until he saw these words fulfilled.

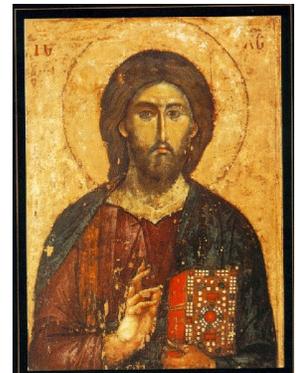
At today's Feast which is the fulfillment of these words, the aged Simeon utters the words: 'Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy words, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast

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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**

Take the trouble to spend only one single day according to God's commandments, and you will see and feel in your own heart, how good it is to fulfil God's will. Love God with all your heart at least as much as you love your father, your mother, and your benefactors; value with all your strength His love and His benefits to you (go over them mentally in your heart, think how He gave you existence

and with it all good things, how endlessly long He bears with your sins, how endlessly He forgives you them; for the sake of your hearty repentance, by virtue of the suffering and death upon the Cross of His only-begotten Son, what blessedness He has promised you in eternity, if you are faithful to Him); enumerate besides His mercies, which are endlessly great and manifold.

Furthermore, love everyone. Do not wish anything that you would not wish for yourself; think, feel for him just as you would think and feel for your own self; do not wish to see in him anything that you do not wish to see in yourself; do not let your memory keep in it any evil caused to you by others, in the same way as you would wish that the evil done by yourself should be forgotten by others; believe others to be as well-intentioned as yourself. Do unto them as you would to yourself, and then you will see what you will obtain in your heart--what peace and blessedness! You will be in paradise before reaching it--that is, before the paradise in heaven you will be in the paradise on earth.

**The Presentation of the Lord, cont'd from p.1**

prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel'.

Soon after uttering these words, he reposed, as did the Righteous Anna, who had also been waiting to see the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit that she too would see the Messiah in great old age. The Prayer of St Simeon is read at every Vespers service in the Church Year, but at Vespers yesterday, and again tonight, before tomorrow's Feast of St Simeon and St Anna, it is sung.

According to the Old Testament, the Jews were commanded to present their male children at the Temple in Jerusalem forty days after their Birth. This was to give thanks to God and pray for the purification of the mother and health of the child, for it was considered that after the vital forty-day period it was almost certain that all mortal danger was passed. This is why this Feast has yet another name: 'The Purification of the Virgin'.

The Christ-Child is only forty days old, the salvation of the world is de-

pendent on His Mother. This is why although this Feast is a Feast in honour of Our Lord, the Church is yet in blue, for we also give great honour today to the Mother of God. Indeed, this Feast is the Feast of all mothers.



In our New Testament times, we have the custom of 'churching', which is similar to this rite of purification of the mother, which was carried out in the Old Testament, but there are also important differences. First of all,

since the Coming of Christ, all children, not only boys, are to be presented in church at the age of forty days. However today, they are to be presented for baptism and chrismation and so made ready for holy communion. Secondly, the Church also appoints prayer to be said over the mother at this critical time. These prayers are firstly in thanksgiving for the physical safety of the mother, but also they are said for the spiritual safety of the mother, in order to ward off what is now called 'post-natal depression'.

The Presentation, the Meeting and the Purification are then all names given to today's Feast, but there is yet a fourth name - Candlemas. This name was given to this Feast in memory of the Roman custom of lighting candles at it, which recalls the lights in the Temple at Jerusalem. The custom spread from Rome even to western parts of Russia and in the Russian service-books there is a prayer for the blessing of candles on this day. The Light of Christ illumines all.

## Homily on the Last Judgment, (cont'd from p.1)

Judgment, begins with the affirmation that God in His great love and mercy toward us desires our salvation more than anything else. This divine will is clearly revealed in the Holy Scriptures: God “desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (I Tim. 2:4) and revealed through the life of Christ, Who, as the Logos (Word) of God incarnate, has been revealed as that Truth. No surprise then that the next verse in I Timothy says, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...”, that is, our Savior, who redeems our human nature and rescues us from damnation by His defeat of death and new life in Him.

God the Father invites us into a relationship, a communion with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, that we too may “put on Christ” in the language of Holy Baptism, enter into His redeemed human nature, and become fellow victors with Him over sin and death—those very enemies that Christ God became incarnate to defeat, and which, would, otherwise keep us from life with Him who is holy. God has made a way for us to grow in holiness and participation in the life He alone is. Such is His great love and mercy for us: He created us for love and communion, life with Him. He created us for participation in that divine life, in the relationship of unity and love that God the Holy Trinity is in His divine nature.

Through the lives of the Saints, we see that growth in love and relationship with God is possible through our cooperation with God’s redemptive work in their lives by the Holy Spirit. But, we see too in our own lives and in the sin around us, the possibility of our rejection of that love—rejection of that life that God so graciously entrusts to us every time we say no to His life and yes to sin through our own self-will, growing apart from life and communion, with God, our Creator.

The truth is that God’s love and judgment are not incongruous paradoxes of God’s nature, as some suggest in today’s culture in their eagerness to dismiss or ‘reimagine’ Christianity to conform it to their own liking. Rather, these two aspects of God go hand in hand: Without a correct understanding of sin and judgment, there is no healing, no salvation, no life with God.

This is where judgment comes in: When we speak of the Final or Last Judgment, we understand that God’s judgment is happening even now. Judgment began when God rejected our first parent’s separation from their true life in Him—their true identity—and, instead, chose death. Through His Christ, His Word made flesh, God made a way so we would not remain in perpetual alienation from Him, our life source. God, in His love for us, doesn’t leave us in the corruption of sin and death: Repeatedly, He calls us back to life with Him. We hear this truth repeated every Divine Liturgy. We see this truth in His relationship with Israel. We embrace this truth in Holy Baptism, becoming part of the New Israel as we are born anew of water and the spirit.



At the present, now, before His glorious Second Coming, it’s we who must, in a sense, judge ourselves through our choices for or against God. This doesn’t mean that we make it up as we go along: All such relativism and subjectivism of our sins or even of the Orthodox Faith, leads to delusion and our own prideful self-condemnation and willful separation from God’s life.

Instead, when we speak of judging ourselves, we mean that our pilgrimage of life with God is dynamic and active: we are actively repenting, we are bringing our sins before God in regular confession, we are praying for God’s mercy on us, we are seeking His healing from our sin-sickness and passions, we’re confessing our negligence of our divine calling of adoption, we’re

confessing and repenting of our inaction towards God, our church, and the world around us.

This judgment of ourselves, this active repentance, we engage in now so that come the Last and Final Judgment we may be spared from separation from Christ. A verse from Matins for today says, “O Lord supreme in love, as I think upon Thy fearful judgment-seat and the day of Judgment, I tremble and am full of fear, for I am accused by my own conscience.” Moment by moment, repentance and regular sacramental confession purges us of our sin and heals our conscience even as it aids us in our growth in faith. In this way, we experience more of God’s love as we humble ourselves through submission to the life in Christ in His Church. In this way, we’re saved from condemnation at Christ’s final judgment.

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At the same time, Christ in His mercy heals us of our sin-sickness, grows us into the men and women of God He's called us to be. By this mercy, we come to enjoy the blessed life with God, the filling of that emptiness within us that only God is meant to fill and, indeed, that only God can fill.

Back to the question about love: What we really need to ask is not how God can judge; He's holy, He created us, He's without sin. He's the only One who can judge. What we need to ask is: How is it love, if we look sin in the eye and don't address it in our own lives, subjectify it, or refrain from speaking the truth with others whom we love? We can do so without judging them, for judgment is an attitude of the heart, an attitude of ultimate condemnation, but if we don't understand sin and its sad consequences on us, on them, or subjectively decide that we can define sin for ourselves, then we're keeping ourselves and others from the very freedom from sin that leads to our and their healing, salvation, and eternal life with God. In short, denial of the reality of the Last Judgment, of the consequences of sin, is a rejection of life, a rejection of the possibility of glory. And that, brothers and sisters, is no love but only self-condemnation.

Now the season is upon us to take Christ's words to heart and apply the teaching of His Body the Church to our daily lives. Now is the time for us to ready ourselves to purge the passions and sin from our lives, to struggle more earnestly to grow to love and serve Him, His Church, and our fellow man. If we're to make the most of this holy season, we prepare ourselves, our families, our homes (our 'little churches') now so that we are ready to go into the desert with Christ during the 40 days of our Lenten journey. Now is the time we prioritize Christ and His Church on our calendars. Now is the time to speak with your priest about your participation and fasting so that you can make the most of this opportunity for deification, growth, healing, and salvation.

Christ God beckons us, "Come!" Our faith in Christ, our love for God, is manifest in the spiritual fruit we produce in cooperation with the Holy Spirit's work in us and through us. If we are faithful in this struggle, then, on that Last Day, by God's grace, we'll hear from Him those joyous words we sang at Vespers for this Sunday, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you."

During our Church Services, the priest burns incense in a censer, which is a metal vessel suspended on three chains about two feet long, and provided with a cover to regulate the burning of a small disk of charcoal placed inside. On the chains are twelve small bells, signifying the voice of the twelve Disciples of our Lord. Grains of incense are placed on the burning charcoal.

Incense is a material used to produce a fragrance when burned. The priest places incense on the burning coal in the censer which the server swings causing clouds of smoke to go heavenward. The ascending clouds of incense in the Old Testament made up of fragrant gums and spices is an offering of earth's treasures to their Creator, symbolizing prayer. "Let my prayer be

counted as incense before thee, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice ..." (Psalm 141: 2) Accordingly, the people would pray before the Holy of Holies while the priest within was making the sacrifice. "And the whole multitude of people were praying outside at the hour of incense." (Luke 1: 10) The prayers went up to heaven unto God as the smoke of the incense does leaving behind the sweetness of the odor of it all the sweetness of the Holy Spirit.

So, too, in the New Testament does it have a prayerful meaning as St. John beheld how in heaven "an angel came and stood at the altar, with a golden censer; and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden Altar before the

Throne of God; and the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the Saints from the hand of the angel before God." (Revelations 8:3-4), but it has a much deeper meaning; the transformed ideal. The burning coal is the burning ember. Christ, Who takes away the sins of the world as we behold in Isaiah at the calling of the prophet Isaiah, "then flew one of the Seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the Altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips: your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven.'" (Isaiah 6:6-7)

The Church offers the bishops and priests, in order to honor in their person Jesus Christ, whom they represent and with whose sacred character they are clothed. The Church incenses the faithful to honor in them the likeness to Christ which was imprinted upon them in Baptism ... to show them forth as the temples of the Holy Spirit. God commanded Moses and His chosen people to use incense. The Church uses it in her service.

