

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 607

2nd Sunday of Great Lent-Jesus heals a Paralyzed Man

February 25, 2024



Jesus Christ.

We may look upon the paralytic as a messenger of God, an imperfect human messenger. Nevertheless, he was made complete by the power of God, and was sent home by our Lord to be a living and walking message of hope to his family and friends. The second occasion is the commemoration of a heavenly body, a messenger of good news, the Archangel of our Lord. His name is Gabriel which in Hebrew translates as "the power" or "might of God".

Finally, we have the commemoration of a Holy messenger, St. Gregory Palamas. Saint Gregory was a mere mortal filled by the wisdom and power of God. He was a vigilant contestant of the Orthodox faith, trying to keep Orthodox Christianity unpolluted by heretical doctrines. A proclaimer of
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Today, we have come to the beginning of the second week of Lent. Today we are all gathered together to honor three separate occasions, a tri-hypostatic commemoration. The first occasion is the Sunday of the Paralytic, which actually commemorates the twofold miracle of forgiveness and healing performed by our Lord on a certain paralyzed man. It is the commemoration of the power of God working through

++ 2nd Sunday of Great Lent ++

++St. Gregory Palamas Sunday++

Epistle: Hebrews 1: 10-2:3

Gospel: Mark 2: 1-12

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 2)

These Teachings of Our Lord are chanted as a daily instruction at the Liturgy, during the Little Entrance, when the priest and altar servers prepare to bring the gospel through the royal doors in procession.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be

satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when people shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in

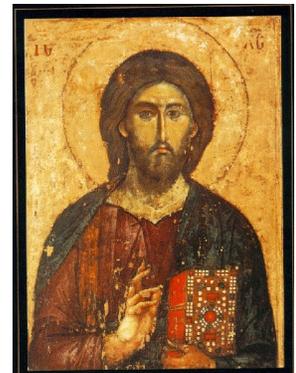
Heaven" (Mt. 5:3-12). This is the way to true beatitude.

Now, we will talk about why these Beatitudes are sung or recited at the Little Entrance and by the open royal doors. We will discover the meaning of the Little Entrance, the altar and the royal doors, for this will make the commandments on beatitude clearer. And now I ask you to remember by heart the truth that we were created by God for eternal life and eternal beatitude, which we lost
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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, 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

On Vanity, Pride, and Humility

Our vanity and pride are so great that the Lord, out of His love, leaves us without His gifts, so we don't perish. Are we really going to dream that we're going to start working miracles and make everyone happy?

We recognize the prophets by their humility, by their belonging to the Church. The people of God are extremely humble; they truly consider themselves worse than

everyone else. To such people the Lord reveals His mysteries, His will. The Apostle John was given his revelation to remind us that Christ is the King of the world. In both our daily life and in the life of the whole world, neither what the devil desires nor what human evil seeks will come to pass, but whatever God wants. Evil may sometimes prevail in this temporary life. People can die being wrongly slandered, but the Lord is coming and He will put everything in its place. He will justify every unjustly condemned person forever.

And what has true dignity? The eternal Kingdom of God, not the feast of this world, given to us for fifty, sixty, or seventy years. The final word about every one of us will come from God. And it matters. All other words are empty. Everything passes, like a fog—both the good and the bad. The most important thing is what God will say about me—the final and most important word. The world and people can say different things; everyone judges in their own way. If Christ is with us, death is defeated, and He illuminates everything. Christ is the light, peace, and joy of all.

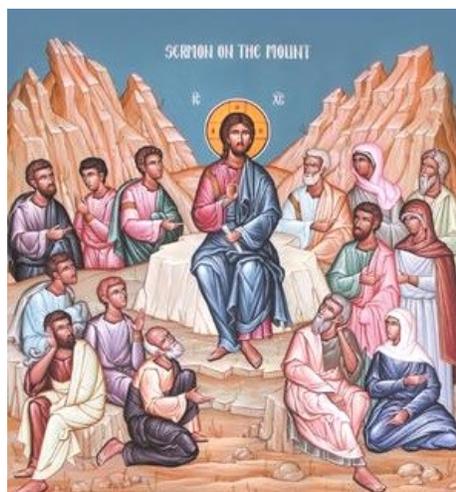
Homily on the Beatitudes, cont'd from p.1

through sin and were banished from Heaven, subjected to God's damnation, and doomed to labor, sorrow, sickness and death, condemned to wandering in exile, seeking this home and beatitude. It may only be returned to us by the Heavenly Father through the intercession and merit of his beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, if we have faith in Him and follow his commandments. Amen.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven."

Previously, we began to speak about the ways to beatitude indicated by the Lord. We found the way in the famous nine beatitudes, which the Savior recounted on the Mount. So let us talk about the reason why these divine sayings of our Lord Jesus Christ were recited or sung at the beginning of the Liturgy, at the Little Entrance by the open royal doors, and why the verse "Remember us, O Lord, when you come into your kingdom" is sung before the Beatitudes; and about the meaning of the Little Entrance, the altar and the royal doors.

Why are the beatitudes sung or read at the Little Entrance, at the beginning of each Liturgy? The Liturgy is a recollection of the earthly life of Jesus Christ from his swaddling clothes to the grave, from his resur-



rection to his ascension into Heaven. The altar means the kingdom of Heaven, or paradise; the royal doors stand for the doors of Heaven; opening and closing the doors during the Liturgy means opening and closing the kingdom of Heaven.

The beginning of the liturgy signifies the beginning of the redemptive ministry of Jesus Christ to humankind, and the Little Entrance with the Gospel stands for his procession to recount the Gospel and the first Sermon on the Mount, in which he blessed those who fulfilled his commandments and promised rewards in Heaven to those who strive in this world for his sake. As we look at the open royal doors as the gates of the kingdom of Heaven, and as we gaze with the eyes of our heart at the Lord appearing mysteriously in the Little Entrance before us, earthly strangers, outcasts from the Heaven, it feels natural, as the prudent thief, to pray to the Lord, saying: "Remember us, O Lord, when you come into your kingdom."

The Beatitudes of Christ are sung at this time to remind us of the appearance of Jesus Christ to preach to the world and his first Sermon on the Mount, and of the virtues each of us needs to be allowed to enter paradise

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Homily on St. Gregory Palamas Sunday, (cont'd from p.1)

the reality of the powers and energies of our God and the uncreated light which our Lord revealed at Mount Tabor. From these three different types of mediators or messengers, we observe that God works in many and mysterious ways. He works through His angels, he works through His Apostles and Saints — but he may also choose to work through his sinful, imperfect servants. In other words, God may also work through any of us here today.

How does God work through us you may ask? We are all sinners, we are all imperfect, we are all unworthy. Yes indeed this is true we are all unworthy, but God who has eyes everywhere can see through and beyond our sins and can penetrate our hearts. God can also see through our false piety our empty prayers and pietistic tears. He alone knows our potential our true intentions, whether they are good or bad. He alone knows if our faith is true, or false. Ultimately — we are all unworthy, but by the grace and power of God we may become counted worthy to serve our God.

The Church proclaims that those whom God loves He tests and chastises in order to strengthen them spiritually. The Old Testament is filled with such examples, the prime example being the chastisement of the faithful and righteous Job. In the New Testament Saint Paul is perhaps the prime example, who proclaims that he is the first of all sinners. He initially persecuted the Church, yet God chose Him, God knew that deep inside Saint Paul was the potential to protect and proclaim the truth to all the Nations. A later example? Saint Mary of Egypt, initially she was a prostitute but was chosen by God nevertheless to become a Saint of our Church.

Today we celebrate a similar occasion where our Lord recognized and discerned the heart of the sinful paralytic. In conjunction, He also saw the faith and heard the wishes of the four loyal friends who carried the afflicted man. And with one Word, He forgave the sins of the paralytic, and with another Word, He healed him of his bodily paralysis.

But let us pause for one moment, and let us think; how is it possible that a mere mortal can forgive the sins of another mere mortal? Surely it is only God who has such authority, It is His power alone which can forgive our sins. Yes indeed God alone has this power, but they

failed to realize who exactly Jesus was. This is exactly what the devil wanted the people following Jesus to believe. But Jesus perceived the deception in the hearts of the scribes, who reasoned against His actions. So Jesus revealed His true power to the unbelievers. He performed a second miracle; He made the paralytic walk. Jesus proclaims that this was done in order for them to "know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" (Mark 2:10).

Jesus the Son of Man was the righteous judge foretold by the book of Daniel the prophet. But what does the title Son of Man mean? It does not mean what most of us think it means today; that he was born by a human. Son of Man in Hebrew Ben Iysh means that He is the Son of the image and likeness of God. Son of Man in Hebrew means one that has God's authority and God's power yet appears to be human in every way.

The wise men the scribes (or as they are called today) the theologians of Jesus time knew very well that only God could do what this seemingly simple man could do. But they were deceived by their self-righteousness and pride. Satan had put up a wall against their reasoning and deceived them to think that Jesus was a blasphemer.

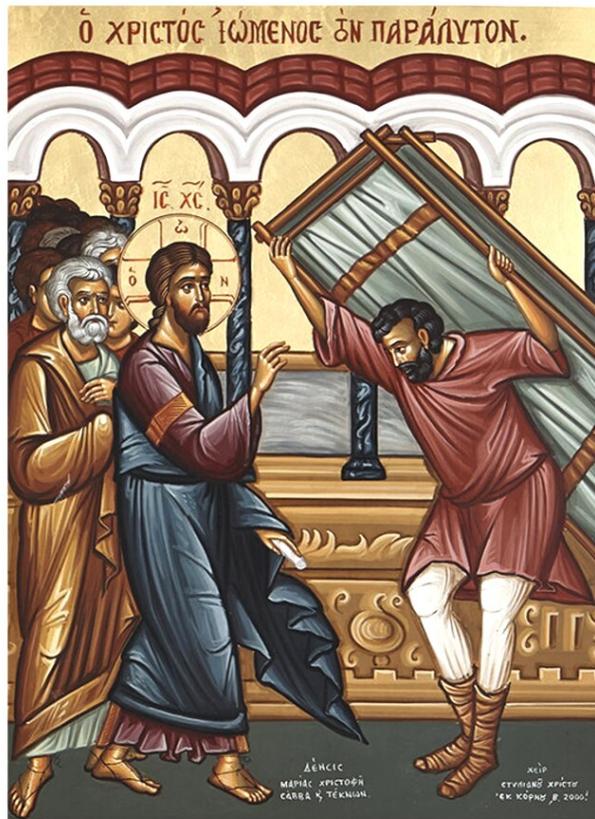
They could not, they dared not, open their subjective minds and look upon Jesus Christ's face to see his righteousness, his truthfulness, the true light shining from within. Instead they were scared and lacked true faith and so plotted against Him.

Let us now look more closely at this twofold miracle. One notices that not only was this paralyzed

man forgiven and made to walk after being healed by the power of God, he was also told by Jesus to take up his bed and go home. To lift up his bed after so many years of having lost all power to the muscles of his limbs. He was physically weak, however his faith together with the faith of his four companions and friends, who lowered him down through the roof, all contributed to this very special miracle recorded in Mark's Gospel today.

If we are saved in the last days, my brothers and sisters, it will be in Christ. If we are granted God's mercy and forgiveness it will not only be our soul which will be saved, it will also have to be our body as well. Our body must be pure so that our soul may also be pure, but more importantly our soul must be pure in order for our body

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to be pure. If we defile our body, the temple of the Holy Spirit, then what hope do we have of God saving our souls? We observe then in this particular order — that sin defiles the body and that the defiled body harms the soul. We observe that Jesus Christ being pure and sinless works in the opposite way — He first cleansed the soul of the paralytic, and then He cured and revitalized the body.

This was done to show that neither fasting nor praying nor even righteous acts can forgive our sins if we do not first repent. It is almost futile to fast and pray and do all manner of righteous acts if we do not first go to confess our sins and reject our old selves in order for the power of God to empower and revitalize our degenerating limbs and souls. Only God knows our sins and so can heal both our souls and our bodies. Holy Scripture tells us that our body will be resurrected together with our soul and will be transformed by the grace of God into a spiritual body on the day of the resurrection of the dead.

Today Saint Mark implores us to believe in the saving power of God working in this world. Today Saint Mark reminds us to believe and trust in the power of God working through His messengers, whether human, divine or angelic. Most of all my brethren, the central message we must remember today is to pray for one another and carry each other's burdens as these four men did for this man. If we would just do this for each other, then assuredly all of us gathered here would be saved. And remember that it is never too late to be healed, it is never too late to repent. Arise then my beloved brethren so that we may take up our Cross daily no matter how heavy it is and follow Christ. And may God grant us all perfect health to our souls and our bodies. Amen

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into Heaven opened by the Lord's cross. Through this sacred rite, the Church says to us: you were banished from paradise for your sins in Adam, you lost the beatitude you had been created for; for you paradise was closed for many thousands of years, but it was opened to you again by the Son of God; compel yourself to enter it, for "the kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matt. 11:12). To enter the kingdom of Heaven opened by the Lord's cross, here

are the qualities and virtues you need to possess: poverty of spirit, lamenting over sins, meekness, hunger and thirst after righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, etc. Acquire them and you will find your way to paradise. This is the meaning of the Little Entrance with the Gospel and singing the Beatitudes of the Gospel during it!

Now let us look at the first commandment on beatitude. "Blessed," says the Lord, "are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven". Let us imagine ourselves standing on the Mount of the Beatitudes, where the Lord preached to the people. His disciples and simple people are there standing before Him, longing for his word. There they stand, because along with his disciples, they relentlessly follow the divine teacher, waiting for his word. Because they also feel their spiritual poverty and destitution, and regret; and with the generosity of heart and mind of Christ they hope to make up for the deficiency of their hearts and minds; from the richness of his mercy they hope to have their sins forgiven and achieve peace in their souls; and they long to enlighten their souls with his light; and from his ever-flowing source they seek to draw the life-giving streams of his grace. These are the poor in spirit whom he, who knows all hearts, beatifies, it is they whom he opens the kingdom of Heaven for; these are the humble ones to whom the Lord reveals his grace!

But why are there no scribes and the Pharisees, scholars and teachers of the Jewish people among them; why are there no priests, elders, or princes? Because they refuse to realize their spiritual poverty, their sinfulness, blindness and spiritual nakedness. They consider themselves righteous, who don't need to learn the word of truth from the gentle and humble teacher of Nazareth; they believe they have pleased God with their false righteousness and dream of taking the first places in the Messiah's kingdom. Brothers, these are the proud ones who are far away from the true beatitude and the kingdom of Heaven; pitiable people, they don't understand that their righteousness is not pure before God and it is not worth the name of truth, for it is imbued with pride and vanity; for they are "the generation of vipers" (Mt. 3:7), children of God's wrath.

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