

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



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Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!



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5th Sunday of Pascha— Sunday of the Samaritan Woman

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It is strangely appealing to define ourselves by our failures, especially when others know that we have stumbled and treat us poorly as a result. As well, our own pride often causes us to lose perspective such that we obsess about how we do not measure up to whatever illusion of perfection we have accepted. People are often their own harshest critics in ways that are

not healthy at all.

On this Sunday of the Samaritan Woman, we celebrate that our Lord's great victory over death enables us to be free from defining ourselves by our sins or by how other people may view us. He rises in glory not only over the tomb and Hades, but over all the distortions of the beauty of the human person created in His image and likeness. Today we commemorate that His salvation extends to our most painful failings and to the harsh judgments of others upon us. Even such difficult circumstances may become points of entry into the joy of the empty tomb.

The woman at the well certainly knew what it was like to be defined by others as someone who did not measure up. She was a Samaritan, and therefore rejected by the Jews as a heretic and a member of a despised group
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Sunday of the Samaritan Woman

*** St. Athanasius the Great ***

Epistle: Acts 11: 19-26; 29-30

Gospel: John 4: 5-42

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, *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.*

The Holy Doors in the Church by John Nichiporuk

The indispensable attribute of the Holy Doors are the diptych icon of the Annunciation and the icons of the four Evangelists. It is so because the Incarnation described in the canonical Gospels opens for us the gates to the kingdom of heaven, closed hitherto by the sin of Adam.

Thanks to the consent of the Virgin Mary, serving as a "gateway" for the Incarnation, which the prophet Ezekiel proclaimed implicitly (Ezek. 44: 1-4), the Lord put in force the economy of our

salvation. The Holy Doors symbolize the Good News of the Coming into the world of the Messiah and the opening of the kingdom of heaven.

They also remind us of the importance of remaining faithful to the testimony imprinted for us in the canonical books of Scripture, violating the meaning of which entails a distortion of the Good News and consequently of our communion with God and participation in the sacraments of the church.

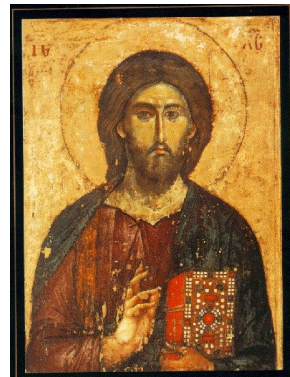
Over the centuries, the rules regulating when the Holy Doors should be open or closed have become more and more complex. Currently they remain closed most of the time, in memory of our sinfulness and alienation from God. The doors open at the solemn moments of the daily worship cycle, as well as the most important moments of the Liturgy, such as the Small Entrance, the reading of the Word of God, the Cherubic Hymn, the transferring
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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.





Troparion to St. George

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
for our souls
salvation.

News and Notes

We welcome all who are worshiping with us today. Because of COVID-19, our social hour has been canceled until we receive further instructions from the Department of Health.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

Please keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Louise, George, Evan, Ryan, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Laura, Elizabeth Matthew, Corella, Ron, Daniel, Frankie, Pat, Kathleen, Terena, Loretta, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

Words from the Holy Fathers

Alms is not only giving money out of your wallet. Alms is to accept a fellow human being to sit next to you, without alienate him/her with your thoughts.

Do you have a colleague who is going through a tragedy in his life? You should know how to comfort him, how to soothe

his pain. For the poor you can do a short prayer: "Lord have mercy on so and so", if you cannot give them something, because you are on the bus and they on the street. The true question is in what state is our heart regarding the pain that is all around us.

The largest sin that we will have to apologize during Judgement is this: "Why I did not give more attention to my fellow human beings? (*Elder Arsenius, On Almsgiving*)."

* * * *

If you hate someone, you cannot have peace in God. Because He is the one who said: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you (Matthew 6, 14)." And if the other person is not making peace with you, you always keep yourself away from hate, and pray for him honestly and never say a bad thing to anyone else about him. (*St. Maximus the Confessor on Forgiveness*).

***Christ is Risen from the dead,
trampling down death by death, and upon
those in the tombs bestowing life!***

The Holy Doors, continued from p.1

of the bread and wine to the altar table and the Communion of the Holy Gifts. The Holy Doors remain constantly open During the Bright Week as a sign of cordial joy in the Risen Christ and the granting of the kingdom of Christ to all.

According to the remarks of church historians and theologians (S. Tar-khanova and the Priest Martyr Pavel Florensky) the Holy Doors are called not to separate the altar from the temple or hide the Holy of Holies from the faithful, but, on the contrary, to accustom Christians in the contemplation of the Holy Mysteries.

This is why the voices of liturgists are heard more and more often suggesting that the doors should remain open during the Liturgy at least until the communion of the clergy. It is for this missionary reason that the hierarchy grants priests of all ranks the right to serve major celebrations (for example, the Nativity of Christ) with the Holy Doors open. Sometimes the same is done in major cathedrals, allowing believers to contemplate the

visible symbols and the incorruptible logoi (St Maximus the Confessor, Mystagogy) of the divine world.



So, today, the entire liturgy is served with the Holy Door open.

Thoughts on the Jesus Prayer

But how wonderful, how delightful, and how consoling a thing it is when God pleased with your efforts in praying unceasingly with the Jesus Prayer (Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me), grants you the gift of the self-acting spiritual prayer, and cleanses also the soul from all earthly sensualities!

It is a condition which is impossible to describe, and the discovery of this mystery of the Jesus Prayer is a foretaste on earth of the bliss of heaven. Such happiness is reserved for those who follow God with a pure and loving heart. So, say the Jesus Prayer as often as you wish and as often as you can. Try to devote every moment you are awake to the prayer, call on the name of Jesus Christ without counting the number of times, and submit yourself humbly to the will of God, looking to Him for help. I am sure He will not forsake you and that He will lead you into the right path.

***O Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God,
have mercy on me a sinner.***

(Homily on Sunday of the Samaritan Woman, cont'd from p.1)

that had intermarried with Gentiles. She herself had been married five times and was now with a man to whom she was not married, which may have been why she went to draw water at the unlikely time of high noon. Perhaps she went to the well in the heat of the day in order to avoid the other Samaritan women who wanted nothing to do with someone like her.

Imagine her surprise, then, when the Savior asked her for a drink of water and then engaged in a conversation about spiritual matters with her. Jewish men simply did not strike up conversations with women in that time and place, and consuming food or drink from a Samaritan was out of the question. How even more shocking it is that Jesus Christ's conversation with her is the longest recorded between Him and any one person in the four gospels. He spoke straightforwardly to her and did not shy away from uncomfortable truths that hit her where she lived. But instead of shutting down the conversation or running away in fear, this Samaritan woman told the people of her village about Christ. As a result, many of her neighbors came to believe in the Lord.

This Samaritan woman is known in the Church as St. Photini, which means "the enlightened one." Through the Savior's conversation with her, Photini became an evangelist who boldly shared the good news, even to her Samaritan neighbors who were surely used to viewing her in anything but spiritual terms. That took tremendous courage. Photini was not only brave in preaching to them, but ultimately in responding to the persecution of the pagan Roman emperor Nero in her defense of the Christian Faith. The Great Martyr Photini refused to back down and gave the ultimate witness to Christ's victory over death by laying down her life for Him. The Savior had set her free even from fear of the grave.

Too many of us today flee in shame from uncomfortable truths, whether we encounter them in our own thoughts or in the opinions of others. Too many of us define ourselves by our failings, weaknesses, and temptations. Thank God, St. Photini the Great Martyr did none of that. In response to her shocking encounter with the Savior, she humbly acknowledged the truth about her brokenness; she did not react defensively or make excuses. She did not end the conversation or run away in

shame. Instead, she was open to the healing of her soul, to the possibility of a new and restored life through the mercy of the Lord. This was such a great blessing to her that she immediately shared the good news with the people of her village and refused to stop, even to the point of laying down her life.

In this joyous season of Pascha, we celebrate that Christ's victory over death. By setting us free from bondage to the fear of death, our Risen Lord enables us to make even our most bitter failures points of entry into the new day of His eternal life. He has conquered death, the wages of sin, which means that our sins now have only the power over us that we allow them to have. When, like St. Photini, we acknowledge them straightforwardly and turn away from them, we participate personally in the good news of Pascha. We rise from death to life as we enter into the joy of the empty

tomb. But when we proudly refuse to confess or repent of our sins, we remain in slavery to our self-centered illusions of perfection, to our sense of shame that we do not live up to the standards that we think we must meet in order to be worthwhile.

In other words, we insist on being our own saviors. But since we cannot conquer death or heal our own souls, that is nothing but foolish pride that keeps us bound to the fear of death, to the terror of realizing how weak we are before the challenges

we encounter both within our own minds and in relation to others. Our failures and weaknesses are not good in and of themselves, but we put them to good use when we let them open our eyes to the truth of who we are, of where we stand before the Lord. If we will use them as ways to humble ourselves without making excuses or otherwise blinding ourselves to what they reveal about us, then we will put ourselves in the blessed place of St. Photini, who was thirsty for strength and healing that she knew she could not give herself, for "a spring of water welling up to eternal life" from the depths of her soul.

No matter what we have done, no matter how distorted and corrupt any dimension of our life may be, no matter how anyone else treats or views us, Christ is able to raise us up with Him from death to life. That is not only a future promise, but a present reality. He rose in glory with His wounds still visible, and no wound that we or others have inflicted puts us beyond the good news of His resurrection.



On Repentance by St. Gregory Palamas (part 4)

Because, since God gave Adam and Eve self-determination and they received, according to Palamas, “the imperial office over the passions within the realm of their souls” and “there was nothing withheld from or imposed upon them” (Homily 29, *PG*, 151, 369C), then through self-censure and Godly sorrow they would have been able to regain what they had lost by their refusal to accept responsibility for their sin. This is why Saint Gregory, in an effort to give a definition of mourning says: “for this is Godly sadness for our salvation, to find the reason in ourselves and not in any of the things which other people have done inadequately. And we should be sad ourselves and, through the confession of our sins and sorrowful contrition over them conciliate God” (Homily 29).

Self-censure is an integral state for the soul where there is humility. Initially, it leads to fear of Hell. It brings to mind the dreadful punishments, as described by the Lord in the Gospel, which become even more terrifying by the eternal dimension they acquire. So people who mourn their sins here and censure themselves because of them, avoid the useless, comfortless and endless mourning engendered in those who come to recognition of their sins through punishment. There, with no hope of redemption or salvation, the pain of mourning is increased by the unwanted reprimands of the conscience.

And this permanent and abiding mourning, since it has no end, causes more mourning and dreadful darkness and searing heat, with no respite, and this leads to the inexpressible depth of dejection (To Xenii). In contrast to Adam and Eve, Palamas refers to Lamech as an example of someone who came to self-censure and contrition for his sins (Homily 29).

It should be especially emphasized that, within Orthodox Christian tradition, asceticism is completely interwoven with grief. The pain of the fall and the joy of the resurrection are experienced by monks with joyful mourning. With bodily poverty and humility, which is hunger, thirst, hardship and affliction of the body, means by which the sensations of the body are brought under rational control, not only is mourning engendered, but also tears begin to

flow.

Saint Gregory gives a clear explanation for this spiritual state in his letter to the nun Xenii. He says that, just as bodily ease, relaxation and pleasure cause callousness, insensitivity and a hard heart, so plain, meagre fare, eaten with restraint brings a broken and contrite heart. Through these, the activities of evil are thwarted, and inexpressible and sweetest joy are given to the soul. Without a contrite heart, no-one can be liberated from the passions. And the heart comes to contrition only through restraint as regards sleep, food and bodily comforts. When the soul is liberated from the passions and the bitterness of sin through contrition, it then receives spiritual delight (To Xenii).

This is the comfort which the Lord says will be the portion of those who mourn. Only in this way can we explain how the alteration of sorrow into joy, about which the Lord spoke to His disciples, becomes an experience with which the monk is acquainted on a daily basis. Mourning becomes joyful and blessed because it brings to fruition in people the pledge of eternal joy.

Self-censure and the sense of sinfulness are the conditions which prepare the soul for mourning. For a long time, says Saint Gregory, like an intelligible weight on the scrutinizing part of the soul they press down and crush in such a way that the saving wine “that gladdens people’s hearts” is distilled. This wine is contrition, which, thanks to mourning and the active part of the soul also crushes the passionate aspect. And once it liberates it from the dark weight of the passions, it fills the soul with blessed joy (To Xenii).

However painful this mourning may be in the initial stages, because it exists alongside the fear of God, so much greater, with the passage of time and as the soul prospers spiritually, so does it become joyful, because people really do see blessed, sweet fruits. The longer mourning lingers in the soul, the more the love of God increases and, in a manner beyond conceiving, is united to it. When the soul experiences mourning profoundly, it tastes the consolation of the benevolence of the Comforter. For the soul, this is such a sacred, sweet and mystical experience that those who have no personal taste of it cannot even suspect its existence (To Xenii).

(continued next issue)

