

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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8th Sunday of Pascha– Pentecost Sunday

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This is a day of great rejoicing: All that Christ imparted to us through His saving Incarnation, defeat of sin and death on the cross, resurrection, and glorious ascension, has its fulfillment and culmination on this day: the disciples, formally confused and fearful, who cowered in the upper room for fear of the Jewish authorities, are now emboldened and enlightened by the

descent of the Holy Spirit. In an instant, all is changed: the disciples now courageously witness to the truth, speaking with great conviction and authority—the Holy Spirit has descended upon them and replaced their heart of fear with power from on high.

Now, we see the Apostles, ordained by Christ, in the streets, united, and preaching to the people with one voice the Good News of new life in Christ Jesus in fulfillment of all that God had promised Israel and the world in His great love and mercy.

The significance of Pentecost is seen in even greater light if we understand its historical context in man's relationship with God. Mankind's efforts at unity without God are always prideful, ego-centric, seeking to take the place of God, as we see in the Tower of Babel. To humble man and teach him to
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*****Descent of the Holy Spirit *****

St. Michael of Synnada Confessor

Epistle: Acts 2: 1-11

Gospel: John 7:37-52, 8:12

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 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.*

Orthodox Theology toward Animals by Nicholas Koios

Orthodox theology maintains an attitude of respect towards animals, as it does to the whole of creation, recognizing the *raison d'être* for their existence, which were established by God himself. Thus, as Saint Silouan the Athonite taught, it is impossible for people whose heart loves the Creator fervently not to be filled with compassion for all creatures.

We see a similar pattern of thought in the teaching and personal example of many Fathers and

Saints of our Church. This concept does not, however, involve any absolute prioritization or idolization of creation, animate or inanimate, animal or plant. The Church regards the creation with respect. We must 'guard' creation, while, at the same time, living in it and off it.

Animals and plants serve as sources of nourishment and as our partners in work activities, and none of this can be ignored. The Fathers and Saints themselves, while expressing their love and

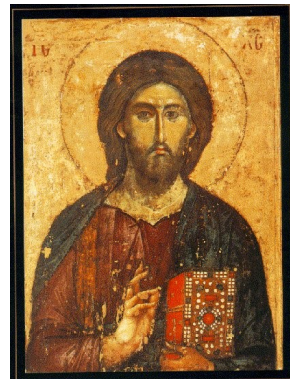
respect for nature, neither condemned not forbade the consumption of meat, fish or any other product.

They also gave approval to the use of animals as assistants in human labor. Even though, in the Lives of the Saints, we frequently see the development of a special and often marvelous interactive relationship with animals, the latter are never recognized as having self-determined rights which would put them on par with human
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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 worshipping 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

The Holy Fathers and Pentecost

“Through the Holy Spirit comes our restoration to paradise, our ascension into the kingdom of heaven, our return to the adoption of sons, our liberty to call God our Father, our being made partakers of the grace of Christ, our being called children of light, our sharing in eternal glory,

and, in a word, our being brought into a state of all “fulness of blessing,” both in this world and in the world to come, of all the good gifts that are in store for us, by promise hereof, through faith, beholding the reflection of their grace as though they were already present, we await the full enjoyment.” *St. Basil the Great*

“The power to bear Mysteries, which the humble man has received, which makes him perfect in every virtue without toil, this is the very power which the blessed apostles received in the form of fire. For its sake the Savior commanded them not to leave Jerusalem until they should receive power from on high, that is to say, the Paraclete, which, being interpreted, is the Spirit of consolation. And this is the Spirit of divine visions. Concerning this it is said in divine Scripture: ‘Mysteries are revealed to the humble’ [Eccl. 3:19]. The humble are accounted worthy of receiving in this Spirit.” *St. Isaac of Syria*

“As the Lord put on the body, leaving behind all principality and power, so Christians put on the Holy Spirit, and are at rest.” *St. Macarios the Great*

Orthodox Theology toward Animals, continued from p.1

beings. In general, the extreme positions promoted by some animal rights and ecological organizations have no foundation in Biblical or Patristic tradition.

Of course, the fact that we cannot give creation absolute priority does not mean that moral theology, which is expressed in the Orthodox theology of the creation, can accept abuse of and cruelty towards animals. Abandonment of animals to the streets, resulting in large numbers of strays, cruel and offensive maltreatment of them, even to the extent of putting them down, wretched living conditions, intensive farming and slaughter of productive animals display rank irresponsibility and are in no way consonant with the Orthodox ethos regarding the creation.

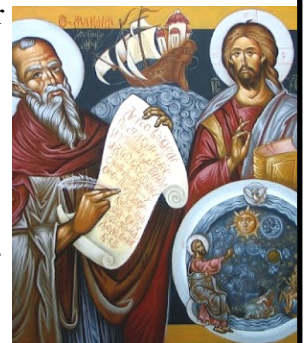
The animal rights movements, however, go to the other extreme. They want not only to put animals on a par with human beings, but often wish to displace the latter in order to guarantee animal rights. In general, this means an interest in animals which

borders on the excessive. According to extremist animal lovers, resources which would be invaluable for people who are hanging on for dear life, especially in a time of crisis, actually belong by right to stray animals. They justify this by laying the blame for the animals’ plight on human beings. It should also be noted that, through the intervention of the animal rights movements, legislation in many countries has been very strict towards human beings but excessively supportive of animals and their rights.

There are, of course, domesticated working animals which serve us in a variety of activities in life (guarding property and herds, guide dogs for the blind, and hunting dogs), a relationship which has existed almost since the time of our appearance on earth. The cooperation between humans and animals is an image of an organic relationship between creation and human beings. This is not an obsolete and idealized relationship, although, unfortunately, this perception

is becoming increasingly popular these days.

The Christian attitude to animals, as well as their relationship with them, stems from the Christian attitude to the whole of creation. For the Church, respect and honor for the creation has a profound theological and social significance. It is indissolubly linked to the worship and honor due to the ‘Creator of all things’ and the relationship of love with our neighbor. It also has a vertical as well as a horizontal dimension. There is no justification for placing irrational nature on a par with human beings, who were created in the image of God. Our proper relationship with God and our neighbor does, however, constitute the basis for a healthy relationship between us and the rest of creation.



(Homily on Pentecost, cont'd from p.1)

follow God and His way that alone is life, God divided the tongues. But now, at Pentecost, God offers us again a way to unity—not one of man’s making, but the way of God by the Holy Spirit. Christ promised before His ascension: “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for... when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:7, 13).

By the Holy Spirit we are indeed led “into all truth.” And what is this truth? Pilot asks this same question of Jesus at His trial. Christ’s answer, found in Jn. 14:6 is clear: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” This revelation of Christ is manifested through His fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, by His power over death, His ability to heal and give life, to forgive sins, and through the witness of the changed lives of His Saints, which continue to bring into the present the message of that same Gospel, which changed the world on that Pentecost 2,000 years ago. The faithful know the Truth is not an ideal, a philosophy, or an ethic, but a Person, Jesus Christ, the Word of God.

By definition, truth is objective, not subjective or divisible. Christ declares and demonstrates Himself to be that Truth.

Pentecost is then an opportunity for the renewal of our Baptism into Christ, our new life in Christ, of our being sealed by the Holy Spirit; it’s an opportunity to step forward in our faith in Christ to witness to the Truth He alone is. By the power of the Holy Spirit and our cooperation with Him, we’re given the means to thirst more after God, to advance in God’s Kingdom, because on this day, all is fulfilled and the life in Christ is made accessible by all, manifesting to us Christ’s abiding presence in our lives by the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit.

God promised Israel that through the Messiah He would “pour out His Spirit on all flesh.” This prophesy is fulfilled this day, as we heard at Vespers last night from the Prophet Joel. Those present at Pentecost from all nations heard the good news of salvation in their own tongue: They all hear in their own language, the one thing that can unite all mankind together in true commu-

nity, one not based on prideful human ambitions, or in humanism, our modern ‘tower of Babel,’ but on communion with God Himself, He who is Life—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Life in the Spirit after Pentecost is manifested then not in chaos or confusion or individual frenetic expression, but always in order and for the sake of the Gospel, as St. Luke relates of the early post-Pentecost Church in Acts 2, “... they continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship in the breaking of the (Eucharistic) bread, and in ‘the prayers.’” This same order continues at the heart of Orthodox worship to this day! And despite differences in language, culture, geography, and time, the same message of “good news,” of healing and salvation, of new life in communion with God in accord

with His commandments, is proclaimed with the same power to change lives—the life of everyone here.

This life in unity in the Spirit, is depicted in the icon of Pentecost before us. In it, we see the heavenly reality of the descent, what it means for us, for the faithful in the Church. The unity of common Orthodox faith is seen in the Apostles’ communal gathering. The diversity of gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, teaching, prophecy, language (I Cor. 12), are depicted in their differing gestures, the Gospel writers are shown Gospel in hand, others with scrolls, depicting their gift of teaching and preaching. The space at the top is vacant, signifying that Christ has ascended and is now invisibly present with us through the Holy Spirit, whom God the



Father has sent to empower them to minister in Christ’s name.

The Holy Spirit is represented by tongues of fire. Why tongues? Because God spoke creation and life into being by His Word, Who then became incarnate to enter into and redeem our human nature. God has sent us His Holy Spirit to further us in this redeemed life in Christ, to empower our speech and actions to proclaim to the world the Good News of His salvation. Today the tongues are united; the curse of Babel is undone. Today, God is proclaimed and manifested as Holy Trinity, a relationship of truth in perfect unity and love that we are invited into the

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Homily on Pentecost, continued from p.3

through communion. The fire testifies to the truth that God is “a consuming fire,” healing our passions by “burning up all the thorns of our offenses,” as we say in the pre-Communion prayers.

To all those wearied by sin, grudges, mediocrity in faith, indifference, fear of witnessing to the truth of Christ in this age, all of which is represented in the holy icon as the old man, ‘the cosmos,’ ruled by sin and darkness, Christ proclaims liberation today, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12). The Apostles and their successors in Christ’s holy Church today, proclaim this same truth that was proclaimed then: there’s freedom from enslavement to this world, there’s fulfillment, enlightenment, healing from sin-sickness, and new life in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I urge you this day: renew your baptism into Christ, your love for God and His holy Church. The same Holy Spirit, Who filled the Apostles and our Orthodox forefathers with zeal, conviction, and boldness for the sake of the Gospel, is here to fill you as well. Pray daily, make time to attend the divine services, come to Bible study when it begins later this month, invite others to church. Be zealous for the Truth that is Christ.

Through your witness, others will be strengthened in faith and the truth of Pentecost will inspire them to put Christ on in baptism, to be born again by water and the Spirit. Beseeking God then, we begin praying again this day: “O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, who art everywhere and fillest all things, treasury of blessings and giver of life, come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every impurity, and save our souls, O Good One!”

* * * *

There is something about life, at least in our earthly experience, that is inexorable. Any individual case of life may be fragile, but life itself endures. The feast of Pentecost in Eastern tradition, celebrates the Descent of the Holy Spirit on the Church as Christians do across the world. However, there is a strange aspect to the Eastern version of the feast (or so it might seem). The Feast focuses as much on the Holy Spirit’s work in Creation as it does on the Spirit’s work in the Church. The Church is decorated in green. In Russian tradition, branches of birch are

Pentecost and Creation

brought into the Church; fresh green grass is placed on the floor; flowers are everywhere. In Soviet times a secular version of the festival remained, called the Day of Trees.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Church is not something separate from Creation – nor are the trees a distraction from the Church. They are, together, a proper reminder of the role God’s Spirit plays always, everywhere. He is the “Lord and Giver of Life.”

Just as the Spirit moved over the face of the waters in the beginning of creation, so He moves over the face of all things at all times, bringing forth life and all good things. Though I am frequently assaulted with bouts of pessimism, despairing over various aspects of our distorted civilization, the truth is that like the planet itself, civilization with its drive for beauty and order seem inexorable. The history of humanity is not the story of a fall from a great civilization with increasing instances of barbarism and cave dwelling. Great civilizations have risen and fallen, but civilizations continue to occur. Some may already have begun in the ruins that surround us now.

The story told in Scripture is not the story of collapse and decay. There are certainly dire warnings of terrible trials and great catastrophes. But these things do not reveal the mystery of God’s will. These things are cracks in the pavement while life continues to burst forth: God has made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth– in Him (Eph. 1:9-10).

What appeared as tongues of flame upon the heads of the disciples at Pentecost was a manifestation of this Divine Purpose at work. With the sound of a mighty rushing wind, the Holy Spirit filled the room. The fullness of the Church burst into the streets proclaiming the Gospel in a multitude of languages. Being birthed in Jerusalem was the New Jerusalem, where there is neither slave nor free, Jew nor Greek, male nor female. Instead there is the fullness that fills all things bringing forth all things in one – in the One Christ Himself.

The voice of Pentecost is the voice of creation’s groans being transformed into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Stones cry out, trees clap their hands and the song of creation rejoices in the One Christ.

