

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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4th Sunday after Pentecost-Christ's teaching on the Kingdom

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The Lord's signs and wonders prove Him to be what He claimed to be, the Son of God. But the present miracle account, like all others, is not intended solely to demonstrate the Lord's power to heal. The healing of the centurion's servant contains a number of short lessons concerning characteristics of the life in Christ. Christians who hear this short section of the Gos-

pel must be attentive to the way in which these instructions may be applied to their own lives.

The basic elements of the story are few. The centurion, a Roman, has complete confidence that Jesus is able to heal his servant. When the Lord expresses willingness to go to his house, the centurion humbly objects, declaring himself unworthy of such a visit. At the same time, he reveals his profound faith in Jesus: "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." He then explains his status as a centurion – he has soldiers under him and is himself under authority.

The Lord's reaction must have surprised those who witnessed the scene. He declares that He has not found such great faith in Israel; those chosen to be the heirs of the kingdom would be cast out and replaced by others.

(continued p. 3)

+ 4th Sunday after Pentecost +
+ Bishop Martyr Methodius +

Epistle: Romans 6: 18-23

Gospel: Matthew 8: 5-13

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.*

Eternal Life, by Metropolitan Ieronymos

The Sunday of the Holy Fathers is a feast which is primarily concerned with the truth of the faith. Not with faith as an ideology, as a theoretical evolution approached and managed by the brain, through reason, or by memorization. Rather, with the faith in its real dimension, its essential form, the very truth.

The Gospel reading is from the beginning of Christ's prayer before he went to the garden of Gethsemane. Christ is preparing for his voluntary sacrifice on the cross

and prays. The beginning of the prayer is marked by 'The hour has come'. The time has arrived which was the reason for his incarnation. The appearance of the Lord on earth served many purposes, but the most important of all was this: to ascend the Cross and to shed his precious blood for us sinners.

Christ became a human being in order to taste death. This is why, in icons of the Nativity, he's typically portrayed not in swaddling-clothes but wrapped in the bandages

used for a corpse. Similarly, the manger, which normally is made of wood, is depicted as being marble, looking much more like a tomb.

And though the time of the unique sacrifice has come, Christ prays not for himself, but for his Church, for each one of his people, for each believer. And although he's going to his death, he prays for the earthly existence of all of us, in the Spirit, with eternal life as the main perspective. Before the Lord of all tasted

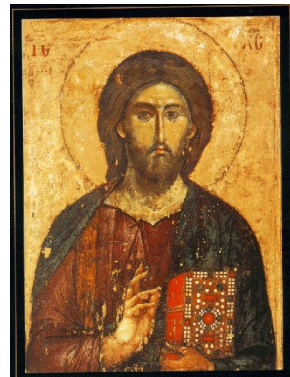
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

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, Michael, Bill, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

"The house of the wicked shall be overthrown but the hut of the righteous shall flourish" (Proverbs 14:11).

The palace of Herod lies in ruins, but the cave of the Child of Bethlehem remains. The crowns of the Caesars have been lost, but the bones of the martyrs have been

preserved. The palaces of the pagan kings have been transformed into piles of stone and dust, but the caves of the ascetics have grown into most beautiful churches. The powerful Roman Empire is now only a tale of the dead, while the hut of Christianity, the Holy Church, is today the most powerful realm in the world. Where are the powerful Romans and the emperors who persecuted the church? In the grave.

Go about your own city and inquire how many homes of the godless are excavated? How many huts of the righteous have grown into beautiful houses? Brethren, heaven and earth are founded on justice, on God's steadfast justice. That is why all the pagan creations are like arrogant bubbles, which burst and are trampled on by passers-by. The palaces of the pharaohs and the Babylonians are like trampled bubbles, while the tent of the righteous Abraham flourishes and blossoms in eternity.

O my brethren, how all-powerful and long lasting is justice, and how noisy and transient is injustice, like a storm on a summer's day!

Eternal Life, continued from p.1

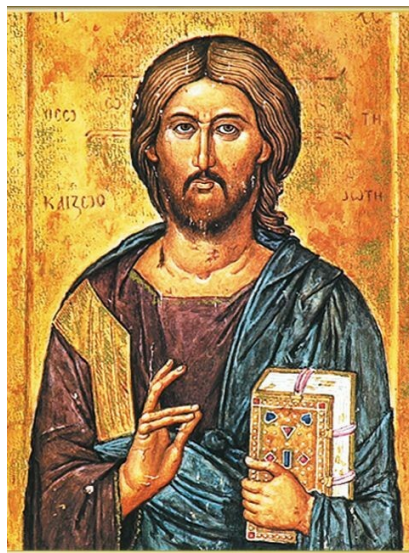
death, he steered us towards eternal life, though not by preaching or simply talking about it. He prays for it as being the sole aim of our life. The first time that Christ speaks with such clarity and desire about eternal life is in this prayer.

And in it he defines eternal life as knowledge. 'And this is eternal life: that they should know you'. Cyril of Alexandria interprets it in this way: 'For life is knowledge as bearing the whole power of the mystery and bringing with it a share in mystical theology, through which we become familiar with the living and life-giving Word'. Knowledge is defined not as something dourly intellectual, coldly rational or merely informative.

It's experience, conscious communication and a sacramental encounter with God as the source of life. This is why, in one sense, knowledge is identified with faith. The mood of the verb 'should know' is subjunctive in order to express the continuous expansion of this knowledge. Just as God is infinite and life with him is

eternal, so knowledge of him will continuously increase without ever reaching any boundary.

Eternal life offers knowledge of



what? Not of a thing, since it's not concerned with speculations and a consensus of views, but of a person: 'And this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent' (Jn. 17, 3). Knowledge of eter-

nal life is dependent upon experiencing God and the person of Christ. In this passage, knowledge of Jesus Christ is shown to be expressly and explicitly equal to knowledge of God. Or better, acquaintance and communion with God are shown to be achieved through acquaintance and communion with Christ as a necessary and reciprocal prerequisite. This is why the person of Christ is the very hub of the Church.

This particular Gospel reading was chosen because it demonstrates that the person of Christ isn't simply of the highest importance to the Church, but is the sole path which leads to God the Father, the fulness of knowledge, the fulness of communion between God and humankind, and eternal life. Any alteration of the person of Christ, any human distortion or misrepresentation negates this path, this experience and this knowledge. The path to salvation is in Christ for He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Amen.

(Homily on Christ healing the Centurion's servant, cont'd from p.1)

Finally, He tells the centurion to go his way and that his servant is healed. St. Ambrose sees the healing by the Lord's word alone as proof of His equality with the Father, saying: "... as the Father spoke the Son made, so, too, the Father works and the Son speaks". And St. Basil the Great emphasizes that it was the Savior's word and not His presence that healed the sick man. The centurion is a striking figure. He enters the narrative as a man already possessed of a deep faith in Jesus' power to heal, even by a word. He asks nothing for himself but only for his servant, his social and military inferior. His status notwithstanding, he feels profoundly his own unworthiness.

How the centurion came to his faith is not explained by St. Matthew, but details in St. Luke's account of the same miracle may offer a clue. It should be recalled at this point that although the synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke – sometimes differ in detail when reporting the same incident, those differences do not diminish their authenticity. In the present case, St. Matthew simply relates what went on between Jesus and the centurion. St. Luke tells us of certain preliminary steps, such as the centurion's dispatching his Jewish friends to plead his case. "Neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee", he says (Luke 7:7).

The centurion's frequent contact with the Jews must have given him some familiarity with their faith; perhaps he was aware of their messianic expectations. It is unlikely that Jesus and His work among the people could have escaped his attention. His own faith, so forcefully portrayed in just a few words, may have arisen from a strong sense that Jesus was the very one awaited by the nation he had come to love.

St. Luke's account tells us that the man's Jewish friends – identified as elders – considered him worthy of Jesus' good favor, although they are impressed by something other than his faith, saying: "He was worthy for whom He should do this: for he loves our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue" (7:4-5). They present a plea from a man who has an exalted position and has contributed materially to their institution. The things that really matter – the centurion's humility, faith, and concern for another – seem not to have made much of an impression

on them. It is not difficult to see the similarity between the mind of those religious leaders and that of some in our own times. And not a few pastors have heard requests on behalf of others who were deemed worthy for the wrong reasons.

Clearly, when the centurion speaks to Jesus of his position, he is not boasting. Quite the contrary. "I am a man set under authority." That is the key expression. He derives his authority from another and applies it in the line of duty. St. John Chrysostom describes the implications: "I am a man set under authority": that is, Thou art God, and I man; I under authority, but Thou not under authority. If I, therefore, being a man, and under authority, can do so much; far more He, both as God and as not

under authority". The same saint is certain that this Gentile, unlike his Jewish friends, suspects Jesus' divine dignity.

The Christ preached by the Apostles was the Christ who gave Himself out of love for mankind. He is the One who receives all who come to Him in faith and humility, those who love Him. He is not moved to respond to our petitions because of some supposed worthiness on our part. Our accomplishments, position, wealth, and fame do not commend us to Him. Neither does our belonging to a particular race or nation, and neither does membership in His Church, if we

make no effort to live in accordance with His will, have no faith or humility, think of ourselves as deserving His salvation, or think only of ourselves and never earnestly desire the well-being of others. Such was the image of Christ that the apostles and disciples proclaimed as they undertook their great missionary enterprise after having been filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

For St. Gregory of Nazianzus, the centurion's faith and approach to the Lord provide an example for us all:

"Wherefore we must purify ourselves first, and then approach this converse with the Pure...be like the Centurion who would seek for healing, but would not, through a praiseworthy fear, receive the Healer into his house. Let each one of us also speak so, as long as he is still uncleansed, and is a Centurion still, commending many in wickedness, and serving in the army of Caesar, the World-ruler of those who are being dragged down, and saying: 'I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof'".



Spiritual Enlightenment by Fr. Chrysostomos (part 2)

Then oh, then a fragrance flooded the whole place. I raised my eyes and saw the other three with eyes full of tears looking at me. The Elder remained with his head bowed. A sweetness flooded our hearts, a state reminiscent of that "on the heart of man did not go up", as the great apostle Paul says.

The Elder raised his head like a ashamed child and said to us: "Forgive me, I did not know how to tell you and I asked God to show it to you."

When Christ said that "the Kingdom of God is within us" as a Kingdom he was implying this Grace of the Holy Spirit. And where else, my brethren, will we experience this Grace of the Holy Spirit if not in the temple of God?

Every time we go to the Temple, to the Divine Liturgy, we must go prepared. Whoever honors the Divine Liturgy is honored by God. My brethren, St. Seraphim of Sarov said that the real purpose of human life must be to obtain the Holy Spirit. You know, the first day of the week is Sunday.

On Sunday we gather in the temple or rather ascend to heaven, since every temple is a piece of heaven on earth, to meet God, and we all mingle with the angels and the Saints, to see and experience what he tells us. The apostle Paul said, "The eye did not see and the ears did not hear, and on the heart of man it did not go up, God prepared them to love Him."

From Sunday to the next Sunday the Divine Liturgy continues. We take Christ from the temple with divine communion. "After the fear of God, faith and love,

come." We take Christ and offer Him on the road and lead Him from the temple to our home, to our work. Everywhere. And the Divine Liturgy continues with the Holy Table our heart, which is in the Holy Step, which must be our body. So our life must become an endless Divine Liturgy.

And we are preparing to enter the splendor of the Saints, not "inwardly and enigmatically, but face to face". We are preparing to enter together with the liturgical beings, the angels and the Archangels, the Cherubim and the Seraphim, the polymaths and the feathers. And in this feast we too, who deep inside us hide the heavenly Margarita, our

Christ. In my ears at this moment comes a heavenly melody from his bowels is mine: "In the splendor of your Saints how can I enter the unworthy? If I dare to join the bridegroom, the chiton controls me, that he is not of marriage and captive I am cast out by the angels; This is how the Saints lived.

One such great Saint, unknown to many, is Saint John of Sinai. At the age of about 16 he offered himself to Christ as a "pleasant and acceptable sacrifice" by entering the yoke of the solitary state, Mount Sinai. From this residence in the visible place, he walked and was directed to the invisible God. He submitted and entrusted his soul in the Lord to his spiritual father as an excellent ruler, and thus safely traveled the great, dangerous and tumultuous journey of this life.

My brethren, in this holy time of the year you have called me to speak to you, who, like thirsty deer, are waiting for the word of God. But I have nothing else to say! I found a bouquet of flowers at the door of my cell. There were so many that my hug could not fit. I took some and brought them here to feel something of the fragrance they emit, spiritual fragrance. From a man who had become a temple of God, a vessel of the Holy Spirit. A fragrance suitable for the period we are walking.

These flowers lift us spiritually and give us the scent of paradise. They grew in the life of this great Saint of our Church, Saint John of Sinai. These flowers are watered by the sweat and blood of his ascetic life. With tears and repentance, with fasting and affliction, they attracted the Holy Spirit, and wrote a book called *The Ladder*. This book contains 30 steps that look like stairs on a huge ladder that steps on the ground and is held at the top by God. With this ladder, anyone who loves God can ascend to heaven to meet our Christ.

All people have their cross, there is no man on earth without a cross. Those who have known Christ since their childhood have as a cross, the Cross of our Christ. Those who knew Christ and repented for their previous life, have for cross, the cross of the robber who repented. So we all have our cross. Everyone carries his cross and ascends his own Golgotha, the Golgotha of his personal life. This struggle and this exercise, if one offers it to God, then this man becomes an ascetic.

