

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

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Christ is in our Midst! He is and ever shall be!



Volume 11 Issue 522

4th Sunday after Pentecost-God will Provide for You

July 10, 2022



Today's gospel reading, I am sure, will be very familiar to many of us. 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 and reveals his profound faith in Je-

sus: "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." The centurion then explains his status – he has soldiers under him and is himself under authority.

Our 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 children of the kingdom would be cast out and replaced by others. Finally, He tells the centurion to go his way and that his servant is healed. Clearly this narrative is about faith, but to see it simply as 'faith' is a little iniquitous. This is faith grounded in complete humility. When the centurion speaks to Jesus of his position, he is not boasting.

In fact, it is quite the contrary, (v9) "For I also am a man under authority." That is the key expression. He derives
(continued p. 3)

++ 4th Sunday after Pentecost ++
+ St. Antony of the Kiev Caves +

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.*

Focusing on God instead of Ourselves, by Fr. James Guirguis

How blessed we are to have the privilege and joy of hearing the words of Our Lord Jesus Christ each and every week, or if we choose, each and every day of our lives. Is anything more beautiful, more meaningful or more powerful than the words of Our Lord?

I feel that each week the Church gives us a new angle, a new insight into the mind of God. Each thought from the mind of God guides us, heals us and has the power to give us renewed purpose and focus in our lives.

In fact, today's gospel reading really does focus on our focus. Our Lord says "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"

Often we hear or listen to these words and we think very straightforwardly that this is about what we look at with our physical eyes. Now there is certainly some truth to

this, no doubt. But the Lord goes further and it helps to clarify the teaching for us. He says "No one can serve two master; for either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other."

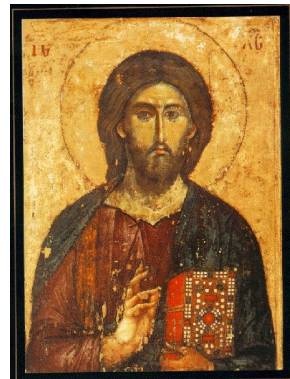
Our Lord tells us that the eye is the lamp of the body, but as we read we understand that this isn't all about what we look at with our physical eyes. Put another way, if a man is blind, is his body full of light or darkness? The
(continued on p.2)

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

News and Notes

We welcome all who are worshipping with us today. We are also happy to announce that coffee social has resumed following the Divine Liturgy.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

Please keep the following in your prayers: Mother Onufria, Fr. Michael, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Brittany, Maverick, Elizabeth, Matthew, Corella, Ron, Daniel, Frankie, Loretta, Mackenzie, Mike, Jessica, Patricia, Grace, Gladys, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

On Belief in the World

St. Isaac tell us that our experience of changeability not only leads us to humility, it also teaches us to lift our spiritual eyes to God who is above all of this variability. He says:

“But when the understanding withdraws itself from [the changeable world] and ascends solely toward the Existent One by beholding the properties of that good Na-

ture which possesses eternal knowledge that precedes all existent things, and by beholding all His properties, then immediately fear is cast out and the mind is sustained by confidence.”

For St. Isaac, confidence returns. No longer is it a confidence based on a presumptuous understanding of worldly things—no *this* confidence “breeds contempt and an impetuous way of thought,” according to St. Isaac. Confidence in or based on anything seen only leads to arrogance, to a further twisting our our souls, making it even harder for us to perceive what is real, to perceive what is behind what is seen.

However, humility based on the fear of God has the ability to “bind up” or even “bridle” to some extent impetuous aberration, or changeability, so that we can to some small extent lift our eyes to God who is beyond change. When we do this and we begin to behold in our inner mind “the properties,” what I think the Greek Fathers might call “the energies” of God, then a new kind of confidence is born in us, a confidence in God.

Focusing on God instead of Ourselves, cont'd from p.1

answer is “it depends on his heart.” Our Lord chooses the eyes as a symbol of our focus in life. What do we desire? What do we live for? Where is our heart? To what do we dedicate our energy, our minds, our hearts and our lives? This, and this alone determines whether or not your body is full of darkness or light.

“You cannot serve God and mammon.” This is the very next word from our Lord after He reminds the people that they cannot serve two master. Why does He say this? Because He knows us well. Our Lord Jesus Christ knows that His people will worry about the details of life. He knows that they will worry about how they will survive, how they will live, how they will eat.

The Lord knows that our fear and our desire to survive can leave us spiritually compromised. Instead of focusing on the one needful thing, on the things of God. We slowly and gradually drift in our focus and aim in life. What is mammon? Mammon is often understood to mean “money”

but in fact many of the Church fathers had a more thorough understanding. St. John Chrysostom saw mammon as a demon.

When we think of mammon in this way then it gives a new meaning to where we focus our lives. Where we focus and what we prioritize are the



most important signs of who or what we really serve. So who do we serve with our time, our focus and our energies? Where do we direct our talents and the resources that we gain through the use of our God given talents? To answer these questions is to

know whether we are full of light or darkness.

Our Lord knows His people, and as a word of encouragement He tries to comfort us. He says “Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink; nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not the soul more than food, and the body more than clothing?”

God loves you, each of you, more than you can possibly fathom. He will not abandon you or leave you poor. He wants to give you all of His riches and His wealth. He wants to clothe you with the beautiful garment of a clean soul. He wants to welcome you into His heavenly mansion so that you are protected from the elements. He wants to feed you with His own flesh and blood. Everything that we think we need to struggle and worry about has already been arranged for us. Trust Him and direct your lives to serve Him alone. Focus on Him because He is already focusing on you.

his authority from another and applies it in the line of duty. St. John Chrysostom describes the implications: "I also am a man 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".

How the centurion came to his faith is not explained by St. Matthew. However, St. Luke's account of the same event offers a clue (Lk 7: 1-10). St. Luke tells us of how Jewish friends of the centurion intercede with Jesus on his behalf. plead his case. St. Luke tells us that the man's Jewish friends – identified as elders – considered him worthy of Jesus' good favour, although they are impressed by something other than his faith, saying that the centurion is "... deserving for he loves our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue" (7:4-5).

These 'Friends' seem to have missed those qualities possessed by the centurion that really matter his humility, faith, and concern for another. It is evident that the Centurion loved this particular servant so deeply that he risked public humiliation by begging publicly for his life. He, a Roman soldier, in the streets of Judea, before a bunch of Jews who are more likely to hate him than anything, comes and begs to an itinerant rabbi.

We can easily overlook just how shocking the Centurions actions are. A Gentile, someone who had no business asking Jesus for help, comes, address Jesus as Lord, and begs Him for help. That simply did not happen in those days. That's why Jesus "was amazed" at centurion's faith. "Not even in Israel," the Jewish nation, did Christ find such faith. This is an extremely strong and condemning statement.

The Jewish nation was supposed to be the carriers of the true faith, the nation that was to prepare the whole world for the coming Messiah. Yet, this Gentile expressed stronger faith than anyone in Israel. Jesus goes on to tell the crowd that people "will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven." The Jewish people also expected, only the to be present at this banquet. But what Jesus is saying is that "outsiders," non-Jews, will come from east and west, meaning from all over the world,

and take the places, which the Jewish people assumed were theirs.

They mistakenly believed that their ethnic allegiance to Abraham, was enough to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. Christ tells them that only the allegiance and faith in Him as the Lord, will save us. That same faith shown in the humble confession of the Centurion. As St James clearly tells us (James 2 v 20) "... faith without works is dead"; And Humility is a prerequisite for the spiritual life i.e., life in Christ. In the Orthodox tradition, humility has often been called the "mother of all virtues,"

True Humility does not mean degradation or remorse. It does not mean effecting some sort of demeaning external behaviour. It does not mean considering oneself as the most vile and loathsome of creatures. Christ Himself was humble and He did not do this. God Himself, according to the spiritual tradition of the Church, has perfect humility, and He certainly does not act in this way.

Genuine humility means to see reality as it actually is in God. It means to know oneself and others as known by God—a power, according to Saint Isaac, greater than that of raising the dead! The humble lay aside all vanity and conceit in the service of the least of God's creatures, and to consider no good act as beneath one's dignity and honour. Humility is to know oneself, without the grace of God, as dust, sinful and dead. We are all called to follow the example of Christ in His divine humility.

As Saint Paul teaches:

"Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2.3–11).



St. Peter the Apostle-A Great Personality

When Jesus had been arrested, Peter recovered from the earlier commotion and followed Him to the High Priest's courtyard. Also, Peter was the first to confirm the event of the Resurrection and the first to see the Risen Lord. Information about the story of Peter after the Resurrection is scant and we have no real sketch of the course of his life and no fixed point to use for satisfactory dates. In the history of the Early Church, Peter again played a leading role in the first action of an administrative nature by the Apostles, when he recommended to a common assembly of the faithful that they should elect a replacement for Judas Iscariot.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter stood with the other disciples and spoke to the assembled crowds with such boldness and eloquence that 3,000 were baptized. Thereafter, when he was in the temple with John, he healed a man who'd been lame from birth and spoke to the crowds for a second time. As a result of this, both he and John were taken to the Sanhedrin, where he spoke out and said that he couldn't not speak about what he'd seen and heard.

The Jewish Leaders, the Sadducees in particular, had him and John arrested a second time, but they were released in a miraculous manner. All of this, and certain other events such as the death penalty imposed on Ananias and his wife Sappheira and the miracles Peter worked through his shadow, meant that his fame increased. Peter and John were later sent by the Apostles to Samaria, when they heard that the word of God had spread there. In Samaria, he met Simon the magician, and the two Apostles, Peter and John, proclaimed the word of God in many villages in Samaria.

With Jerusalem as his base, Peter often went out on journeys and visited neighboring Churches. Saint Paul twice went up to Jerusalem and met Peter, the apostle of circumcision as he called him, who, together with James, the Lord's brother, and John, were considered pillars of the Church. On one of his journeys, Peter cured the paralytic Aeneas in Lydda and, in Joppa, raised Tabitha (Dorkas). But there were always Christians in those areas already, so Peter wasn't the first apostle to visit them. It appears that Peter achieved great things in Lydda and Sharon. Peter remained in Joppa for several days, then went by divine decree to Caesarea, when he instructed and baptized the centurion Cornelius and all his household.

When he returned to Jerusalem, he related what had happened with Cornelius, and answered the circumcised Christians who were unhappy that he had baptized Cornelius. Peter's speech convinced them that God was not only for them, but for the whole world, since, as they now recognized, God also gave the Gentiles the chance to repent and gain true life. In 42 or 44, when Herod Agrippa saw how pleased the Jews were that the Apostle James had been put to death, he arrested Peter and imprisoned him, with the aim of killing him, too. God saved him, however, in a miraculous manner and Peter slipped away to the house of Mary, the mother of Mark. From there he escaped and went to another location.

After that, Peter is mentioned two more times. The first is when he took part in the Apostolic Synod, in 49, in Jerusalem, where Peter, Paul, James, the Lord's

brother, and Barnabas played leading roles. At the synod, with his brief, eighth speech in Acts, Peter took a bold stand in favour of freedom for the Gentile Christians in relation to circumcision and the requirements of the Law, and supported the view that Gentile Christians were not obliged to conform to these, because the Gentiles, like the Jews, were saved solely through faith in Christ.

And the second time is when Peter had a meeting in Antioch with Paul, who rebuked him for a want of courage and for making too many concessions to the Judaizers, to the detriment of the Gentile Christians. The Christian community in Antioch was a relatively old one, having come into existence immediately after the stoning of Stephen and was made up of converted Gentiles. Peter arrived in Antioch with Mark, shortly after

Paul and Barnabas had. Soon after, those Jewish Christians whom Paul mentions in Galatians arrived in Antioch. Peter remained in Antioch for the same period of time that Mark, Paul, Barnabas, Jude and Silas were there. Of these, only Jude left for Jerusalem.

Eusebius, who in this case uses Origen, reports that Peter preached the Gospel to the Jews of the diaspora in Pontus, Galatia, Bithynia, Cappadocia and Asia. This evidence is based on the prologue of Peter's first Universal Epistle. However, Peter may have written without having preached. Silas, accompanying Paul, also preached in the area where the recipients of the epistle lived. So we may consider that Peter addressed these through the mediation of Silas.

(Continued next issue)

