

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

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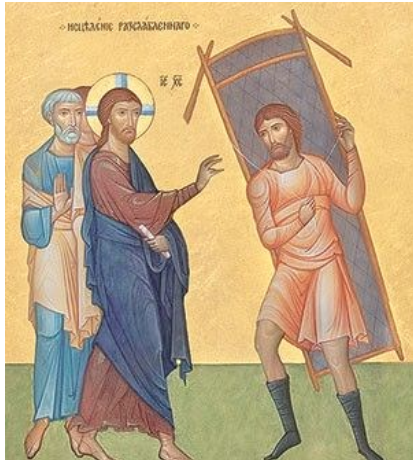
Christ is in our Midst! He is and ever shall be!



Volume 11 Issue 524

6th Sunday after Pentecost-Jesus heals the Paralytic

July 24, 2022



Today's gospel reading gives us a clear portrait of what it means to encounter the Lord in this way. Christ did not rest content with forgiving the paralyzed man's sins. He also provided visible proof to the skeptics of His divine authority by enabling the man to stand up, carry his bed, and walk home.

Christ's healing of the man's soul was not an invisible act somehow totally separate from the rest of his life. His miraculously renewed health was a visible sign of his restoration as a whole human being in God's image and likeness. The Lord restored his freedom, his strength, and his integrity as an embodied person. And He commanded him to live accordingly by doing what he could never have done by his own power: to rise, pick up his bed, and walk home.

Whether we recognize it or not, that is the will of the Lord for each and every one of us. He comes to heal our corruption, to strengthen us so that we will not be enslaved in weakness to our sins and passions, and to enable us to share fully in His restoration of the human person in the divine image and likeness as the New Adam.

(continued p. 3)

++ 6th Sunday after Pentecost ++
+ Holy Martyrs Boris and Gleb +

Epistle: Romans 12: 6-14

Gospel: Matthew 9: 1-8

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.*

Conversations with St. Sophrony of Essex and Mt. Athos

How can one learn simplicity?

That's a good question, but it is hard to put the answer into practice. Not that it's hard; but, unfortunately, we are complicated people, especially those who are younger. Complexity is a torment, being a complicated person is torture.

Complexity is also the result of the environment we grew up in, and how we are accustomed to thinking. It is also the result of our life away from the Divine Grace.

A simple man is sheer

sweetness! He is grace-filled—you see him and it brings joy, so the only thing you want is to be near him. Such a man is kindhearted and free; you feel at ease and at peace next to him. A complicated person is unhappy, burned out, he tires you out, and you always get tired of him.

How do you acquire simplicity? The easiest way is to stay close to the simple people. Simple people teach simplicity. If there are such people around us—our grandparents or other simple

people—let's live near them and observe how they think and behave. Let us try to follow their example and thus learn to be simple.

We can also acquire simplicity through spiritual means—by purifying our souls from passions. If we avoid passions and sins, repent of them and weep bitterly, this weeping of ours, as well as our observance of the holy commandments, staying away from sinful worldly knowledge, being unwilling to coddle

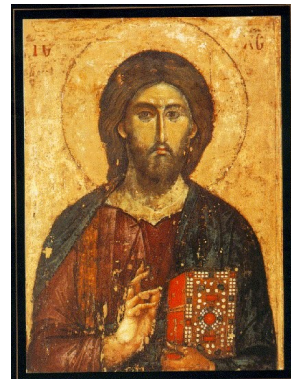
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

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

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

The Light of the World.

According to the Lord, greatness isn't found by learning to argue with others, or by joining the various causes of the day. I change my profile picture to the flag of Egypt and then I think that I am great. I tell people that I recycled today and that makes me special. All of this is fluff, a worthless substitute for the gospel of the Lord. The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ

is concerned with our repentance and the forgiveness of our sins, leading to righteousness and holiness of life. These are the true attributes of greatness. We recognize and commemorate the multitudes of the saints because of their willingness and desire to follow the teaching of the Lord and to teach others through their words and even more so, through their examples.

Our Lord teaches us, "You are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

Do we appreciate who we are and what our role is in this world? Your role isn't yours to decide. You were bought at a price. Your life belongs to the Master. Your role is simply to be the light of the world. To reflect the light of Christ. To walk into places that might not be very bright and transform those places by your presence. We are so eager to fit in with others. The path for saints is the path that makes us seek the acceptance of God before everything else in life.

Conversation with St. Sophrony, cont'd from p.1

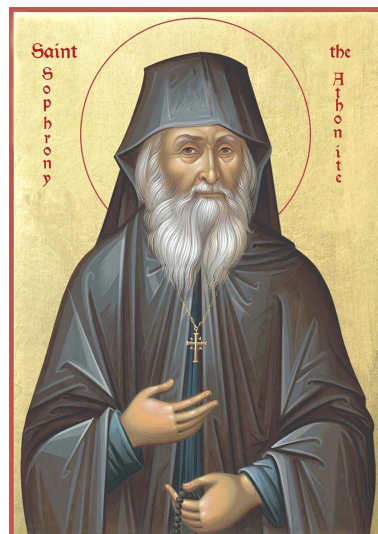
sinful thoughts and becoming evil people, reading and studying the Holy Scriptures and the lives of the saints—all of this will help us attain blessed simplicity. Blessed simplicity, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, is bestowed upon a man who cultivates prayer, who lives in and through the Holy Mysteries, and keeps his mind pure, abstaining from the worldly way of thinking.

What should I do about a wrongdoer? If someone constantly offends me, what is the proper Christian way to respond?

The distinctive quality of a Christian is humility. If we humble ourselves, we will benefit greatly. Therefore, he who humbles us is our benefactor. But we should also exercise reasoning. For example, a teacher, or a parent, that is, someone who has to bring up children, he may humble himself when children disobey him and misbehave, but it is detrimental to the children themselves.

For their own good, we should bring them back to their senses using spe-

cific instructional methods. In this situation, we can't simply say "with humility:" it's OK, let the classroom or a room turn into the Augean stables, and everything lies in a complete mess. It is necessary for my hu-



mility! Wrong! It will do no good if you allow the naughty children to go on causing the mischief.

If a brother upsets or offends us because of his bad disposition, there is

nothing we can do about it, and we should endure it and pray. It will help us spiritually. But if we are responsible for this brother, if we are teachers, parents, employers, then, of course, using reasoning, we should calmly put things in order—so that the work we must perform gets done and we also do no harm to our brother. Since in the end, it is the brother behaving badly towards us who ends up in harm's way. The best way to control our thoughts is to be on guard at all times.

How can we differentiate our thoughts?

Thoughts proceed from three sources: God, the devil, and man. Good and holy thoughts proceed from God; they bring joy and peace to the heart of man. Evil thoughts come from the devil: they bring confusion, darkness, profanity, and wickedness. Human thoughts arise from a man and his surroundings, but since we are often overcome with passions, we often produce evil thoughts.

(continued next issue)

(Homily on the 6th Sunday after Pentecost, cont'd from p.1)

Even as the Savior rose bodily from the tomb and ascended to heaven, He enables us to serve Him faithfully in our own bodies in the practical challenges of the world as we know it. He did not rest content with forgiving the paralytic's sins, but empowered and commanded him to embrace a new life. He does the same for us, calling us to pursue a life of holiness, a life that displays to the world the healing of every dimension of our humanity.

Unfortunately, most of us have not spent much time in the spiritual goal of holiness. Instead of devoting ourselves to prayer and purity, we have filled our minds and hearts with tempting attachments to all kinds of things. They may not be bad in and of themselves, but in our corrupt state we have developed unholy relationships to them. Doing so simply weakens us further and makes us paralyzed before our besetting sins. Even when we resolve not to do or say something, we often do so anyway.

Even when we abhor a particular behavior, we so often lack the strength to stop doing it. When that is the case, we are just like the paralytic before he encountered Christ, lying helplessly in our bed of sin. When the paralytic was brought to Christ, He did not tell him immediately to stand up.

First, He forgave his sins. That is a key point because our salvation is not found in simply doing good deeds or obeying laws by our own power. If that were the case, we would not need the God-Man to conquer sin and death on our behalf. Even as a paralyzed person lacks the ability to rise up and walk, fallen humans lack the ability to free themselves from slavery to sin, to raise themselves from the grave, and to participate in the eternal life of God for which He made us in His image and likeness.

Christ first forgave the man's sins, which means that He healed the corruption that reached to the depth of his soul and that kept Him from personal union with God. Our salvation is an infinite journey, for to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect is a calling with no upward limit. Christ told the paralytic to begin that journey by standing up, carrying his bed, and walking home. By forgiving his sins, Christ graciously gave him the healing necessary for him to take a first step that

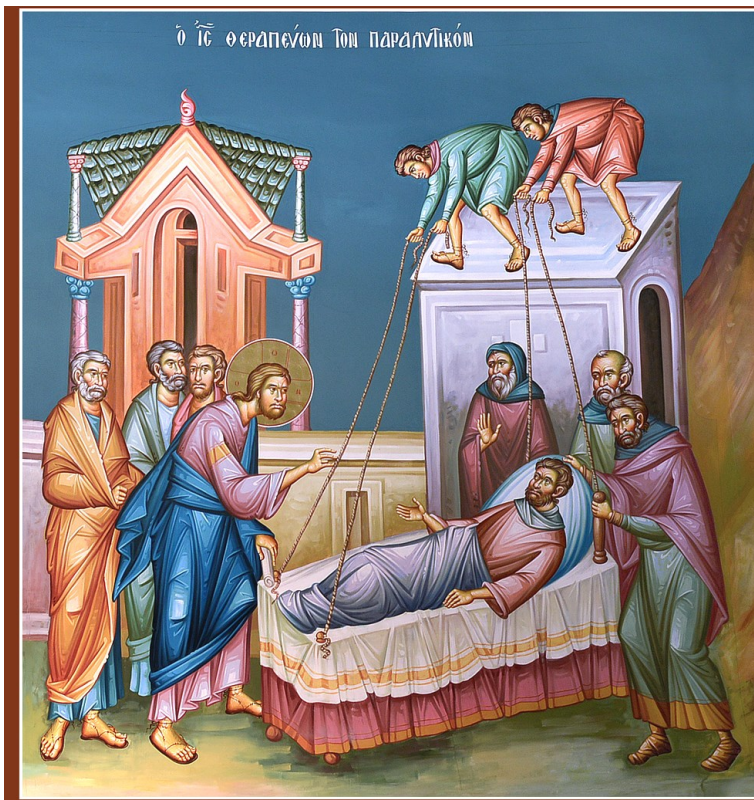
would have otherwise been impossible for him. Then the man had to cooperate with the Lord, obeying His command as he moved forward in life, one step at a time.

Do you see how we are all just like that formerly paralyzed man, strengthened beyond our own power in Christ and commanded to move forward? That is not where our spiritual journey ends, but only where it begins. By virtue of our baptism and chrismation, we are all empowered to begin the pilgrimage to the Kingdom. Christ nourishes us with His own Body and Blood in the Eucharist and forgives us in Confession when we stumble or wander from the path.

We do not take this journey alone, but as members of His Body who participate mystically in the Heavenly Banquet in every Divine Liturgy. On a daily basis, we open ourselves to further strength and healing by prayer,

reading the Bible, and studying the lives and teachings of the Saints. It was probably a struggle for a formerly paralyzed man, who had been used to lying still all his life, to start walking around. It will definitely be a struggle for us to make progress in pursuing a holy life, but that is what is necessary for us to participate in the fullness of Christ's

St. Paul made clear in today's epistle reading that we must energetically use the gifts given us by the Lord, which is another way of saying that we must be actively faithful, regardless of what our particular abilities may be. Those who follow his advice will not simply blend in with the



larger culture of any age, but will instead become vivid icons of what God's salvation means for human beings. The Apostle calls us to be genuine in showing love, mercy, and honor to our neighbors as we cling to what is good and allow evil no place at all in our lives. He instructs us to respond to difficult challenges with hope, patience, and prayer. And just as Christ taught, St. Paul reminds us to "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them." Obedience to these teachings demands a deep commitment that extends from the depths of our souls to every thought, word, and deed. And that is not something we accomplish simply by our own power, but by responding faithfully to the merciful grace of our Savior.

"Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us."

'A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house' (Matt. 5, 14-15).

How does the world want people today to act and to behave? Apart from the necessary factors of work, and basic respect for laws, our culture nowadays requires each of us to accept the rights of others. Do what you like; just don't annoy other people. So long as you don't deprive them of the right to do as they like, as well; so long as you don't affront their dignity. If you get on well and they do, too, then everything's fine. Our happiness depends on our material goods. On our ability to enjoy what we have with little to no responsibility. The world wants us to be free, even if freedom involves indulging our desires and passions.

The Gospel has a different model for us. In his Sermon on the Mount, Christ asks each of us to become a light and to be like a city which can be seen from all around because it's built on a mountain. In other words, what he wants from us is transparency, not only in our words and deeds but also in our thoughts. What we are, we should be seen to be. And in this perspective there's no room for darkness. There's no room for behavior that makes people close in on themselves; there's only love and all that that involves.

Christians, real cities who can't be hidden, can find room in the hearts of all their fellow-citizens. That is, they have room for the whole world. This isn't a model for showing off. It's a path to having an encounter with everybody. This is why

Christ requires us not to judge: not in the sense of desisting from condemnation and the refusal to accept other people, but of seeing what goes against the Gospel. By speaking one on one or in front of 'witnesses', we can then offer them a way to change. Or we can do this by silence, which will be expressed through prayer or patience, depending on our gifts.

Christians should be models of light and love. This doesn't mean that they won't sin any more or that they won't err in their lives. What it does mean, however, is that they'll be in a position to shoulder the responsibility for their words, deeds and thoughts and to help others in their need for truth. And, as far as they can- the

rest will be completed by God's grace- they should try to become sign-posts in the life of others, so that the city isn't hidden.

We people hide when we're ashamed. Just as Adam and Eve, after their disobedience to God's will in paradise, hid when they heard God's footsteps, so we also hide by denying the Gospel, though we do our best to justify doing so. Because the Gospel's within us, in our conscience. Even when our soul's so depraved that it thinks sin is a virtue or a right, something within us makes us feel that we have to hide. This becomes fear, depression, insomnia, an attempt to justify ourselves publicly, to claim our right to a life which is in opposition to the Gospel, to become not merely acceptable, but also as 'true' as the truth.



Society, and Christians in particular, should show respect and understanding for human wounds, should hold out the prospect of forgiveness, acceptance, love, repentance, and expectation of healing by Christ. In fact, however, society demands not pardon of sin but acceptance of sin as a right and, in the end, a virtue. And action brings reaction. Polarization, division, and a new generation increasingly estranged from the path of faith, the path of light, the path of the city, the path of the Gospel. Instead, it accepts the way of the world.

But unless we follow the path of faith, the path of the city, how will we, society as a whole, be able to accept ourselves, in the first place, and then all the others, since we're all wounded and lying in darkness; some more than others, but all of us in the end? If we write Christ out of our life, everything's permissible. What's unnatural becomes natural; what's sick

is deemed healthy; and what's really healthy will be considered ordinary, of no particular value. We Christians are called upon to set a boundary, even if this means we're alone in the effort. The boundary is love and understanding. But love without truth no longer functions as a sign-post, as the city, as the light, and this causes confusion.

Christ's exhortation that we should become a city of light, love, and shining truth seems to be our duty as Christians. This may bring with it psychological, social, or bodily costs. But it's the only way for God to be glorified in the highest and for us to move onwards as those who've been called: as children of the light.