

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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37th Sunday after Pentecost-Forgiveness Sunday

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Today we stand right on the edge of Great Lent, for the weeks of preparation to follow our Savior to His Passion begin tomorrow. We have already been challenged to prepare with the Sundays of the Tax Collector and the Pharisee, the Prodigal Son, and the Last Judgment. Now it is the Sunday of Forgiveness, when we are reminded that we must forgive one another if we hope to receive God's forgiveness for our sins.

Every time we pray the Our Father, we say "and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Christ teaches in today's gospel lesson that "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." It is impossible, of course, to earn God's forgiveness or put Him in our debt by anything that we do.

Before His infinite holiness, we stand in constant need of mercy and grace. At the same time, it is impossible to open ourselves to receive His mercy and grace if we do not extend the forgiveness of which we are capable to those who have wronged us. If we ask for the Lord's forgiveness and refuse to forgive others, we are in the false position of those who want something
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++ 37th Sunday after Pentecost ++
+ Cheesefare Sunday +

Epistle: Romans 13:11-14:4

Gospel: Matthew 6: 14-21

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.*

Repressed Guilt and Projection by Archimandrite Symeon

What is projection? It's when someone projects onto others whatever it is that's inside themselves. To put it more analytically, so that we all understand: people who've committed a sin and have repressed the guilt created by it, have, along with the guilt, also repressed their moral conscience; they've also repressed the valid law of God and replaced it with their own.

It follows that everything they think, judge and decide is colored with religiosity- for which they probably use

passages from the scriptures, the fathers or excerpts from liturgical books as a base- but all of this is a personal construct, which they themselves have made. And it's all done in order to conceal guilt, whether they realize this or not. In other words, it's not real, it's imagined; it's their own creation. And what happens then?

What they have inside them, their own made-up construct, comes from their own moral law, the law of arrogance and egotism, and this is what

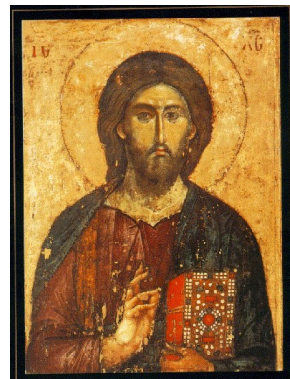
they project onto others. So, whatever they have inside themselves, they see in other people. They see in others something which they themselves are dominated by. This is projection.

If you remember, we've dwelt on this point in the past to some extent and we've said it's a great evil. Do we see something that's not good in somebody else? Some error, a weakness, anything at all, let's say their entire outlook? If we saw this state from the point
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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.





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 that our souls
may be saved.

News and Notes

We welcome all who are with us today and invite you to join us at our coffee social 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, Mackenzie, Mike, Jessica, Lisa, Jeff, Bonnalee, Joann, Skip, Georgia, Colleen, Stan, David, Carol, Norris, Debbie, Linda, Grace the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

The Triodion-The Lenten Guide

For the Lord of mercy and love didn't come into the world to call the righteous, those 'who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt' (Luke 18, 9), like the pharisee; instead, he came to call 'sinners to repentance', which is why he justified the sinful but sincerely repentant publican, rather than the formally virtuous but hypocritical pharisee.

The message from this first, instructive extract from the Triodion is clear: if we wish to find grace and mercy from our Lord and God, all we have to do is follow the example of the publican, who, acknowledging 'the multitude of his sins', sought, with contrition, the Lord's mercy: 'Lord be merciful to me.'

Certainly the Lord knows the difficulties involved in repentance but he also respects sincere intent- provided it's really sincere- and doesn't regard the penitent with contempt. This is why he 'opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble' (James 4, 6). It's also why the Fathers consider humility the supreme virtue and call it 'elevating', because it raises us up in the eyes of the Lord- not of other people- and exalts us before him.

Let's take the first step, then, and acquire a sense of our sinfulness, and let's repair our relationship with God and other people, since these are the necessary requirements for us to continue our spiritual struggle. Then, with his grace and mercy, the Lord will supply anything that's missing.

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of view of the other person, with a clear eye, it might be miniscule. But since we already have something within us, an unwholesome world, we take this sick world and, having found a small point of contact with someone else, we project it onto them. It's as if we're saying: 'This is what they're like'. Whereas, in fact, at that very moment, what we're doing, neither more nor less, is saying: 'This is what I'm like'.

Naturally, people don't say this and it never even crosses their mind, but when they say 'That's what they're like', 'That's what they get up to', or 'That's the sort of person they are', it's as if they're saying: 'I've got these things deep down inside me, but I don't really know I have and I don't want to manifest them to others. But those of you who can look and understand can see for yourselves'.

And we now realize how much confusion, how many misunderstandings, disturbances and squabbles arise among us over nothing. Because I've

seen something small in other people and made it big; and it may be that they've seen something small in me and magnified it, since they're like me in this way. And so it goes on.

So you might say we live in a world of illusions, an imaginary place and we're dragged back and forth by a phantastic condition that we see in others or that they see in us. This is true; it's true. It may seem exaggerated but it's true, whereas what's really required is for people to think and say: 'Perhaps I'm not seeing straight. Maybe I don't understand properly. Perhaps I'm missing something. Maybe my eyes are deceiving me. Since I don't feel that I have clarity, since I don't feel that I'm in good standing with God, sanctified and illumined, perhaps I've got it all wrong'.

Or we could try to put ourselves in the position of other people. And say: 'Who knows why they do this, that or the next thing. It may be that they don't even realize that they do it at all. Who knows their inner workings?

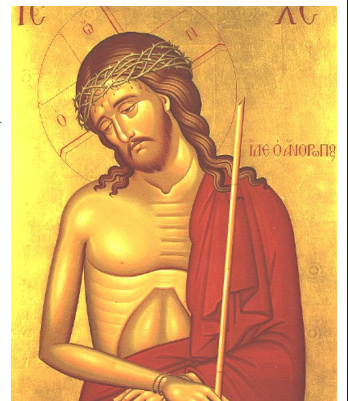
Who knows what overshadows them, what they're suffering from, and why they're in this state?'

So, repressed guilt prevents us from seeing clearly and acting properly.

And I very much doubt if there's anyone at all who doesn't have repressed guilt. Not just that we're sinners, but that we have repressed guilt. Only in

Christ can we become humble and contrite, and say: 'God, I stand before you naked and exposed. Will you judge me, punish me, castigate me? As

you wish, God. I am your creation and you are my God. You have every right to do as you wish. I'm not hiding'. Naturally, for people to take such a stance requires trust in God and in his tenderness.



for themselves but will not give it their neighbors. That is a form of selfishness that reflects a lack of love for those in whom we encounter Him every day of our lives. It is a form of idolatry in which we imagine that we are serving a false god who simply does our bidding rather than a Lord Who calls us to die to self as we share more fully in His life.

Forgiveness is not some kind of commodity that can be hoarded greedily. It is ultimately a divine energy of the Lord in Whom we participate by grace. If we refuse to forgive others, we refuse to be healed, transformed, and illumined like an iron left in the fire of the divine glory. We refuse to be truly in communion with Christ; indeed, we refuse Him. But if we forgive, even as we acknowledge the imperfection of our efforts to control our thoughts, words, and deeds toward those who have offended us, we open ourselves in humility to become more like our Savior in holiness by the power of His grace.

Like the rest of the Christian life, forgiveness is not simply a matter of how we feel about God, our neighbors, or ourselves. It is not about whether thoughts of past wrongs or future fears pop into our heads. It is not about whether we particularly like someone else. Forgiveness occurs when our vision of those who have wronged us is clarified or restored such that we see them not in terms of past wrongs, but as those who bear the image and likeness of God. Only our inflamed passions keep us from seeing our neighbors this way, for pride tempts us to hold on to anger and judgment that quickly condemn anyone who has ever dared to cross us.

Adam and Eve were cast from Paradise when they stripped themselves naked of the divine glory by their prideful disobedience. They diminished themselves to a life focused on "mak[ing]...provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." We do not have to look very closely at our world or into our own souls in order to see that we have followed our first parents on a path out of Paradise. When their son Cain murdered his brother Abel, it became abundantly clear how powerful the passions are at destroying human relationships as God intended them to be, even within our own families.

If we are truly in Christ, the New Adam in Whom all the corruptions of the first Adam are set right, we must

be in the processing of healing from the self-centered desires that separate us from Him and one another. The weeks of Lent provide us with profound opportunities to open even the darkest corners of our lives to His brilliant light. But no matter how strictly we fast, how fervently we pray, or how generously we give to the needy, we will be unable to receive God's forgiveness if we do not forgive one another. That is the clear teaching of Christ in today's gospel lesson.

What greater sign is there of our brokenness than how easily we offend, harm, and disregard one another? Indeed, we often enjoy doing so and come up with all kinds of reasons to justify hateful thoughts, words, and actions toward others. At Forgiveness Vespers, we will personally bow before one another as we ask for and extend forgiveness to everyone in the parish. We begin our journey toward the deep mystery of Christ's death and resurrection with humility and reconciliation. Since none of us has lived as faithfully as possible, we have all weakened one another spiritually, for we are members of one Body in Christ. Now is the time to grant to one another the forgiveness that we ask from the Lord as we prepare to follow Him to the ultimate manifestation of His forgiving love in the cross and empty tomb.

Instead of wasting time and energy by judging others or holding grudges this Lent, we must focus on participating as fully as possible in the restoration of the human person that Christ has brought to the world. Since we have put Him



on in baptism, we must live in a way that reflects and reveals His mercy and blessing. The Lord is very clear about what this means: If we want forgiveness for our sins, we must forgive others for their offenses against us. The prodigal son had no claim to restoration as a son, and he knew that, but the overwhelming love of his father healed the deep wounds that the young man's behavior had caused. If we want to open ourselves to the unfathomable mercy of our Heavenly Father, we must become channels of that same mercy to others, despite our unworthiness. Like an iron left in the fire takes on the qualities of the fire and conveys heat and light to other objects, those who truly share in Christ's life will share what they have received with others, especially those they are tempted not to forgive.

For Elder Aimilianos, there's a contradiction in the spiritual life. God shows that he delights in sicknesses. But this is so strange. Basil the Great says that although God made us hale and hearty, he immediately gave us sickness, even though he wants us to be joyful and peaceful. Why? Because when we embrace sickness, when we love it, when we draw positive conclusions from it, when, because of it, we surrender to God, then illness becomes the quickest way for the acquisition of salvation and freedom from the passions... Sickness is God's best gift to us. People who can't boast of their ailments, as Saint Paul did, or laugh at them, can't make any progress in the spiritual life.

Here Elder Aimilianos agrees with Saint Paisios who considered that he had greater benefit from a relatively short illness than from long years of arduous asceticism.

Most illnesses befall us because of sins. Not as divine punishment, but as necessary schooling... And the more severe the ailment, the closer God is to us, even if we're suffering as a result of our sins. When David became ill, he fasted and covered his head with ashes, not in order to seek expiation from God but to restore his relationship with him. This means that, in his sickness, which may have been caused by sin, he retained the sense of God's love.

This feeling of God's love is also the basic feature and means whereby we may be able to transmit to ourselves, as well as to

others- even if only as a starting-point- the notion of sickness as instruction. Otherwise God appears to be relentless and cruel. No matter how aware we are of our sinfulness, we're brought to repentance only with difficulty, even through trials. Knowledge of our sins often makes us more callous. It's the sense of God's holiness, love and glory that lights the flame of repentance within us. This feeling is granted directly by the Holy Spirit. But we may also receive it through the presence of holy people close to us, or by sharing in the love and support of our brothers and sisters. Then, according to Saint Paisios, the soul is moved, it's put on its mettle and shows awareness.

It's important to say that all this instruction which we've briefly quoted, isn't directed by the Elders and Fathers towards those who are sick, but to the healthy.

In particular, Elder Aimilianos directed these teachings of his to the communities of Simonopetra and Ormylia, in the early years, when most of the monks and nuns there were still young and healthy. His aim was to school his spiritual children in such a way that they'd be ready to face the trial of sickness.

This is true for both monastics and laity. It's a preventative pastoral approach in which the spiritual father has the luxury, is justified, we might say, in setting the bar of spiritual demands high. In the military, there's a maxim: 'What's hard in training makes it easy in battle'. Saint Sophrony teaches that, above all, Christians have to be ascetics. This means that the more they're committed to the ascetic struggle, the better prepared they'll be at a time of trial or temptation.

And what happens when that time of trial arrives?

When sickness comes, especially in the form of painful or even mortal illness? As to how we deal with this on a personal level, when the trial affects us, we should probably seek the answer in the lives of the saints and in their personal example. The issue becomes entirely different when it has to do with other people, with our 'neighbors'. Then, what we see in the teaching and life of the Fathers and Elders is that loving kindness and discretion should come first. Loving kindness means that when you fall ill you can be as harsh and strict as you like with yourself. But not with your brothers and sisters. You



offer them relief in any way you can. You don't mind at all the medical and pharmaceutical care. You express your genuine interest in their health. You take care of their needs. You pray that they'll become well. You share their anxiety with a calm bearing.

The way in which you'll speak to them about God when they're sick is with discretion. And, above all, you'll listen to them. The message and the theology that you know, which we described above, will be in your mind and heart but won't easily leave your lips. The other person must experience Christ in your face, in your person, and not just hear platitudes about him. First we must offer love with kindness and support, and then through words. Often, love becomes the message itself, making words superfluous.

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