

# 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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26<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost-Christ and the Rich Young Man

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Jesus is God himself. And Jesus wants to push the man to go further. This man who comes to Jesus wants to receive things. He wants the secret code to get eternal life. He wants a backstage pass. He wants into the VIP section, or what you might see in the movies at a night club and there are 100 people standing in line to get in. A celebrity drives up in their limo, and gets let in ahead of everyone else. No waiting in line for superstars.

In the gospel, a man comes to Jesus and says, “Good teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus says, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.” Who is God in this story? It’s Jesus. Jesus IS God. Jesus does not say, “do not call me good because God is the only one who is good.” Jesus says, “Why do you call me good?”

Jesus knows that this man suspects

Maybe the man in today’s gospel was even prepared to pay for it. He knows that Jesus has something special, and this man just wants some of it. But Jesus wants this man to stop thinking about what he can buy or get or inherit. Jesus wants the man to give. He says sell everything you have. All of it. Jesus wants this man to find freedom from his possessions. He wants to

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+ 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost +

++ Holy Prophet Zephaniah ++

Epistle: Ephesians 5: 5-19

Gospel: Luke 18: 18-27

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 Christ’s commandment, *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.*

## ***What does it mean to believe in God, by St Arsenia, part 7***

With any discomfiture and temptation, the only consolation and way out is humility. This is the only path that leads the soul to the truth that clarifies everything, to the warmth that heals, to the freedom that relieves. If you lose this path of humility, then the soul is surrounded by darkness and is constricted and pressed. This leads to false reasoning, which is disastrous, because false reason puts everything in the wrong light: All circumstances seem bitter and disastrous; you can’t

see the ways of God in them, the great judgments of His saving providence; people become not brothers, but enemies, and their infirmities grow to the farthest extremes.

Our own infirmities become terrible and even living images of internal torments. Yes, there is only one saving path then—that of humility. Where there is passion, there is constriction and suffering. That passions live in our hearts is indisputable, but they don’t make themselves known

by that unbearable weight when we’re not aware of them and simply fulfill them.

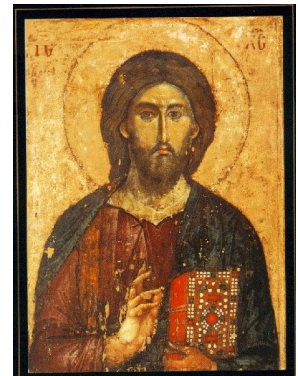
They don’t languish even when we become aware of them and resist them. But when we become aware of them within ourselves and don’t want to rebel against them with all the strength of our soul, when we reject them with one part of our soul and listen to their sweet speech with another, when we turn away from reproaches, when we feel

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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)**

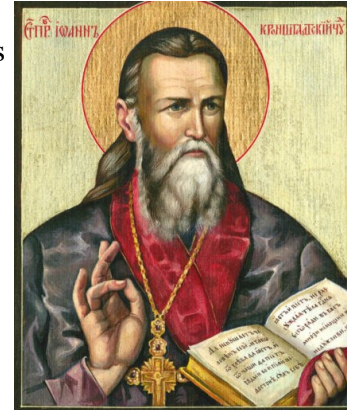
Please keep the following in your prayers: Mother Onufria, Larissa, Jack, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Mackenzie, Mike, Lisa, Jeff, Bonnalee, David, Carol, Norris, Debbie, Linda, Daniel, Michael, Abraham, George, Rochelle, Brianna, Tamam, Catherine, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ

**From St. John Kronstadt**

How easily and speedily the Lord can save us!--instantaneously, unexpectedly, imperceptibly. Often during the day I have been a great sinner, and at night, after prayer, I have gone to rest, justified and whiter than snow by the grace of the Holy Ghost, with the deepest peace and joy in my heart! How easy it will be for the Lord to save us too in the evening of our life, at the decline of our days! O! save, save, save me, most gracious Lord; receive me

in Thy heavenly Kingdom! Everything is possible to Thee."

To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yes, he shall be holden up: for the Lord is able to make him stand." That which is especially important and constitutes the life of the being the Creator has placed and concealed far away in the very depths within that being; we see this everywhere. Thus in the man the soul is in the very midst of his being--in the heart; and therefore the soul is often called the heart and the heart the soul. "Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me, my heart within me is desolate." "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Our God is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy."



**What does it mean to believe in God? cont'd from p.1**

sorry for ourselves and aren't bold enough to follow our Cross-bearing Teacher on the way of the Cross, then, of course, we will feel anguish and pain.

The Lord, Who has taken all our sins and infirmities upon Himself, showed an example of the struggle of the will. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He was tormented until His will agreed to accept suffering.<sup>1</sup> Try your heart, and you'll see that there are many conflicts within it. We must once and for all give our souls over to the guidance of the will of God, to following His commandments, and to the guidance of the harsh monastic rules. When the soul agrees, then it will be easy.

The Lord saves us by all means; these grave bodily ailments that so often visit us constantly remind us of death. And what can be more beneficial for the soul than the remembrance of death? It frees us from all earthly predilections, it allows us to know the value of all earthly affairs, and most of all, it helps us strive for

the future life. May God grant that your illnesses bring fruit to your soul: salvation. We believe that everything that the Lord builds serves for our benefit and our eternal salvation. Instead of our desires, there should be the commandment of God, the will of God leading us to eternal life.

If you were at war, could you say you don't want to go fight? No, you would go, without thinking about it, to certain death. If there's a spiritual battle ahead, if God's commandments demand a struggle, how can we say we don't want to fight, that it would be better to give ourselves over as captive to our enemies? What a disgrace! What horror someone who slackens his will to such a point will experience in this life; and in the future life, his soul will endure even greater shame when all of its deeds and thoughts are revealed!

You have to entreat, to pray to the Lord to strengthen your will to resist passionate thoughts, to turn all the powers, all the aspirations and desires of the soul to higher goals—holy,

high, and noble. Every indulgence in one's passions kills the purity of moral feeling. The conscience, that natural moral law written in our hearts, goes deaf if we don't listen to it and act contrary to its promptings. What are these words: "Do I want to or not?" These words have no meaning where the moral law of the salvation of the soul is concerned.

We are all judged by the word of God, given to us for guidance in life, salvation, showing the path to eternal life, for our purification. It judges us when we don't listen to it. It will also judge us in the future life. It's fearful to sin before it. It's fearful because the heart becomes callous, and the word of God ceases to act upon it. This condition is worse than bodily death



*(continued next issue)*

## Homily on Christ and the Rich Young Man, (cont'd from p.1)

free this many from the loneliness of having something everyone else wants, and never knowing if your friends like you as much as they like your money. He wants to show this man how good a time you can have waiting in line with everyone else. He wants to give this man community, family, brotherhood, self-respect. And above all he wants him to have a purpose in life.

We can all see ourselves in the young rich man. We come to Jesus to get, and not to give. We come to get an experience of a familiar church service on Sunday. But often we don't come prepared to give our time, money, and energy to give to others. Or we come to church to receive the true facts, the right arguments, but when we go about our lives during the week, we never give out anything like kind words, prayers and blessings.

A few weeks ago, we read the gospel passage about the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man was the bad guy in the story because he didn't feed Lazarus. Last week the rich guy was the bad guy because he hoarded his wealth. Now the rich man is – kind of – the bad guy in this story because he won't sell his goods and distribute the money to the poor.

"It's easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven." So all of these Gospel readings basically say that rich people have to help poor people. There's no way around it. That's what they're saying. I would be lying and hiding the truth from you if I didn't discuss this.

The relationship between rich people and poor people is a really complicated thing. In the earliest church Christians lived in a community that had all possessions and all money in common. That was what was expected. Not only did people give all their money to the church, and live in community with everyone else, they also bought the freedom of slaves. And they took in unwanted children.

In the Roman empire, people would take unwanted children and leave them outside in the woods to die of exposure, or to be eaten by the animals. They reasoned, "if the gods want this child to live, let the gods take care of the child." This happened more to girls than boys.

Christians would rescue the girls and take on the re-

sponsibility of raising the girls. And so there were a large number of women who, ironically, had found their freedom in the church. Because their biological parents gave them up, the women were not under any obligation to marry someone chosen for them. They could choose not to marry, something novel. And in this group of women we see the beginnings of female monasticism.

Salvation for someone who was a slave, and is no longer a slave, or for a child that was rescued from the woods, that kind of salvation is very practical. People felt that God had done a miracle for them. And God had done a miracle for them. But God also did a miracle for the rich people. God freed the rich people in these communities from slavery to their money.

When Jesus says, "it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God," he doesn't mean, "God is going to be sitting at the gate of heaven and refusing entry to all the rich people." He doesn't say they can't get into heaven. He says it is hard for them to enter the Kingdom of God. But the Kingdom of God within us, in our midst, it is the Church, the redeemed family of God. It's not just about where you end up in the afterlife, it's about what community you enter into now.

It is hard for rich people to find themselves truly a part of same family as the poor. Jesus is saying salvation for the rich is when they are freed from the tyranny of their possessions. It is truly difficult

for rich people to break free. It's hard to train your mind to think differently. To truly care about other people. To give up power and influence. To give up comfort. To give up financial security.

Jesus knows it's hard. He is not saying, "you're not good enough, rich person." He is saying, "I understand that it seems impossible for you to actually follow me to the cross. But my strength is made perfect in weakness. You are not alone in this struggle. I am with you. And with God it impossible! But this takes us back to what we said in the beginning – do we really think Jesus is God? When we really do trust in Jesus we trust that investing our time and money in the church is a good investment for our children, as well as for ourselves. Let us be wise stewards as we await the birth of Our Lord.



Their mockery comes from a malicious heart; let your smile be without any badness. Mockery sits well with ignorance; a smile is more suited to knowledge. Through their mockery they're increasing the value of your prayer before the eternal Judge. Because God is more enamored of the prayer of a bold soul, surrounded by the arrows of wickedness, hatred, envy and mockery. The tips of these arrows have been blunted and the base of the shafts sharpened, so that they're warded off by you and pierce the archers who shot them.

David's wife, Michal, once mocked the fervent prayer of her husband. God was more affronted by this mockery than King David was. This is why the Lord most high punished Michal: 'And Michal, daughter of Saul, had no children to the day of her death' (2 Kings 6, 23 [2 Samuel 6, 23]). If you pay attention to events and the fate of people, you'll see for yourself that today, too, God punishes severely those who mock the sacred.

And if you think that any word is stronger medicine for them than silence, say to those mocking you: 'Are my eyes deceiving me or am I seeing straight? Every day, you entreat merchants, land-owners and law-enforcers, each for a variety of reasons, and yet you're mocking me because I entreat our eternal Creator. Isn't it more ridiculous to ask for something from somebody who's incapable, instead of going to the Almighty? Isn't it absurd to venerate dust rather than the Lord, the Giver of life?' It says somewhere in the prophet: 'Cursed are they who place their hope in people' (Jer. 17, 5). Those who place their hopes in mortal people, in a fleeting bubble and don't lay it on God Almighty are obviously cursed. And this curse on them and their houses can be confirmed through everyday experience. It's clear that, in the same way, those people are cursed who ask things of people but not of him who sustains everything and can do everything. But take note: sometimes silence is more effective than words.

The first mockery unsettles the soul that prays. But you've already survived and haven't given up on prayer. Any further mockery is an incentive. You can tell yourself you already have experience. Now you feel that God's somehow closer to you, the Church more beloved by you and prayer is sweeter. You should know that the time will come when the mockery will cease. Then people will come round, they'll admire and praise you and then your soul will be in greater danger than it is now. Now you're learning humility, but then you'll be defending yourself against pride. But that's another issue, a different temptation.

You should know that those who torment us with their mockery are precisely those who are our enemies.

These are the people Christ was referring to when he gave the commandment 'Love your enemies' (Matth. 5, 44). Without knowing, they're doing us good. By hurting us and troubling us, they're lighting the flame of divine fire within us. They bark behind our backs when we're on our way to church, but that just pushes us closer to God. By making the earth more tiresome for us, they make heaven more attractive. Frost and the wind don't think about the tree, but even unwittingly they do it good. So it



is with your enemies and you.

So forgive them and bless them, pray to God for them and- this is the culmination- love them as your greatest benefactors after God. Pay frequent visits to houses of sorrow. Visit the grave-yard, as well. Think about Christ's cross and kiss it as often as you can. And think about the end of life. All of this will help strengthen your resolve to pray and you'll reach the final victory. Peace and the Lord's mercy.