

# A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

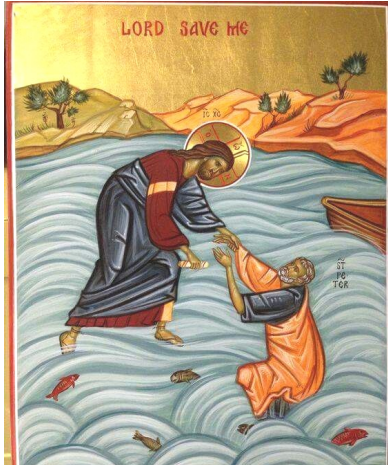
*Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be Forever!*



Volume 8 Issue 373

9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost– Christ walks on water

August 18, 2019



Often, we think of God's will as some overarching plan for our lives. We tend to focus on the big picture and forget that God's will for us is revealed every day; it's discerned through a daily, if not moment by moment relationship and participation in the life of the Holy Trinity through His Church, keeping our focus on Christ in

faith, cooperating with the work of the Holy Spirit, obediently and humbly following the teachings of the Church to the best of our ability.

The word that St. Paul uses to describe this relationship of cooperation in today's Epistle is "synergy." He says, "we are God's fellow workers." Now, this is no 50/50 relationship: We aren't equals with God. We cooperate with God's work in us through our obedience to His teachings, to His Church, to the hierarchy, so that we can be pastored, in order that we may grow in Christ-likeness and change, conforming ourselves to God's will. Obviously, this is a great challenge, but a necessary one if we're to grow in Christ and be deified, and this is the model that's been faithfully passed down to us since the beginning. If Christ, showing us the Way, submitted  
*(continued p. 3)*

**\*\* 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost \*\***

**\*Post-feast of the Holy Dormition\***

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 3: 9-17

Gospel: Matthew 14: 22-34

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.*

## ***The Dormition: Pascha of the Summer, by Evangelos Sotiropoulos***

In the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom celebrated in the Orthodox Church, the priest repeats the following prayer a number of times: Let us commit ourselves and one another, and our whole life to Christ our God. The ecclesiastical year, which begins on September 1st, has been divinely developed by the Church Fathers with feasts and fasts to aid our life in the God-Man Christ. The longest and strictest fast, Great Lent, paves the

way for Pascha (Easter), the Feast of Feasts. In addition to Lent, there are three other periods of prescribed fasting: that of the Apostles in June; the Dormition; and, that of Christmas in November and December.

Let us then briefly examine the theological and spiritual significance of these two feasts through the homilies of Saint Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), who represents Christian theology at its most sublime. Unlike some who deny the

truth, St. Gregory demonstrates clearly that the Light of the Transfiguration is uncreated.

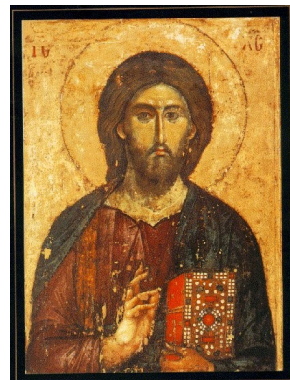
"While pretending to concern themselves with the literal sense of the passage, they reject its godly meaning," Palamas writes.

In Matthew's Gospel (see 17:1-9; see also Luke 9:28-36), the Evangelist recounts the manifestation of Christ's divinity through a display of His divine energy on Mount Tabor: "And He  
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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 worshipping with us today and invite you down to the church hall for our social hour.

**Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)**

We ask that you keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Olga, Lillian, Meg, Larissa, Stephen, Louise, Marcia, George, Peg, Christopher, Jackie, Karoline, Evan, Ryan, Kathleen, Sandy, Andrea, Samuel, Anatoly, Linda, Alexey, John, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, and those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

**Commentary on the Our Father**

As we also forgive our debtors; This is God’s ‘catch-22’ for us sinners. We want to obtain—if we are serious Christians—the forgiveness of our sins and bold assurance before God. But we can attain to this only if we forgive our own debtors. God is very clear on this. We forgive; he forgives; we don’t forgive; he doesn’t forgive. Nothing in the Gospel could be clearer. That’s the deal. Take it

and forgive to receive forgiveness; or don’t take it and enter eternity without bold assurance before the Lord of Hosts, the Creator of your soul.

This is a very deep struggle. For while we are sinners, that does not mean that we can’t be sinned against, wounded, sometimes seriously, sometimes grievously. But there’s no other way: we have to purify our hearts and forgive. This can be a great struggle.

And do not lead us into temptation, A humble man who has ‘been around the block’— who has some experience—will pray this petition with feeling. In fact, an index of spiritual maturity is how seriously a man will pray this petition. The more serious he is, the more he will get down on his knees and ask his Heavenly Father not to lead him into temptation. He has learned. There is no longer any time for fooling around.

*(continued next issue.)*



**The Dormition: Pascha of the Summer, cont’d from p.1**

was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light” (Mt 17:2).

This theophany was beheld by three of His disciples – Peter, James and John – as well as by Moses and Elijah. God the Father also spoke, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” (Mt 17:5), confirming Jesus’ divine sonship.

The attainment of this light is the ultimate goal of Orthodox Christians and can be achieved by dedicating “our whole life to Christ our God” as the Holy Chrysostom says. “The divine light is given by measure and is received to a greater or lesser extent, being distributed, undividedly divided, according to the worthiness of the recipients,” declares St. Gregory, although this in no way should be confused with God’s essence, which is “absolutely indivisible and incomprehensible, and no other being can receive it, either to a greater or lesser extent.” We have no better example, no better prototype, to lead us to

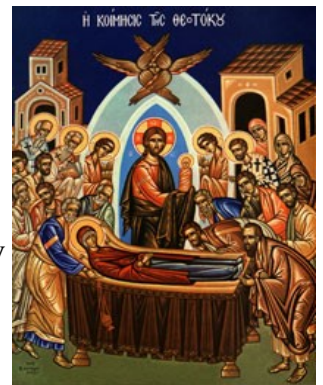
Christ’s ineffable glory than His Mother, the Most Holy Lady and Ever-Virgin Mary, the Holy of Holies, whose Dormition we will soon celebrate.

St. Gregory writes: She showed that her whole life, her behavior, her mind and her words, were utterly devoted to godly striving. As a result of this, her death, too, was life-giving and led to heavenly, immortal life, and its day of remembrance is a joyful holiday and worldwide festival... For at present she is the only one who has a place in heaven with her divinely glorified body in the company of her Son.

Orthodoxy venerates the Theotokos through its icons, hymns and feasts and prays for her intercessions to her Son and our God. A special honor in the liturgical life of the Church is given to the Axion Estin hymn: It is truly right to bless you, Theotokos, ever blessed, most pure, and Mother of our God. Higher in honor than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim, who without

corruption gave birth to God the Logos. Most truly Theotokos, you do we magnify.

Like Pascha, the Great Feasts of the Dormition Fast call us to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mk 12:30). The Transfiguration shows us that we can experience the Kingdom of God here on earth, while the Dormition shows us that through our faith and good works and Christ’s love and mercy, we can attain immortal life; since, as St. Gregory Palamas describes:



“Christ as God is for those who live by the Spirit and see with spiritual eyes what the sun is for those who live by their senses and see with natural vision.”



Himself to the Father in all things, how much more should we, submit ourselves to the Church.

Many Orthodox in America struggle with having a 'teachable spirit,' with grafting ourselves into the Church that is above culture and time, just as we struggle with the idea of being a family, a community in the Church because so much of this model is broken down around us in the culture. But this means that you and I have an even greater need for the Church, living in this culture that promotes the autonomy of the individual over our sense of connection with family, place, and community.

We have an even greater need to trust God and His work in us through the Church, even as we are so often influenced by so many 'winds of doctrine'. For our part, we're each responsible for how we build on what we've received and how we act

on what we've been taught of that truth of Christ He's entrusted to us for our salvation. And so, realizing what's at stake, we prioritize the Kingdom of God over all that's temporal and passing away so that we may become inheritors of that Kingdom and help others find their way into the Kingdom as well through our own example of struggle, repentance, and faith.

Our cooperation, our daily, even moment by moment, "yes" to God, is predicated on such faith, or, at least, the desire for such faith. And faith is

one of those big concepts that often eludes us. Faith means letting go of your control, your will, and struggling to trust God. Taking a big step of faith can induce fear. The more pride grips us, the more we can fear the spiritual surgery God may be doing in us to grow us in cooperation with His work in our lives and the more we'll chafe against godly authority in the Church—that teachable spirit.

The disciples, for their part, were in constant fear following Jesus, and, they were in constant need of more and more faith and humility. They seem to be placed in one perilous situation after another. In today's Gospel, we find them tossed about on the sea, the waves and the wind making them fear for their lives. To add to it, Christ comes to them, walking on the storm-tossed waves. Imagine! Seeing such an unbelievable sight, they assume He must be an apparition.



Christ's words to them though are comforting, even as they are to us in our struggles to courageously trust God. He assures them, saying, "It is I. Do not be afraid." Literally, Christ says here, "I AM; He uses the divine name of God. Who else has the power over the laws of nature? Still dubious, Peter calls out, "Lord, if it's You, command me to come to You on the water." So, the Lord gives Peter what he asks to teach him humility and to strengthen his faith. He commands Peter to walk to Him. Now, this is a big step of faith on Peter's part. And, Peter actually walks on the water! We often forget this when we consider this passage. For a few steps, Peter exhibits the humility and faith necessary to get to Christ, to do the impossible.

But when Peter gets distracted—in this case, by the winds and waves, and, here's the key, takes his focus off of Christ, he begins to sink and be in trouble; his faith's wavered, his focus is on himself, he's drowning. So it is with us: we're so easily distracted from our focus on Christ.

As Peter shows us: faith is hard work; keeping our focus on Christ, putting Him and His Church first in our lives, is hard. But when we fail to do so, what are the consequences? We can become fearful yet again, bogged down in the mundane of the material world, our pride, our passions, our worldly preoccupations, our self-focus—and we 'sink,' we spiritually 'sink'. This is when we need more than ever to remember

Christ's words, "It is I. Do not be afraid." And so, God in His love and mercy, also gives us the tools we need to keep our focus on Him, to repent, to cooperate with the work of healing, growth, and salvation He's doing in us.

What foundation are you building on? Are you making use of the 'gold' that Christ God has entrusted to you? St. Paul admonishes us today, saying "let each one take heed how he builds on it." Our 'building' with Christ begins with cooperation, praying for an increase in faith and trust in God, striving to keep and get our focus back on Christ. Let's pray that through growth in faith, trusting in God's work in us, we may continue to grow in obedience, humility, repentance, and love for God and His holy Church, making use of all the tools He's entrusted to us. In this way, Christ God will extend to us His strong arm and we will find ourselves among those who build on the foundation of Christ.

## The Saints of North America (part 6)

Since the number of parishes within the Diocese of North America was growing, Bishop Tikhon found it impossible to visit all of them. The diocese had to be reorganized in order to administer it more efficiently. Therefore, Bishop Tikhon submitted a plan to the Russian Holy Synod which would transfer the See from San Francisco to New York because most parishes and individuals were concentrated in the east. Since various ethnic groups required special attention and pastoral leadership, Bishop Tikhon proposed that Archimandrite Raphael be made his second vicar bishop (the Bishop of Alaska would be his first).

In 1903, the Holy Synod of Russia unanimously elected Archimandrite Raphael to be the Bishop of Brooklyn while retaining him as head of the Syro-Arab Orthodox Mission in North America. The Holy Synod announced the election to Patriarch Meletios, who was pleased by their decision. Bishop Tikhon wrote to Saint Raphael to inform him of his election, and Father Raphael sent him a letter of acceptance. Meanwhile, Father Innocent Pustynsky was consecrated as Tikhon's first auxiliary bishop at Saint Petersburg's cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan.

On the third Sunday of Lent in 1904, Saint Raphael became the first Orthodox bishop to be consecrated on American soil. Bishop Tikhon and Bishop Innocent performed the service at Saint Nicholas Cathedral in Brooklyn. The new bishop's vestments were a gift from Tsar Nicholas II. Following his consecration, Bishop Raphael continued his pastoral labors, ordaining priests and assigning them to parishes, and helping Bishop Tikhon in the administration of the diocese.

At the end of 1904, Bishop Raphael announced his intention to publish a magazine called *Al-Kalimat* (The Word) as the official publication of the Syro-Arab mission. This would help to link the people and parishes of his diocese more closely together. Bishop Raphael knew that he could not visit all Orthodox Christians across North America in person, but through the ministry of the printed word, he could preach the word of salvation even to people he would never meet. The content was to be

spiritual, moral, and churchly so that the magazine could reinforce people in their Faith. The Word would focus on five primary topics: dogmatic truths, ethical teaching, historical and contemporary ecclesiastical subjects, a chronicle of baptisms, weddings, etc., and official pronouncements. The first issue was printed in January 1905, and Saint Raphael considered this milestone as one equal in importance to the acquisition of Saint Nicholas Cathedral and the parish cemetery.

In July of 1905 Bishop Raphael consecrated the grounds for Saint Tikhon's Monastery and blessed the orphanage at South Canaan, PA. Three days later, he presided at a conference of diocesan clergy at Old Forge, PA, because Archbishop Tikhon was in San Francisco. Among the clergy in attendance were three who would also be numbered among the saints: Father ALEXIS Toth, Father Alexander Hotovitzky, and Father John Kochurov (the last two would die as martyrs in Russia).

For the next ten years Bishop Raphael tended his growing flock. With the growth of his New York community came an increase in the number of children, and he was concerned about their future. He wanted to establish an evening school to educate them in a Christian atmosphere, because the future of the Church in this country depended upon the instruction of the youth. Children who did not speak Arabic were already going to non-Orthodox churches where Sunday school classes were conducted in English. Bishop Raphael saw the absolute necessity for using English in worship and

in education for the future progress of the Syro-Arab Mission.

Taking heed of Saint Paul's words to pray in a language that people understood (1 Cor.14:15-19), Saint Raphael recommended the use of the Service Book of the Holy Orthodox Catholic Apostolic Church (translated by Isabel Hapgood) in all of his parishes. In March of 1907 Saint Tikhon returned to Russia and was replaced by Archbishop PLATON. Once again Saint Raphael was considered for episcopal office in Syria, being nominated to succeed Patriarch GREGORY as Metropolitan of Tripoli in 1908.

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