

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 383

19th Sunday after Pentecost—Christ Heals a Demoniac

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We have probably all been surprised at some point by a family member, friend, or acquaintance who behaved out of character. We get to know people and have some idea of who they are, but then they say or do something that makes us wonder if we really know them. If we are honest, we will acknowledge that the same is true of

each of us. We say, do, and think things that surprise even ourselves. Sometimes we handle a problem or respond to a temptation better than we thought we would, but so often our actions reveal a brokenness that we do not like to see. That is why we can so quickly become defensive when others see our weaknesses, and especially when they point them out.

In today's gospel reading we read about a man whose situation was beyond miserable. He surely had no illusions about himself, for he was so filled with demons that he called himself "Legion." His personality had disintegrated due to the power of the forces of evil in his life. That is shown by the fact that he was naked, like Adam and Eve who stripped themselves of the divine glory and were cast out of Paradise into our
(continued p. 3)

When we are forced to stare at death, by Fr. James Guirguis

In the Gospel from St. Luke, we hear an amazing account. We are told that many of the disciples as well as a great crowd of people were following the Lord Jesus as He went to a city called Nain. As our Lord Jesus Christ drew near to the gate of the city He encountered a funeral procession passing by.

Why should such a sight be something that the Lord Jesus despises? Because He created us to live forever. He created us to be full of life, not to

be swallowed up and embraced by death. He was sad at the sight because from the beginning it was not meant to be.

I believe that every time the Lord encountered death, it was deeply troubling to Him, as it should be to us. Because it reminds us of the fallenness of humanity. It reminds us that death had dominion over all human life. Yet we find that in Christ, all things become new.

We are told that when the Lord Jesus saw the

procession and the widow whose only son had died, He had compassion on her and said "Do not weep." These are the precious words of the Lord. He condescends to this poor widow's pain and anguish and He comforts her with His word "Do not weep." Who are we that any of us should be shown such comfort and compassion by the Lord, as He demonstrates in this story? What a beautiful master we serve! For He is the Creator!

(continued p.2)

**** 19th Sunday after Pentecost ****

*** Martyr Nestor of Thessalonica ***

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 11:31-12:9

Gospel: Luke 8: 26-39

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.

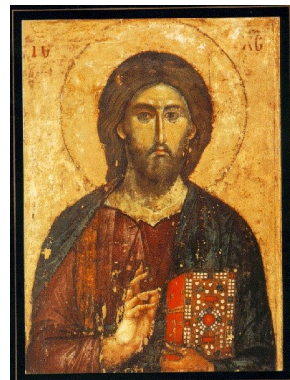
We worship God in Trinity - Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

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.*

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.

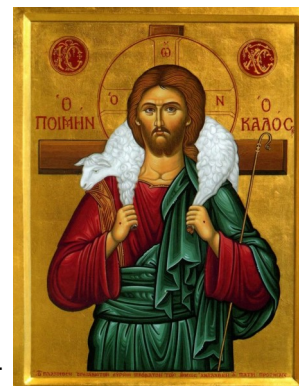
Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

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, Chuck, Eric, Abraham, Susan, Bill, Jenny, Sally Lou, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, and those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Words of wisdom from the Elders

In a prayer on the day of the Dormition we say, "The laws of nature are overcome in you, O all pure Virgin." God wans our salvation, and when God wishes, he laws of nature are overcome. Spirituality is the supernatural world, which a Christian must enter not "some day," "somewhere," but right here and now, on earth in the midst of modern civilization.

Entering this spiritual world is itself a act of spirituality. Spirituality is the sate of existence of any person who in some way tries o become part of he spiritual world. Spirituality is synonymous with the acquisition of godliness, become God is Spirit. Jesus calls God "Spirit" when he talks to Nicodemus (John 3: 1-10). And discloses to him and in his person to the entire human race the reality of another divine world, and the difficulty entering it.



Spirituality is the Kingdom of the divine Spirit. Christianity is a teaching about this kingdom and about how to enter it. That is why the Gospel is permeated by the call "to seek the Kingdom of God." Nicodemus was awed and terrified as he realized the concept of new birth into the spiritual life. (Edited from the book, *Light in the Darkness*, by Sergei Fudel, p. 46)

When we are forced to stare at death, cont'd from p.1

After comforting the widow with His words, and as an aside, let me say that when someone is sick or suffering, we should be careful not to try and comfort them with empty words of comfort. The Lord comforted with a full knowledge of what He would do. We should not tell the sick and suffering that everything will be okay, when in fact, their world might be falling apart. We should be with them in their pain. You can't tell them that everything will be better, because we don't know that. End of aside.

After His comforting words, the Lord does something that no one that day expected or foresaw. He came up to the bier (the casket) and He touched it and said "Young man, I say to you: arise." And we are told that the dead man sat up and began to speak. It was such a shock to the crowd that we are told that "fear seized them all." But the evangelist goes on to say, "and they glorified God saying "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited

His people!"

My brothers and sisters, this story is about each of us. Sometimes we are like the widow who is staring into the face of the darkness and trying to somehow make sense of the death of a loved one. And we will all certainly be like the widow's son who was laying lifeless in the casket, because all of us are going to die. Death is beyond our control. Death is beyond our control but life is the gift of Jesus Christ to those who love Him, who hear His words and follow Him.

We do not need to be troubled by death, because death has no more dominion over Our Lord Jesus Christ, who conquered and defeated death. He destroyed it and destroyed sin. Each of us is called then to live as if Christ has already touched our casket and brought us back to life, and He has! We were dead in sin! We were buried with Him and raised again in baptism! We were given new life and put on the new man. We have become sons and daughters of God by this royal adoption into the household

of God. Now we are called to live a resurrected life, not bound by sin as ones who are spiritually dead, but living in the Spirit, in newness of life.

Each of us was dead through sin and each of us has been restored. St. Paul says at least three times in his epistles "walk worthily." He writes "that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." Again he writes "that

you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;" and finally he writes "I, therefore,

the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called". Let us indeed do just that.



world of corruption. He lived among the tombs, and death is "the wages of sin" that came into the world as a consequence of our first parents' refusal to fulfill their calling to become like God in holiness. This naked man living in the cemetery was so terrifying to others that they tried unsuccessfully to restrain him with chains. In the Gadarene demoniac we have a vivid icon of the pathetic suffering of humanity enslaved to death, naked of the divine glory, and isolated in fear from loving relationships with others.

Evil was so firmly planted in this man's soul that his reaction to the Lord's command for the demons to leave him was "What have you to do with me?...I ask you, do not torment me." His brokenness was such that he had no hope for healing and perceived Christ's promise of deliverance simply as pain. By telling the Lord that his name was Legion, he was acknowledging that the line between the demons and his own identity had been blurred. He was in such bad shape that it was not clear where he ended and where the demons began.

Perhaps there is no clearer image of human brokenness in need of the healing of Christ than this miserable man. He represents us all in many ways. He did not ask Christ to deliver him, even as we did not take the initiative in Christ's coming to save sinners. The corrupting forces of evil were so powerful in his life that he had lost any sense of what it meant to be someone in God's image and likeness. Whenever we are driven by our distorted self-centered desires, we think, speak, and act similarly. We too are often so wedded to our favorite sins that, like him, we would rather that Christ leave us alone than that He set us free. We are often so weak and confused that we fear His healing mercy will torment us, for we have lost all hope of being set free from them. We are afraid of what life would be like without them.

After the spectacular drowning of the swine, the man in question was "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind." The one who had not been recognizably human returned to being his true self, was back in society, and was learning from the One Who had set him free. That was very disturbing, however, to the people of that region. In fact, they asked Christ to leave out of fear at what had happened. We may find their reaction hard to understand. What could be so terrifying about this man returning to a normal life? Unfortunately, we all tend to get used to whatever we get used

to. What we have experienced in ourselves or in others becomes normal to us. Even as the scary man in the tombs was afraid when Christ came to set Him free, his neighbors were afraid when they saw that he had changed.

It is no surprise, then, that the man formerly possessed by demons and still feared by his neighbors did not want to stay in his hometown after the Lord restored him. He begged to go with Christ, Who responded, "Return to your home, and declare all that God has done for you." That must have been a difficult commandment for him to obey. Who would not be embarrassed and afraid to live in a town where everyone knew about the wretched and miserable existence he had experienced? It would have been much easier to have left all that behind

and start over as a traveling disciple of the One who had set him free.

But that was not what Christ wanted the man to do. Perhaps that was because the Lord knew that the best witness to His transforming power was a person who had been healed from the worst forms of depravity and corruption. Why should people believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the world? Surely, the lives of His followers must bear witness to His power in order to convince them. When someone moves from slavery to the glorious freedom of the children of God, that person has moved from death to life. Such a radical

change is a sign of the truth of Christ's resurrection, for He makes us participants in His victory over death by breaking the destructive hold of the power of sin in our lives.

Our Lord makes it possible for us to become our true selves in Him. That means being united with Him in holiness such that, by His gracious mercy, we become "partakers of the divine nature" who fulfill humanity's original vocation to become like God in holiness. He has overcome our nakedness by clothing us in a robe of light in baptism, filled us with the Holy Spirit in Chrismation, and nourished us with His own Body and Blood in the Eucharist. He Himself forgives and restores us through Confession and repentance.

Our challenge is to take the small steps to turn our hearts more fully toward God through prayer, fasting, almsgiving, forgiveness, and all the basic spiritual disciplines of the Christian life. When we fail, we must use our weakness to grow in constant dependence on the Lord's mercy and strength.



The Saints of North America (part 16)

The unique characteristics of the Chicago-Streator parish community demanded of Fr. John a deft combination of pastoral-liturgical skills, with missionary ones. These abilities would permit him not only to stabilize the membership of his parish community spiritually and administratively, but to enlarge his flock continually by means of conversions, or by the return to Orthodoxy of the ethnically diverse Christians living in Illinois. Already during the first three years of Fr. John's parish service 86 Uniates and 5 Catholics were added to the Orthodox Church,⁷ bringing the number of permanent parishioners up to 215 men in Chicago, and 88 in Streator. There were two functioning church schools affiliated with the parishes, with more than 20 pupils enrolled in them. The course consisted of Saturday classes during the school year, and daily classes during the school vacations. ⁸

In his work, Fr. John continued the best traditions of the Russian Orthodox Diocese in North America. He organized, in Chicago and Streator, the Saint Nicholas and Three Hierarchs Brotherhoods, which established a goal of setting up a program of social and material mutual aid among the parishioners of the Chicago-Streator parish, as members of the Orthodox Mutual Aid Society.⁹

Father John's abundant labors for building up a healthy, flourishing parish life in the communities entrusted to him did not hinder him from fulfilling other important diocesan responsibilities that were laid upon him. So it was that, on April 1, 1897, Fr. John was appointed to be one of the members of the newly created Censorship Committee of the Diocese of Alaska and the Aleutians on texts in the Russian, Ukrainian, and English languages,¹⁰ and on May 22, 1899, Fr. John was appointed Chairman of the Board of the Mutual Aid Society¹¹ by a decree of Tikhon, Bishop of Alaska and the Aleutians, who had recently arrived in the diocese. The varied labors of Fr. John were soon rewarded; after just the first years of his pastoral service, he received the marks of priestly distinction from the Most Reverend Bishop Nicholas.¹²

A significant obstacle to the normal functioning of the Church liturgical cycle at the Chicago-Streator parish was the condition of the buildings, which were unfit for the purpose. Saint Vladimir's Church in Chicago occupied a small part of a rented edifice located in the southwestern part of the city. On the ground floor of the house the

church itself was separated by a wall from the kitchen and a room where an attendant lived. On the first floor there were several small rooms which were occupied by Fr. John together with his family and by the church Reader. The church of the Three Hierarchs in Streator employed the lobby of the Russian section of the Chicago World Exhibition [the Columbian Exposition of 1892—Ed.].¹³

The assignment of Bishop Tikhon, the future Patriarch of Moscow, to the Diocese of Alaska and the Aleutians on 30 November, 1898, was especially significant for the resolution of problems of church life in the parish entrusted to Fr. John. Zealously fulfilling his hierarchical obligations, Bishop Tikhon already during the first months of his leadership of the see managed to visit practically all the Orthodox parishes scattered around the vast territory of the Diocese of Alaska and the Aleutians, in an effort to discern the most fundamental needs of the diocesan clergy. Arriving in Chicago for the first time on April 28, 1899, Bishop Tikhon gave his archpastoral blessing to Fr. John and to his flock, and by the next day he had already inspected a plot of land proposed as the site where the new church — so necessary for the parish in Chicago — would be constructed. On April 30, Bishop Tikhon visited the Three Hierarchs Church in Streator and served the vigil service at Saint Vladimir's Church in Chicago. On the following day, after serving the Divine Liturgy, he approved the minutes of

the meeting of the committee for the construction of the new church in Chicago, which was chaired by Fr. John.

The limited financial resources of the Chicago-Streator parish, where the people being ministered to were primarily poor, did not permit Fr. John to begin the construction immediately. And since more than five years had already passed since the time of Fr. John's arrival in North America, his great desire to visit his beloved Orthodox Russia for at least a brief time prompted him to submit an application to Bishop Tikhon requesting leave for the journey to his motherland. Being above all mindful of the needs of the parish entrusted to him, Fr. John decided to use the vacation granted to him from January 15 till May 15, 1900, to collect money in Russia which would allow the Chicago parish to commence construction of the new church building and of the first Orthodox cemetery in the city.

(continued next issue)

