

# A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

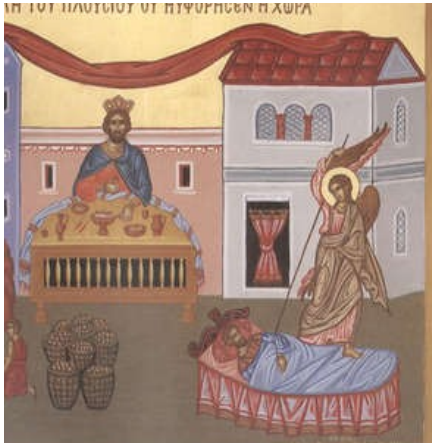
*Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be Forever!*



Volume 8 Issue 386

22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost— Parable of the Foolish Rich Man

November 17, 2019



We may have a hard time identifying with the rich man in the parable from today's gospel lesson. He had such an abundance of grain and other possessions that he did not have room to store them; he needed to build larger barns in order to hold all his wealth. Once he did that, he planned simply to relax and enjoy himself for the rest of

his days. He was so wealthy that he did not have to worry at all about providing food, clothing, and shelter for his family or paying his bills. In first-century Palestine, someone with such riches would have been rare indeed, and I doubt that anyone in our parish is in such comfortable circumstances today.

We may be tempted, then, to think that this parable has nothing to do with us. What does it have to do with people who struggle to make ends meet even though they work as hard as they can? What does it have to say to people who have to follow a budget and wonder how they will ever pay off their debts? Actually, it has a great deal to say to all of us, regardless of our financial circumstances. That is because the man's problem is not that he is rich, but that he is self-centered. *(continued p. 3)*

## The Heart in Orthodox Spirituality

The heart is central in Orthodox Spirituality. This is biblical: if your heart is pure, your actions are pure. If your heart is impure, so will your actions be.

In our Orthodox tradition, the heart is bigger than the mind and the mind is located in the heart; the combination is referred to as the nous.

The heart is not identified with the physical heart, but it is understood to be the center of our spiritual existence. God takes up residence

in the heart (Gal. 4:6; Eph. 3:17). Christ refers to this residency in the heart as "the Kingdom of God," which is not a state like New Mexico or Montana, but rather may be understood as a reign or *ruling*. It is a verbal noun; it is not, in other words, static but energetic.

When Christ says, "The Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21), he means that we are energized by God's power through the Holy Spirit. This is where we

know the "peace of God that passes all understanding" (Phil. 4:7), to which Paul also testifies at Rom. 5:5. In the heart we receive both the grace of God and the enlightenment of our lives (II Cor. 4:6).

The heart is the location for our feelings, for our will, and for our thinking. Our objective as Christians is to have these three unified, for the heart to be one. Sin interrupts this process of unification. The mind *(continued p.2)*

**\*\* 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost \*\***

**\*St. Gregory the Wonderworker \***

Epistle: Galatians 6: 11-18

Gospel: Luke 12: 16-21

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.

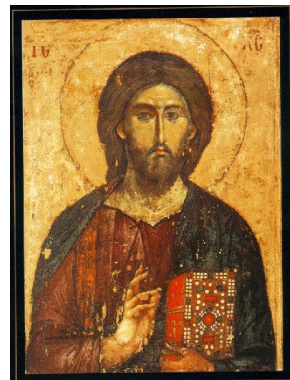
We are dedicated to living out Christ's commandment to, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, ad with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.*

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, Lorraine, Peg, Christopher, Jackie, Karoline, Evan, Ryan, Kathleen, Sandy, Andrea, Samuel, Anatoly, Linda, Alexey, Chuck, Eric, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Sally Lou, Bob, Catherine, 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 batch of old letters I recently found a letter written by a bishop to his spiritual daughter. He wrote, "if a sinner truly sighs once, feeling the burden of his sins, if just once he opens his heart to his Redeemer, the whole weight rolls away, all doubts disappear, his heart brims with faith and tears, and he feels so light at ease." The last words are a quotation from

a well known poem by Lermontov, but they were obviously so much a part of what the bishop felt, that he used no quotation marks. They were his words, and mine too, as well as anyone's who has experienced the grace of prayer which removes the weight of sin.

"Pray without ceasing," is a direct admonition of the Apostle Paul. The Fathers of the Church reach us that only prayer of the heart can be constant. Our mind tires out, while the heart remains awake even when we are asleep. For us, imperfect as we are, the most important element in the concept of constant prayer is sincerity.

The Apostle demands from us constant, unwavering, prayerful sincerity in our relationship with God.

(Edited from the book, *Light in the Darkness*, by Sergei Fudel, p. 54-55)



### **The Heart in Orthodox Spirituality, cont'd from p.1**

be convinced of the good, but the will is not able to follow because of the heat of desire; hence, the unity of the heart is broken.

When trouble comes, it comes in the form of double-mindedness (this concept is found in the Epistle of James, chapters 1 and 4, in particular). We are split apart in consciousness. Jesus uses a different metaphor for the same idea in Matthew 6:22: "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good (sound, singular), your whole body will be full of light." We are to be of one mind and focused.

But we do not see the world aright because we are blind. The Slavonic word for this problem is *prelest*, or delusion or, better still, spiritual blindness. Ironically, the word has the positive meaning of "lovely" in the sense of "enchanting."

Because of the dynamic nature of our lives and our hearts, and because we are always strung between good and evil, light and darkness, life and death (see Deuteronomy 30:19), the

Evil One may also take up residence in the heart. We may be deluded; we may be spiritually blind; we may not think right!

The Orthodox Tradition, however, insists that the Light cannot be overcome (see John 1) by the darkness that Evil brings to it. Because of baptism, our hearts are filled with the grace of God that cannot be extinguished; therefore, the Evil One cannot take up residence *in* the heart but must remain *outside* as a goad (St Diadochos of Photiki). Metaphor or not, this is a powerful image that can bring us comfort in dark moments.

The heart is the seat of passion (*pathos*). As our Lord says, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts" (Matthew 15:19). Paul writes, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires" (Gal. 5:24) and goes on to list the virtues of life in the Spirit.

But this is again part of the dynamic of life. There is no guarantee that we will remain in this condition; in fact

we have every reason to commit ourselves to spiritual warfare for life. At the heart of this is the struggle for self-control (Gal. 5:23, Eph. 4:22, and elsewhere) and for what the Tradition calls *apatheia*, which means dispassion; it does *not* mean that we become apathetic, but that we view all things without clinging to them.

In a way it relates to our use of the icon. Our vision does not stop with the icon; if it does, then we do indeed make an idol of the icon. Our

vision must *pass through* the icon to see the reality it embodies.

(continued next issue)



Notice that in the parable he speaks only of himself, of his possessions, and of his plans. He had become the measure of his own life. When God requires the man's soul, however, it becomes clear that to live that way is simply to be a fool, for it amounts to laying up treasures for oneself in this world instead of becoming rich toward God.

No matter what our financial circumstances are, we all bear God's image and likeness. That means that we will find fulfillment only in becoming more like Him in holiness, only by embracing the healing of our souls in Jesus Christ. Such a life is never one of self-centeredness. It is instead a life of communion with the Lord and all the neighbors in whom we encounter Him. It is a life in His Body, the Church, in which we flourish as members of one another, not as isolated individuals. That is how we participate by grace in the life of the Holy Trinity, Three Persons Who share a common life as one God.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to turn away from the self-centered individualism that can so easily lead to the spiritual poverty of the rich fool. We may not invest our lives in the accumulation of riches and possessions, but that does not mean that we are free from the temptation to live simply for ourselves.

For example, we may judge everything in life according to our own preferences, as though there is something wrong if our will is not done in family life, work, school, or anywhere else. Without even realizing it, we then end up judging others based on how useful they are in doing our will. When they do not obey us, our passions become inflamed against them. The more we relate to our neighbors in that way, the more we will want our will to be done and the more we will become blind to the dangers of putting ourselves before others.

Consider what kind of an impact that can have on our relationships with our neighbors, who bear the image of God as much as we do. Consider also its impact on our own souls. No matter what we believe, to live that way is to commit the idolatry of serving our own sovereign will above all else. It is simply to lay up treasures for ourselves instead of becoming rich toward God.

Treasures can take many forms, of course. We can invest our time, energy, and sense of self-worth in any of our activities or in the service of any of our traits or abil-

ities, including how we look, how we feel, or how well we do literally anything. There is nothing wrong with giving any worthwhile endeavor or necessary concern the attention it deserves. The problem is when something becomes primarily a tool of self-centeredness. That means making an idol out of it, instead of offering it to God for Him to bless in fulfilling His purposes for it and for us. The point is God's glory, not ours.

In the parable, it is no surprise that the man whose life was simply about acquiring wealth wanted to spend the rest of his days indulging in food, drink, and pleasure. All of his energy and attention had been focused on getting more of what he wanted for himself. The more that we gratify our self-centered desires, the stronger a hold they have over us and the more we become their slaves. The more settled the habit of getting what we want, the harder we will find it to limit our desires in any

area of life. In the eyes of our corrupt world, a life of conspicuous self-indulgence may make someone look like a great success. Slavery to the passions, however, is hardly a path for fulfillment for those who bear the image and likeness of God.

We are about to enter the season of Advent. This season warns us that the Messiah is coming and we must be ready to receive Him. Because we are all so much like the foolish man in the parable, we need a challenge to our usual obsession with ourselves in order to prepare to celebrate the Lord's birth. Otherwise, our Christmas will simply be about us enjoying ourselves to the

point that we become blind to its having any greater significance than "eat, drink, [and] be merry." Though it is odd to say in our culture, we need to make Advent a time of intentional spiritual discipline if we are to gain the health necessary to receive the great richness in God that the Savior was born to bring.

Otherwise, we will continue investing ourselves in ourselves, especially in the illusion that we are isolated individuals who will find fulfillment in getting whatever it is we want on our own terms. As appealing as that way of life may sound, it is simply a path to weakness and despair. It is neither suitable nor satisfying for those called, as St. Paul put it, "to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."



### *The Saints of North America (part 19)*

Only in November of 1916, by order of the Saint Petersburg Church Consistory, was Fr. John assigned as a parish priest to the vacant second position at Saint Katherine's Cathedral in Tsarskoye Selo, whereby his dream of resuming service as a parish pastor in the motherland was fulfilled. In this period, Fr. John's pastoral inspiration and sacrificial demeanor, so characteristic of him in his former activity, might be combined with the daily routine of the outward conditions of his service and with the spiritual and harmonious personal relationships between a diligent pastor and his numerous pious flock. But the cataclysms of the February Revolution that burst out in Petrograd just three months after Fr. John's assignment to Saint Katherine's began little by little to involve Tsarskoye Selo in the treacherous vortex of revolutionary events.

For several days after the October 1917 seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in Petrograd, reverberations from the momentous events happening in the capital were felt in Tsarskoye Selo. Attempting to drive Gen. Paul Krasnov's Cossack troops, which were still loyal to the Provisional Government, out of Tsarskoye Selo, the armored groups of the Red Guard — the soldiers and sailors supporting the Bolshevik upheaval — were coming there from Petrograd.

On the morning of October 30, 1917, stopping at the outskirts of Tsarskoye Selo, the Bolshevik forces began to expose the town to artillery fire. The inhabitants of Tsarskoye Selo, like those in all of Russia, still did not suspect that the country was involved in a civil war. A tumult erupted, with many people running to the Orthodox churches, including Saint Katherine's, in hopes of finding prayerful serenity at the services, and of hearing from the ambon a pastoral exhortation pertaining to the events taking place. All the clergy of Saint Katherine's Cathedral eagerly responded to their flock spiritual entreaties, and a special Moleben, or prayer service, seeking an end to the civil conflict, was offered beneath the arches of the church, which was jammed with worshippers.

Wishing to prevent an outbreak of fighting in the streets of Tsarskoye Selo, the Cossack leadership began to withdraw troops from the town on the evening of October 30, and on the morning of the 31st the Bolshevik forces en-

tered Tsarskoye Selo, encountering no opposition. One of the anonymous witnesses to the aftermath of these tragic events wrote a letter to the prominent Saint Petersburg Archpriest F. Ornatsky, who himself was destined to receive martyrdom at the hands of the godless authorities. The writer told in simple but profound words of the passion-bearing that became the destiny of Fr. John.

Yesterday (on October 31), he wrote, when the Bolsheviks, together with the Red Guard, entered Tsarskoye Selo, they began to make the rounds of the apartments of the military officers, making arrests. Fr. John (Alexandrovich

Kochurov) was conveyed to the outskirts of the town, to Saint Theodore's Cathedral, and there they assassinated him because of the fact that those who organized the sacred procession had allegedly been praying for a victory by the Cossacks, which surely was not, and could not have been, what actually happened. The other clergymen were released yesterday evening. Thus, there has appeared another Martyr for the Faith in Christ. The deceased, though he had not been in Tsarskoye Selo for long, had gained the utmost love of all, and many people used to gather to listen to his preaching.

The Petrograd journalist mentioned earlier reconstructed a terrifying picture of Fr. John's martyrdom and its aftermath, ascertaining these details: The priests were captured and sent to the headquarters of the Council of the Working and Soldiers

Deputies. A priest, Fr. John Kochurov, was trying to protest and to clarify the situation. He was hit several times on his face. With cheers and yelling the enraged mob conveyed him to the Tsarskoye Selo airdrome. Several rifles were raised against the defenseless pastor. A shot thundered out, then another, after which the priest fell down on the ground, and blood spilled upon his cassock. Death did not come to him immediately ... He was pulled by his hair, and somebody suggested, "Finish him off like a dog." The next morning the body was brought into the former palace hospital. According to the newspaper *The Peoples' Affair*, the head of the State Duma, together with one of its members, saw the body of the priest, but the pectoral cross was already gone from his breast. Thus Fr. John became the first martyr among millions during the communist regime of the Soviet Union.

