

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

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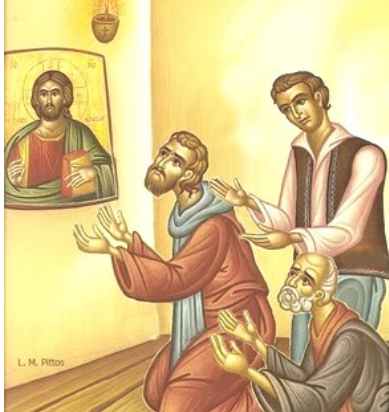
Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be Forever!



Volume 8 Issue 390

26th Sunday after Pentecost—Sunday of the Forefathers

December 15, 2019



Today's gospel lesson describes people who made the foolish choice of excusing themselves from a great banquet, a glorious celebration that anyone would want to attend. Their excuses for doing so are mundane: buying land and animals and being married. In light of their refusal to attend, the master of the house insisted that his servants bring the blind, lame, and maimed from the streets to the party.

Then he told them to go out "to the highways and hedges" and bring those passing by into his house so that it would be filled.

We read this parable on the Sunday of the Forefathers of Christ as we remember the choices that the righteous people of the Old Testament made across the centuries in preparing for the coming of the Savior. This line of Hebrew patriarchs and prophets who prefigured or foretold the coming of Christ leads to the Theotokos, who freely chose to welcome the Messiah into her life in a unique way as His virgin mother.

But even as we remember their faithful decisions, we must also recall false prophets, wicked kings, and numerous other characters in the Old Testament who chose poorly. Like the people who excused themselves from the

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The Icon of the Entry of the Theotokos, Pt. 2, by Hierodeacon Philaret

And, if we are to understand it, we need to bear in mind the way people saw temples in the pre-Christian period. A general feature of almost all ancient religions was the idea that the gods dwelt simultaneously both in the heavens and in the temples dedicated to them.

So the temple was the locus where the difference between heaven and earth was suspended and anyone entering the temple would, at the same time, be standing before

the celestial throne of God. At the site of the temple, there was a transcendence of the categories 'earthly' and 'heavenly', since the boundaries between heaven and earth were blurred.

So, in the minds of the ancients, the temple was a place where a piece of the earth reached the heavens, or, by the same token, a piece of the heavens touched the earth.

Precisely because the locus of the temple was associated with such cir-

cumstances, the faithful were forbidden from entering. In the innermost place of the temple in Jerusalem, only the High Priest was allowed to enter, once a year, in order to sprinkle it with the blood of the sacrifice which had been offered in the courtyard.

This strict boundary-line between the locus where the deity dwelt and the space believers were permitted to enter was erased by Jesus Christ. Since God

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**** 26th Sunday after Pentecost ****

*** Sunday of the Forefathers ***

Epistle: Colossians 3:4-11

Gospel: Luke 14: 16-24

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.

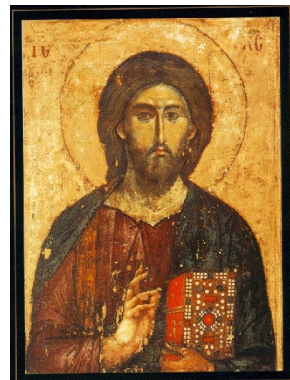
We worship God in Trinity - Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

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, 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

Only once in my life did I experience the joy of generosity, yet there are many people whose hearts are generous throughout their life.

My experience took place in the Butyrky prison in Moscow, in the fall of 1922, and it was like a sunny wind that sweeps out all the dust and refuse accumulated in your heart. I was getting ready for my deporta-

tion to the gulags of Siberia and I distributed all my possession. The more I gave away, the deeper I could breathe the air of freedom, that freedom to which we are called at all times. This short time of prison-born daring remained the happiest time of my life. I often wonder why did I not die at that moment.

The simplicity and love to which we are called by the Apostle Paul is surely not a simplification of things. It is bringing all our thoughts and feelings into a relationship of evangelical discipleship to Christ. Only this can help us find our way in the maze of modern confusion.

Persons who possess Christian simplicity are "those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes...and in their mouth no lie is found" (Revelation 14: 4-5) (*From Light in the Darkness, by Sergei Fudel, p. 63-64*)



The Entry of the Theotokos, (continued from p. 1)

became a human person and came to live among us, He did away with any partition between the divine and the human.

With God's incarnation, the whole world became a temple, in which everyone has the opportunity to communicate directly with God. So, through its architecture, an Orthodox church symbolizes the universe and each part of it is a piece of the cosmos: the floor represents the earth on which we find ourselves; the ceiling is the heavens, which is why there's always an icon of Christ (the Lord of All) in the center, looking to be of average age, neither young nor old, in order to show the union between Father and Son; the architectural part of the church which links the floor to the roof, that is the earth to the heavens, is the apse in the sanctuary, which is why there's always an icon of Our Lady there: to show that the contribution of this poor little girl made possible the union of earth and heaven. These are a series of symbols and images, but, if they're interpreted

properly, they summarize the whole theology of the Church.

The image of Mary entering the temple depicts most vividly her role in the history of the human race. Whereas the temple in Jerusalem symbolized the dwelling-place of



God, He really did abide in the womb of Mary. Whereas the temple in Jerusalem symbolized the heavenly throne of God, Mary really did become His throne, so the hymnographer of today's feast rightly identi-

fies her with the heavens: 'Heaven and earth rejoice, seeing the perceptible heaven modestly entering the house of God to be brought up there'.

And, finally, if the temple in Jerusalem was the dwelling-place of God and therefore holy to the Jews, it's right for Christians to call Mary 'Most Holy'. The icon of Mary entering the temple demonstrates clearly the abolition of the space separating the heavenly and the earthly worlds, which was achieved through Christ's sacrifice on the Cross and His Resurrection. Now, we all have the chance to become citizens of heaven.

But this opportunity, this gift from God to us, is not free of obligations. Since, as we've said, the whole world has become a temple of God, it's no longer possible for people to behave one way in their everyday life and another way on Sundays, in the church. If you go to church to glorify God, then you ought to do the same through your actions on an everyday basis.

great banquet in the parable, they made idols out of the things of this world and worshiped their power, possessions, and pleasure instead of the one true God.

Those who rejected the Savior did exactly the same thing, for they could not accept a Messiah Who challenged the self-righteous religious pride that fueled their power over others. They could not serve a Lord Whose kingdom was not an earthly one of conventional political or military conquest. They had no interest in a Savior Who told them to take up their crosses and follow Him. Since they worshiped themselves and the things of this world, they literally hated the One for Whom the righteous of the Old Testament had prepared across the centuries.

In the midst of their rejection of the Messiah, it became clear how God would bless the entire world in fulfillment of the ancient promise to Abraham. (Gen.

22:18) Though often ignored, Hebrew prophets such as Isaiah envisioned all the nations being drawn to God's Temple. As St. Paul teaches, "Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all." Through faith in our Savior, we are all the children of Abraham, rightful heirs to the fulfillment of the promise.

Today's parable reminds us, however, that it is not enough merely to be invited to accept the great blessings that are ours in Christ. "For many are called, but few are chosen." Like those who shut themselves out of the great celebration because of their obsession with the earthly cares of everyday life, we face the choice of how we will respond to the invitation that is ours through Christ to enter into the great joy of His heavenly banquet. In order to answer the call, we must avoid the poor choice of convincing ourselves that whatever daily responsibilities we have are somehow more important than participating personally in the eternal life that our Savior was born to bring to the world.

In order to "appear with Him in glory," we must follow the advice of St. Paul to the Colossians "to put to death what is earthly in you. He warns us clearly against what happens when we look for our fulfillment as human persons simply in the things of this world. As those created in God's image and likeness, we will remain slaves to our self-centered desires as long as we worship what can never satisfy us. That is a path that leads to

such spiritual blindness that, like the characters in the parable, we will actually think that the common concerns of life are good excuses for not uniting ourselves to Christ in holiness. That is the way of "the old nature" corrupted by slavery to death, which is powerless before deeply ingrained tendencies to "anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth."

We all know what happens when we make our life an offering only to ourselves. To choose to indulge our passions is nothing but a path to greater slavery to them. It is to enter into a captivity that ultimately leads only to despair and the grave. It is to separate ourselves from God, from one another, and even from our own true selves.

We pray often in services that we will live the rest of our lives in peace and repentance. That is not a petition for others to stop bothering us so that all our problems to



go away, for the problems are deeply rooted in our own souls. As St. Paul knew, we will find peace only when we deliberately embrace "the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator." In other words, we must mindfully pursue the healing of our souls by offering our daily cares and our deepest desires to the Lord. Instead of allowing them to become excuses for disregarding Him, they must become opportunities to enter more fully into the joy of His Kingdom. That is how repentance leads to

peace.

The forefathers and foremothers of the Lord prepared the way for His salvation through lives that were by no means easy. The Old Testament makes clear that they struggled with every problem known to humanity in our corrupt world. Despite their challenges and failings, those who accepted the invitation to prepare for the coming of the Messiah remained faithful to the Lord through repentance. Christ offered Himself fully for our salvation and, if we are truly in communion with Him, then we must offer ourselves to Him each day of our lives. That is the only path to peace.

In the coming days, let us all mindfully prepare to welcome the Savior at Christmas by refusing to think that we have more important things to do. Following the example of the Old Testament saints in their preparation for Him, let us respond enthusiastically to the Lord's invitation to the great feast of His Incarnation.

St. Matrona of Moscow

The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects. (James 5:16)

She was blind from birth, but from a very young age Blessed Matrona was filled with the gift of the Holy Spirit to be able to clearly see the sins and passions and even the thoughts of people who came to her. Born totally without eyes she was blessed with the ability to foretell future events. This simple, illiterate woman, born in a remote Russian village in a poor peasant family is now known and honored throughout Russia as a powerful intercessor before the Lord and a worker of miracles but is less well known here in America.

Blessed Matrona was born in the village of Sebeno, about 300 kilometers south of Moscow in 1885. She was the fourth child born into a poor family and was initially seen as another unwelcome mouth to feed. Prior to her birth, her mother decided to send her to an orphanage in the nearby village of Buchalki but she had a dream in which she felt a sign from God to accept and care for the child. Matrona's family lived directly across from the village church and were a pious family and all frequently attended services.

Matrona especially loved the church services and spent most of her time there, literally "growing up" in the church. There in the church she stood, riveted to one spot, immersing herself in the worship, learning by memory all of the hymns and prayers of the divine services. Even as a young child, before she learned to talk, her parents at times discovered her, in the middle of the night when everyone was asleep, pulling the icons from the family icon corner and speaking to them in her childish language.

Beginning around the age of 7 it began to be noticed that when Matrona prayed for the sick they often recovered. From that time on a steady stream of sick people from their village and the surrounding province made their way to the family home begging Matrona to pray for them. People came to her with a multitude of problems and concerns besides sicknesses: loss of a job, unhappy love, what decision to make regarding a move, psychiatric illnesses...

In gratitude for the help they received they would leave gifts of food and other items for the family. Her parents, expecting that this blind child would be an unwelcome

burden on a poor family, now realized how God was blessing their family and village with this "handicapped" child. When she was 17 years old she lost the ability to walk, the cause of the paralysis never discovered. She never complained of her new handicap, but bore it as the will of God.

At the age of 14, Blessed Matrona joined a group of pilgrims who journeyed to the city of Kronstadt to see the famed Russian priest and miracle worker, Father John of Kronstadt. Father John, with his own gift of spiritual discernment, demanded that the crowd make a space for him to meet the teenager. As he greeted Matrona he exclaimed: "Here goes my successor, the eighth pillar of Russia!"



Blessed Matrona always emphasized that it was the power of God, and not her own that brought healing to anyone: "What, Matrona is God? Is that it? It is God that helps!" She always prayed in a loud voice and insisted that the people who came to her have faith in God and repent of their sins. She required that everyone who came to her wear a cross throughout their lives. She herself followed the same, strict pattern throughout her life: she devoted her nights to prayer and her days to receiving visitors, sometimes up to forty a day. A tiny woman, she usually sat on her bed cross-legged, while visitors knelt before her bed.

Matrona would reach out her hands and with her fingertips touch her visitors' head and make the Sign of the Cross over them and pray for them, giving a word of consolation or advice as needed. With her love and compassion for people she held them in her arms and prayed for them as they sobbed in pain and despair. It is said that she had a small depression on her forehead made by her fingers because she made the Sign of the Cross so frequently, slowly and carefully.

With her spiritual gifts she predicted the coming of the Russian Revolution and described in detail how churches would be desecrated and closed and how believers would be persecuted and killed. During World War II she was often the only source of information on the safety of sons and husband who had gone off to fight in the war. To one family she would be reassuring: "Alive! Wait for him..." To another: "They've died, arrange for the burial service".

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