

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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3rd Sunday after Pentecost-Let The Light of Christ Shine

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We are an anxious people. Many of us are overcome with worry about matters large and small. Some certainly do need the help of physicians and psychological counselors in order to cope with their fears. The sickness of our souls remains, however, at the very heart of all our collective and personal brokenness. If our souls are not

healthy, we will never find the peace that truly satisfies us as God's children who bear His image and likeness.

The Lord spoke of the health of our souls in terms of vision: "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" Christ taught that, if our spiritual vision is clear and focused, we will see ourselves and our problems in light of God's kingdom. Then we will be able to serve our one true Master and gain strength for being at peace, regardless of the circumstances of our lives.

If our spiritual vision is clouded and unfocused, however, we will not have the strength to see our problems and challenges in light of the Kingdom.

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A Brief Guide to the Psalms

The book of Psalms, also known as the Psalter, stands in a unique position in the Old Testament and even among all of the Holy Scriptures of the Orthodox Church. In a way not found elsewhere in the Scriptures, the Psalms reflect the upwards prayers of man to God (under the inspiration of God).

The Jewish church used the Psalms as its central worship prayers for centuries and this practice was adopted by the Christian Church follow-

ing Christ, and continues to our day. The Psalms are richly interspersed in the Divine Liturgy and Holy Day services of the Orthodox Church and are a significant part of the Daily Prayer book.

Bishop Demetri Khoury of the Antiochian Archdiocese, in his foreword to *Christ in the Psalms*, said that the Psalter was a "golden thread [which runs] through the beautiful garment of Orthodox worship." The Psalter is so prevalent in Orthodox worship that St. John

Chrysostom said that wherever one looks in the Church, he finds the Psalter "first, last, and central."

Most of us read or pray the Psalms in English, which, in the Orthodox Church, are translated from the liturgical Greek Old Testament, which itself was translated by the Jews from the original Hebrew. This is important to know because they contain segments of Hebrew poetry or Israelite cultural elements,

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*****3rd Sunday after Pentecost *****

Wonderworkers Sts. Cyrus & John

Epistle: Romans 5: 1-10

Gospel: Matthew 6: 22-33

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.

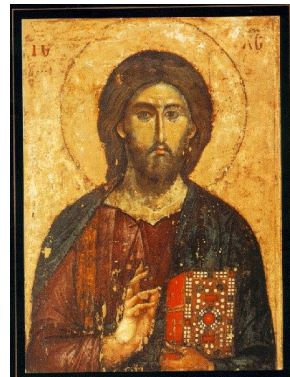
We worship God in Trinity - Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

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, Evan, Ryan, Kathleen, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Bonnalee, Vicky, Corella, Gail, Mike, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Words on Prayer

Frequency in prayer creates a habit of prayer, which quickly becomes second nature, and which frequently brings the nous and the heart to a higher spiritual state. It is the only way to reach the height of true and pure prayer. It constitutes the best means of effective preparation for prayer and the surest road for one to reach the destination of prayer and salvation.

Each one of us is able to acquire interior prayer—that is, to make it a means of communication with the Lord. It does not cost anything except the effort to plunge into silence and into the depths of our heart, and the care to call upon the name of our sweetest Jesus Christ as often as possible, which fills one with elation. Plunging into ourselves and examining the world of our soul give us the opportunity to know what a mystery man is, to feel the delight of self-knowledge and to shed bitter tears of repentance for our falls and the weakness of our will. *Elder Ephraim*

If you truly want to learn how to pray, take as an example a good guitar player. Such a person tilts the head slightly down and when he hits the strings listens carefully the outcome. Just as the strings are struck masterfully, the guitar emits the melody, and the guitarist is pleased with its sweetness. You, like the guitarist, when you turn your attention towards the bottom of your heart, you will find easily what you are looking for. Because the soul that is completely overwhelmed by divine love, sees nothing else. *St. Kallistos*

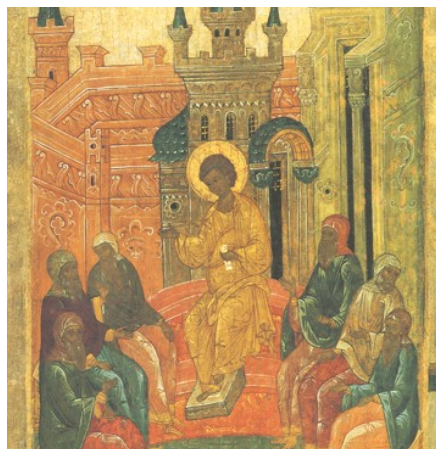
A Brief Guide to the Psalms (cont'd from p. 1)

some of which are lost in translation or minimally, may sound strange outside the original language and culture.

The Greek numbering, which we use in church, differs slightly from the traditional Western numbering familiar in most English translations. Under the Greek numbering there are 151 psalms in the collection. The name “Psalms” comes from the Greek word which means to pluck on the harp, referring to their ancient liturgical musical setting. The Psalms themselves refer to this musical setting (e.g. Ps. 32). Today, in the Church, when they are put to music, they are exclusively chanted. Otherwise, they are prayed in plain, vocal reading.

Under the Jewish setting, and as used by Jesus Christ, they were called *Tehilim*, which means “praises” in Hebrew, but this refers only to a kernel of the Psalms which cast the name on all of them. The Psalms consist of not only prayers of praise but of jubilation, lament, thanksgiving,

penitence, complaint, supplication, intercession, as well as God’s messages to man, and a rehearsing of God’s work among men, among others. They yield to a great degree the



range and depth of human religious experience in relationship with God.

On a spiritual level therefore, they provide holy meditative and prayerful tools for the Christian pilgrim and they open the door to a deeply personal and mystical relationship with the God who covers us in all of the depth and emotions of the joyful but

sometimes difficult and sorrowful Christian life.

The Psalms arise out of historical and geographical settings in God’s workings with man, details of which gives us critical insight into their motivation and inspiration. Layered on top of these is a rich set of interpretative traditions based on typologies and spiritual or metaphorical interpretations some of which existed in the Jewish Church and later were significantly expanded in the Christian Church. Both of these aspects of understanding the Psalms have been traditionally important in the Church, as it has for all parts of Scripture.

The interpretative tradition of the ancient Jewish Church is particularly important because it is upon this basis that we have the Messianic prophecies to which Christ referred to himself. Many Church Fathers were known to have composed commentaries on the Psalms, though we don’t have all of them in direct manuscript tradition.

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We will instead stumble in the darkness to the point that we make the passing things of this life our constant obsessions, which is a path only to greater worry, anxiety, and fear. For example, many people make money and possessions false gods for which they will sacrifice just about anything. Jesus Christ teaches that we are not to worry about our food, drink, and clothing. Instead, we are to trust that our Heavenly Father knows that we need these things. "Seek first His kingdom and righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."

This teaching does not condemn reasonable provision for a decent life for ourselves and our families. It does not deny that the necessities of life are God's good blessings. Instead, it gives us a clear example of how spiritual blindness enslaves us to idolatry, which leads only to constant worry. Poverty, hunger, and famine are always possibilities in our world. Economic depression, natural disaster, war, crime, disease, and disability are obvious threats to having adequate food, clothing, and shelter. There is simply no way that we can protect ourselves completely from such dangers. If we make the physical necessities of life our gods, we cannot avoid being consumed by worry about them. That kind of idolatry inevitably fuels anxiety.

If the eyes of our souls are gaining clarity and focus, however, we will not blindly view life's necessities as the highest good, and neither will we make the lack of them the greatest evil. Instead, we will be illumined with the light of Christ to the point that we will see even the worst circumstances of life in this world as opportunities to serve our one true Master. We will already participate in God's reign as we learn to trust more fully that our Heavenly Father will provide what we need in this life and beyond.

When we struggle to see that God cares for us in the midst of our challenges, we must remember St. Paul's example of using suffering and difficulty for growth in holiness: "We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance character, and character, hope." Paul's hope is grounded in "the love of God ...poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who was given to us." Christ died for the ungodly, including us, and has sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts and souls to enlighten us with the glory of the Kingdom. In this context, our difficulties and needs are opportunities for gaining greater healing for our souls. We must use these tribulations to gain greater

spiritual strength, clarity, and vision by growing in trust, humility, and patience.

When we are overcome with worry about any problem or threat in life, we must use our weakness as an opportunity to gain greater spiritual strength: as a reminder to guard our thoughts as we turn our attention from obsessing about what we cannot change to an earnest, humble plea for the Lord's healing mercy. That is how we will open ourselves to greater participation in His life and, thus, find true peace.

Some lose the joy of life because of worry fueled by the love of money; others become miserable because of domination by anger, fear, self-righteousness, or other passions. These and all our other habitual sins are symptoms of our spiritual blindness, of our darkened souls which keep us from seeing ourselves, others, and the entire creation in the glorious light of the Kingdom. As long as we remain in the dark, we will never

see anything clearly and easily stumble and fall.

Those who are sick do not need relief only for their symptoms; they require healing from the causes of their disease. They need therapy that goes to the heart of the matter. We will find that kind of healing in the spiritual life by: opening our souls to the light of Christ through daily prayer; reading the Bible and the lives and teachings of the Saints; and watching our minds and mouths to reject thoughts and words that are contrary to Christ's holy word.

We will find it by fasting in order to humble ourselves before the Lord and gain strength in refusing to be enslaved to selfish desires. We will find it as we embrace the mercy of the Lord

through sincere repentance. We will find it by forgiving those who have wronged us and asking forgiveness of those we have wronged; giving generously of our time, attention, and resources to those in need; and attending the Divine Liturgy regularly as we receive the Body and Blood of Christ as often as possible.

This way of life is for our healing; it is for our good. It is what is necessary for us to open our darkened souls to the brilliant light of Christ as we learn to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. It is how we may gain the clarity and strength to serve our one true Master as we come to place our problems, fears, and worries in the context of trust in a Lord Who has conquered even death itself for our salvation purely out of love for His sons and daughters.



The Experience of the Holy Spirit—an interview with Archimandrite Zacharias

Question: Saint Silouan and Saint Sophrony speak repeatedly about the Holy Spirit. How do we experience the Holy Spirit according to their teaching?

Answer: Everything begins from our faith in Christ and accepting His word. When we make His commandments the unique law of our life, then we gradually acquire a certain mystical depth. We become mystical, just as the Person of the Holy Spirit is mystical, secret, invisible. The Spirit of God works in us in diverse ways. Father Sophrony once explained to me that the prayer, ‘O God, cleanse Thou me, a sinner’ is addressed to the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Holy Spirit first of all cleanses us from our sins, heals us from the wounds of sin and gradually builds the holy temple of God in us, that is, the image of Christ.

Christ is *par excellence* the Temple of God, the House of God (1 Pet. 4:17), ‘for in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily’ (Col. 2:9). Then, man’s nature is strengthened to bear the perfection of the love of Christ (cf. Eph. 3:19), all the truth into which the Comforter will guide us (John 16:13).

There is a unity in the Holy Trinity. Everything begins from the Unoriginate Father and is performed *through* Christ in the Holy Spirit. There is a certain order, one life, one nature, one energy which has the Father as a source, and is imparted to all of us through Christ, in the power and perfection of the Holy Spirit. The Son came to the world to give witness of the Father: ‘All things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you’ (John 15:15). He comes in perfect obedience to the Father, in order to glorify Him and transmit the truth of His word, and He speaks of ‘another Comforter’, Who shall testify of Him (John 15:26). We see something wondrous in the Holy Trinity: every Person gives witness and glorifies the other Two. We see this ‘perichoresis’ of the Hypostases of the Holy Trinity, this common life where each Person lives through the other, this marvelous competition of love, perfection and humility.

We see the indescribable humility and kenotic character of the Son. He Who is ‘impalpable in His divinity’ was well-pleased to come down from the height of His glory to the abyss of our corruption and be united with our human nature so as to take upon Himself all the wounds which came as a result of our iniquities, but without sin.

We see the same kenotic humility in the Holy Spirit.

When He comes into the world, the Holy Spirit acts in a mystical, secret manner. The great theologian Fathers say that even the Name of the Holy Spirit gives witness to His kenotic character. The other two Hypostases have a specific Name which signifies Their particularity, the Father without beginning and the coeternal Son and Word of God. Whereas, in essence, the Holy Spirit does not have His own hypostatic name, but shares the same name of ‘spirit’ with the other two Persons of the Holy Trinity. About all the Three we say that ‘God is a spirit’ (cf. John 4:24), whereas about Christ we say that ‘though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more’ (2 Cor. 5:16).



The Holy Spirit is characterized by the same utter humility like the Son and the Father without beginning. For this reason, He is the secret and delicate Person of the Holy Trinity, ‘the secret Friend’ as Saint Symeon the New Theologian calls Him, Who comes to give witness to Christ. Christ says, ‘My Father worketh hitherto, and I work’ (John 5:17); but the Holy Spirit can likewise say, ‘and I work hitherto in order for Christ to be formed in the heart of every man that believes in the word of Christ’.

The Holy Spirit is a secret Person, Who is revealed in the gifts that He gives to His Saints. The Sunday of All Saints is in fact the day which certifies and glorifies the grace of the Holy Spirit. If the image of the Heavenly Father is the Son and the image of the Son is the Holy Spirit, Who depicts the image of Christ in our heart, the image of the Holy Spirit is depicted by the gifts in which the

faithful partake. The Holy Spirit gives ‘a particular gift’ (cf. 1 Cor. 7:7) to all of us who believed in Christ and were baptized in His Name, if we truly live according to His word, so as to make us members of the Body of Christ. In this way we are enriched and our hypostasis is enlarged. We become ‘members one of another’ (Rom 12:5) and partakers of the gifts of all the Saints, and all things are shared in common, as in the apostolic community: ‘They had all things common’ (Acts 4:32). The first Christians had one life, one breath, one heart, and were all gathered together ‘with one accord’, with one desire, continuing ‘in breaking of bread’ and the invocation of the Name of Christ (Acts 2:42, 46).

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