

# 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!*

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If you're like me, you sometimes lose perspective on what is most important in life. We get so busy, so distracted, and so worried about what is going on around us at the moment at home, at work, or wherever that we sometimes lose sight of the big picture, and instead focus on small things that aren't really crucial. So we end up wasting our time and energy on

what really isn't very important.

The Pharisees were experts at missing the big picture, especially of interpreting the Old Testament law in such rigid detail that they ignored the true point of the commandments. When one of them asked the Lord to name the greatest commandment in the law, he was apparently trying to trap Christ in a complicated argument. But the Lord wasn't about to play that game; He wasn't about to waste time and energy in pointless speculation that served only to confuse people. Instead, He got to the heart of the matter: He quoted from the book of Deuteronomy, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." That fundamental, and often overlooked, central teaching of the Jewish faith is the first and great central

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**\*\*\*15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost \*\*\***

**\*\*Holy Martyrs Eustace, Placidus, Theopistas, and their Children\*\***

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 4:6-15

Gospel: Matthew 22: 35-46

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.

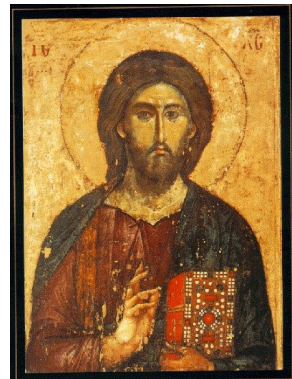
We worship God in Trinity - Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

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.



## ***Time and the Church, Part 2, by Professor George Mantzaridis***

The Church of Christ is not a conventional local social group, but a "katholiki" catholic or universal society. It is catholic because it extends not only 'to the whole of the world', but also 'to the whole of time' (St. John Chrysostom, *Interpretation of Psalm 144,4*).

The Church also alludes to eternity in the world and directs the world towards it. The institutions of the Church, as Saint Basil the Great points out, transport people's

intellect 'from things present to those of the future'. In this way, the same bishop continues, every time the faithful kneel down and then stand up, they are testifying in practice to that fact that 'through the sin into which we have fallen and through the love for humankind of our Creator, we have been recalled to heaven' (*On the Holy Spirit 27, 66*).

This simple and expressive gesture of kneeling provides St. Basil with the opportunity to men-

tion the new dimensions within which the life of the faithful unfolds. With the acceptance of God's loving-kindness, as a force that elevates us from earth to heaven, people see new ways of orientating themselves within the straight line of history.

Eternity is linked with temporality. So every day, every hour, every moment on the time-line assumes a limitless breadth and unfathomable depth. It becomes

*(continued p.2)*



*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. Because of COVID-19, our social hour has been canceled until we receive further instructions from the Department of Health.

**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, Ron, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

**Alleluias in the Divine Liturgy**

What is the significance of singing Alleluia immediately before reading the Gospel? Its meaning is to prepare the Christian community and every believer to listen to the Word. Just as the Epistle Apostle is preceded by Prokeimenon comprised of separate verses from the psalms, the read-

ing of the Gospel, the core of Holy Scripture, requires a separate prayerful preparation.

As the Apocalypse states, the singing of Alleluia will be the song of eternity (see Apoc. 19: 1,3-5). Alleluia, along with the word Amen, is in fact the only Hebrew expression that Christians did not dare to translate into their languages, adopting its Old Testament sounding. It may seem to many that the singing of Alleluia is conclusive in relation to the Apostle, but this statement is erroneous. According to the statute, it is the Alleluia singing during which the censuring of the church should be performed. That emphasizes the importance of the forthcoming Gospel reading even further.

In the East, as well as in the West, the Gospel reading is preceded by the singing of Alleluia. The oldest of the Orthodox liturgical monuments mentioning Alleluia before the Gospel (notably, with an indication of the tone and verse) is the Georgian edition of a 7th century Jerusalem lectionary.

**Time and the Church, cont'd from p. 1)**

the vessel of eternity and is available as an opportunity for the communication of that which has passed with that which is transcendent. The eternal becomes admixed with the temporal. And time is not restricted to an evanescent and irreversible stream, but, rather, every moment provides people with the opportunity of being inducted into the infinite love of the eternal God.

The Church is not subject to time, but leads us from time to eternity. As the body of Christ and a communion of glorification, the Church inducts the world into the kingdom of God. But again, as the body of Christ and communion of glorification, the Church manifests the kingdom of God to the world. The world and the kingdom of God are linked and woven together, creating in this way the eschatological period of the presence of the Church. The time of history becomes the 'locus' of induction into eternity.

Transcendence of the world is realized in Christ within the Church

through the grace of the Holy Spirit (Cf. 'Let grace come and let this world pass away'). The Church is not eradicated together with the world.



The end of the world, which will be the end of time, will not also be the end of the Church. The Church leads to the kingdom of God. The manifestation of the kingdom of God does not occur all of a sudden, but is gradual.

In the same way, the end of the world will not occur just like that, but will appear first as a preliminary engagement and then as the final resolution. The initial engagement as regards the end was the devastation of Jerusalem and the resolution will be the final extirpation.

When Christ refers to the end of the world, He links the devastation of Jerusalem with the extirpation of the world and ends with the declaration: 'Truly, I say to you: this generation will not pass away before all this comes to pass. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not' (Matt, 24, 34-5). The devastation of Jerusalem occurred before the generation to whom Christ was talking passed away. And the final extirpation will occur before the generation of Christians has passed away (On the interpretation of the word 'generation' as the 'generation of Christians', see St. John Chrysostom, *Homily on Matthew 77*).

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teaching of the Jewish faith is the first and great commandment, according to Christ.

But our Savior wasn't done yet. He added a second commandment "that is like it," taken from the book of Leviticus: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." And He concluded that all the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. In other words, the 10 Commandments given to Moses and all the other legal material of the Old Testament, together with all the prophetic teachings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos and the rest of the prophets, grow from these two basic commandments: to love God with every ounce of our being and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Jesus Christ got to the heart of the matter, for He knew that the law and the prophets were intended to direct the people to communion with God, to loving fellowship and union with Him which would include their relationships with one another. Remember His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount: Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. In other words, those who are blessed in the eternal life of the Kingdom are those who have been purified by the love of God to the depths of their souls and who show that love in their relationships with others.

No, Christ did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them. He called His followers, and He calls us, to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. That doesn't mean that we will follow more laws than they did, but that the meaning and purpose of the Law will be fulfilled in us: that we will grow in the likeness of God, that we will be united fully with Him through love; that His love will overflow into every relationship that we have and become present in the world through us. In other words, we will become holy through the love of God and neighbor; indeed, that's what true holiness means, to be purified in love and union with God and with one another.

Though we may not yet have the eyes to see it, our entire life in the Church—and every bit of our life in the world as Christians—presents an opportunity to grow in holiness through the love of God and neighbor. Indeed,

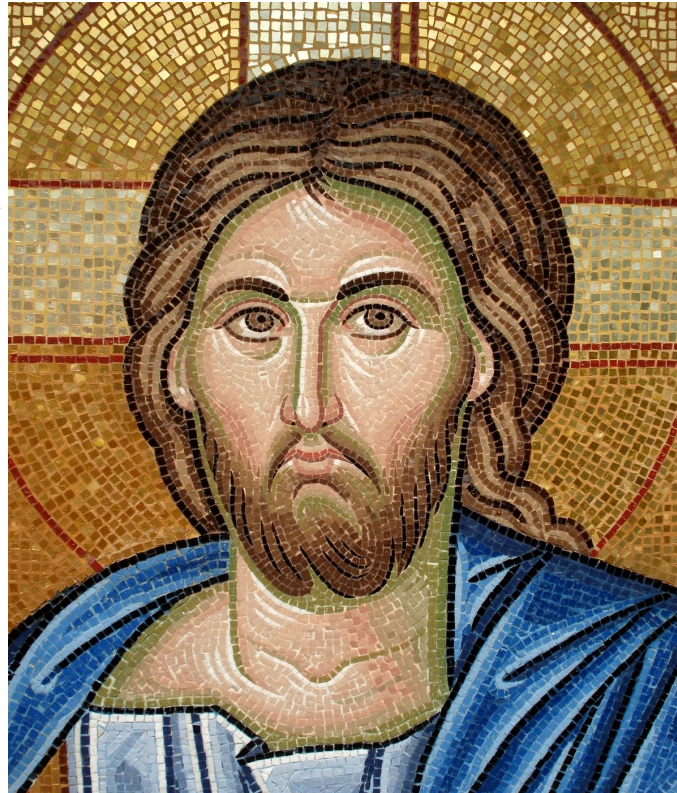
that's the point of it all: of our services, our prayers at home, our fasting, our feasting, our generosity to the poor, our forgiveness of others, our marriages and family life, our recreation, and all our work on the job or at school. They are all part of fulfilling our most fundamental calling: to grow in the likeness of God, to become partakers of the Divine Nature, to grow in loving union with the Holy Trinity and with one another.

But that may sound strange. After all, we work to make a living. We go to school to learn and to prepare to make a living. We spend time with friends and family, play games and watch sports or listen to music because we like to. We don't often think of these activities as religious at all. So what do they have to do with growing in holiness or fulfilling the commandments?

Well, the answer is found when we remember that the Incarnate Son of God became a human being with a real body in order to bless, heal, and sanctify us and everything about us and our world. In His resurrection Christ conquered every corruption and distortion of our fallen humanity, and has now ascended into heaven as the God-Man, showing us our destiny for life eternal. The good news of the gospel is that every single bit of our life presents an opportunity to share in His sanctification of our humanity, to grow in love of God and neighbor, to continue on the path trod by our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ.

If we want to love our neighbors as ourselves, we never have to look far at all. Every person whom we meet is a living icon of Christ and is called to life eternal. No matter the circumstance, whenever we put someone else's interest above our own, whenever we are generous with our time, our attention, or our resources, whenever we help someone in any way, we serve Christ and grow at least a bit in the divine likeness. No matter our age, gender, occupation, or circumstances, we all have the opportunity each day to love our neighbors as ourselves and Christ in our neighbors.

When we make the time to pray daily and to come to Liturgy; when we confess our sins and prepare conscientiously to receive Communion; when we humble ourselves to serve others and to ask for their forgiveness when we offend them, we grow in the love of God and neighbor, and we shine a bit more brightly with the holy light of Christ. We are then perfected in love.



## Why is Fear an Enemy of Faith? By Vladimir Basenkov

To have faith means to trust the Lord and to sense His living presence in one's life. Faith brings us our inner peace, tranquility and confidence. Fear, on the other hand, thrives when we are overwhelmed by acute anxiety in the face of an imminent danger or trying times in our lives, and have no confidence in a positive outcome. When overwhelmed by fear, we lose our sense of security. For a Christian who puts his trust in the Lord, succumbing to this kind of fear would mean losing the sense of God's presence. This creates in him the impression that he had been left to his own devices in his predicament.

Is God still around? Has He abandoned this Christian? No, the Christian himself has forgotten about His presence. The spiritual reality in which we exist is always determined by the way in which we see it. A Christian who acts sinfully places himself outside of the spiritual reality with God in it. As the Holy fathers wrote, someone who has not seen God in his life will not see Him after death. One thing might mean by this is that the spiritual reality is defined by our priorities; sin desecrates it and puts us outside it.

Our spiritual vision is blinded by fear. It is not surprising, then, that fear is sometimes described as the devil's weapon. A Christian's life is always a struggle for focus. Christ calls on us to be vigilant and alert, which means never losing sight of things that are of greatest value and of greatest importance.

Fear paralyzes our will and acts destroys our ability to concentrate. At times of our great anxiety, it would be right to turn to God and send Him our fervent prayer and pleas for His help. In doing so, we might flounder, but not fall. Sometimes, however, the sight of danger may deprive us of all our will and sensibility, and cause us to behave instinctively. Even among some Orthodox Christians, the expectation of the end of times sometimes escalated to doomsday panic; This panic was causing some of the faithful to get into groups within the Church, some of which have evolved into what we now call sects. The underlying reason for this is that the lives of these Christians came to be driven by fear, rather than faith. Or, more exactly, they developed a faith in their fear. This might sound like a contradiction in terms, but let us still try to understand how fear might take the place of a religion.

We know that fear paralyzes our will. When this happens, we can no longer remain sober in viewing our situation, and we are also powerless to overcome the numb-

ness of our mind and to stop the escalation of the fear. As the fear grows, our mind develops the habit of fear. It becomes its obedient servant; it creates patterns of thought which appear logical and which we are keen to reproduce time and again. Fear wins. Faith is defeated.

Fear dominates a person's behavior by exploiting his instincts. The instinct of self-preservation is perhaps one of the strongest. It is powerful enough to drive some people – grappled with a fear that had reached the scale of a paranoia – into the depth of the Siberian forests. Let us also note here that people may freely choose to become hermits in the Siberian wilderness to become closer to God and to grow in their faith, and not in the least out of fear.

What we are referring to in this context is the eschatological fear, which causes some people to lose faith in the true Lord. In their minds, God becomes more of an abstraction, although they might vehemently deny this. To them, spiritual beings of a different kind are taking precedence; they appear to them in many forms, ranging from passport and ID numbers to the anti-Christ himself. Such frightful Christians would rather live in fear than see Christ.

He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith? (Mark 4:40). The Disciples were afraid of the storm, He calmed it down. With God, everything is possible. If He is with us, what could frighten us? Not a hair on our head will perish without God's will. We have laid our full trust in the Lord; we have entrusted Him our lives and are prepared to follow Him anywhere. How can we still fear, wherever it might come from – our everyday lives or our doomsday fantasies?

Faith, of course, is not something that is born of itself. To acknowledge and believe in the existence of God does not yet mean to have a faith that is strong enough to move a mountain. Growing the seeds of faith in one's heart takes a long-time effort and hard work; it takes experience, wisdom and courage, the ability to face adversity and learn one's lessons, many years of prayer and partaking in the Holy Sacraments, great self-control and full trust in the Lord. Fear is not compatible with faith, save the fear of God, which means not doing anything to displease Him and obeying His laws. Trust in the Lord and our readiness to submit our lives in His caring hands liberates us from anxiety, apprehension and panic and helps us hold on to our faith, the lifeline that connects us to Him. We all need to have stronger faith, and we all trust that the Lord will help us overcome our unbelief.

