

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 9 Issue 432

17th Sunday after Pentecost—Love Your Enemies

Sunday, October 4, 2020



How we see ourselves plays a very important role in how we live. Many people define themselves in light of their own weaknesses in ways that keep them chained to whatever shattered personal history they may have. It is easy to weigh ourselves down with ways of thinking that hold us in bondage, especially when we think that there is no possibility of us

changing. When we do that, we simply enslave ourselves further to a distorted perspective on where we stand before God and in relation to others.

In today's gospel reading, the Savior teaches that we must do something that seems impossibly hard in every generation, namely, loving our enemies. He reminds us not to define ourselves by what seems easy or even natural in our world of corruption by simply being nice to those who are nice to us. Even terrorists and gangsters do that, of course. There is no great virtue in loving those who we expect love in return.

Far more challenging is the calling not to be defined by the disagreeable actions and words of others or by how we are inclined to respond to them. We may find it much easier to hate and condemn our enemies than to show

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17th Sunday after Pentecost

Bishop Martyr Hiertheos of Athens

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1

Gospel: Luke 6: 31-36

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.*

Values and Social Life, by Professor George Mantzaridis

The concept of value is often used in a moral, social, economic, aesthetic and religious context. Value is a quality or idea which is cultivated and experienced on a personal and social level.

It is something which interests, attracts and influences people as regards their individual needs, interpersonal relations and everyday life. In the social sciences, particularly in sociology, which wishes to function as a non-evaluative science, values are treated

as 'empirical variables' of social life.

Their validity here depends not on their truth or rectitude but on their reception as true and correct on the part of the people who accept them. The notion of value is often used in theology, as well, though here a particular conundrum arises, which we will analyze later.

The sum total of values or the value system of any society creates a kind of transcendental reference in relation to

the individual or the social whole. It forms a vertical, notional scale which transcends the individual and collective ego.

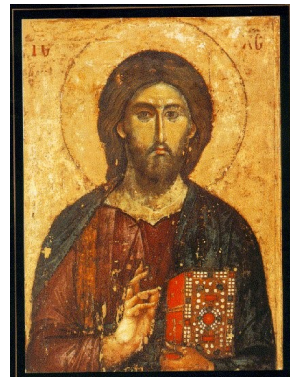
The formation of this scale is dictated by the innate tendency among people to allude to and seek support from the transcendental. Besides, in the Christian view of humankind, our creation in the image and likeness of God has this allusion to the transcendental as a fundamental feature,

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

The Man in Christ is a true Person

Why don't people come to an understanding? Why can't they find the truth? Why does everyone want to have it his own way? The answer is because they don't start from God. There is this worm, this poison within man: that turn towards himself, towards egocentricity, towards

self-love. The more man believes in God, the more he is redeemed from self-love, egocentricity and egoism. And then, everything is splendid and there is no problem at all.

There is no problem indeed. There is no problem in attitude or miscommunication and no problem in relationships, either. But when is there not a problem? When? When man is redeemed in Christ and is a true person. And when, as a true person, he does not lose himself among other people, nor does he want to eliminate, devalue and embitter them. *Fr. Symeon*

When someone receives inside something from God, then the heart feels happy. When on the contrary receives something from the enemy, then the heart feels confused and upset. *St. Seraphim of Sarov*

We perceive God's love for us by the grace that He gives to the soul. Even little grace, if it is present in the human soul, fills it with peace and love for the Lord and neighbor. But there is also the great love. It makes the soul forget the whole world. *St. Silouan of Mt Athos.*

Values and Social Life, cont'd from p. 1)

though here this allusion is not limited to secular boundaries, but has a supernatural dimension and perspective.

The value system and the individual values within it guarantee stability in social structures and in our everyday relationships, while at the same time, restricting self-interest, to a certain extent. The moral, social and civic behavior of an individual or the collective, which are expressed on a horizontal plane, are affected and colored, consciously or otherwise, by their relationship to the values of the vertical scale, while, at the same time, they contribute to the formation of them. Hence, the quality of the values and of the value system is interwoven with people's moral, social, civic and religious life and behavior.

The values of any society start from the 'being' of that society and proceed towards some 'well-being'. The 'being' and 'well-being' are considered sometimes from an individual and sometimes from a collective standpoint. When the individual is

taken as the foremost value then the center of attention is focused on the person. When society as a whole is seen as the prime value then interest



is directed towards it.

In the first case, the quality of society goes back to the individual behavior of its members and the center of gravity is associated with the cultivation of individual virtues. In the second instance, the quality of society depends on its formation and activation, and pride of place is given to

collective virtues, institutions and the social and civic system. In both cases, the value system is structured on a utilitarian basis: the individual or collective ego of society is protected, supporting individual and collective self-interest, though also reining it in.

Let us take the example of classical Greek antiquity. According to Aristotle, people are 'civic animals'*. This means that they submit to the city: 'the city has, by nature, priority over the household and over each of us individually'. By the same token, the person exists for the city, which acts as a unifying factor for its citizens, morals are subject to the needs of the city and moral values come second to those of the city.

There is no autonomy in morals. Here any individual approach to morality is a disruptive act. Individuals and their ways of behavior are allowed by the collective only through some process of isolation. Autonomy is a characteristic only of God and the wild beasts.

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generosity, kindness, and forgiveness. There is much in our culture, and much that somehow passes for Christianity in our society, that would tell us we are perfectly justified in allowing fear, resentment, and self-righteous judgment to shape how we respond both to particular people and to certain groups.

When St. Paul addressed the Gentile Christians of Corinth as “the temple of the living God,” he was doing something no one would have anticipated. As his letters to the Corinthians make clear, they were converts from paganism who had to be corrected from their tendency to fall back into old ways of living on everything from worshiping false gods to engaging in sexual immorality. Not only were they Gentiles, they apparently continued to fall back into the very ways of living that the Jews associated with the perversions of strangers and foreigners

Those who worship the false gods of worldly power and self-centeredness may think that loving their friends and hating their enemies helps them get what they want. Because they set their sights so slow, they may be right—at least for a time. Even terrorists and gangsters will have a measure of success by their own standards.

But what on earth should that have to do with us, who by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ have become “the temple of the living God”? Our goal is not to achieve this or that earthly goal like another interest group or faction, but to become “merciful, even as your father is merciful.” Our goal is to live as sons and daughters of the Lord, cleansed from every stain, and to “make holiness perfect in the fear of God.”

We are just like the Gentile Christians of Corinth who, purely by God’s grace, moved from aliens to heirs, from hated foreigners to those who have inherited the promises to Abraham in Jesus Christ. We must separate ourselves, then, from much that is appealing to us in our culture, from much that would keep us enslaved to old habits.

We must shut our ears to voices that associate strength with bondage to the passions of anger and hatred, as

though it is somehow virtuous to hold grudges and refuse to forgive. We must shut our eyes to the habit of seeing as neighbors only those who are like us in how we look, how we live, or how we believe.

Thank God, His mercy extends even to sinners like you and me. If that is the case, then how can we refuse to extend mercy to anyone? Did not Christ die and rise again in order to save the entire world, including those who nailed Him to the Cross? Even as there are no limits to His love, there should be no limits to ours. If we judge others by merely human standards of any kind, we fall well short of showing to others the same mercy that we want for ourselves.

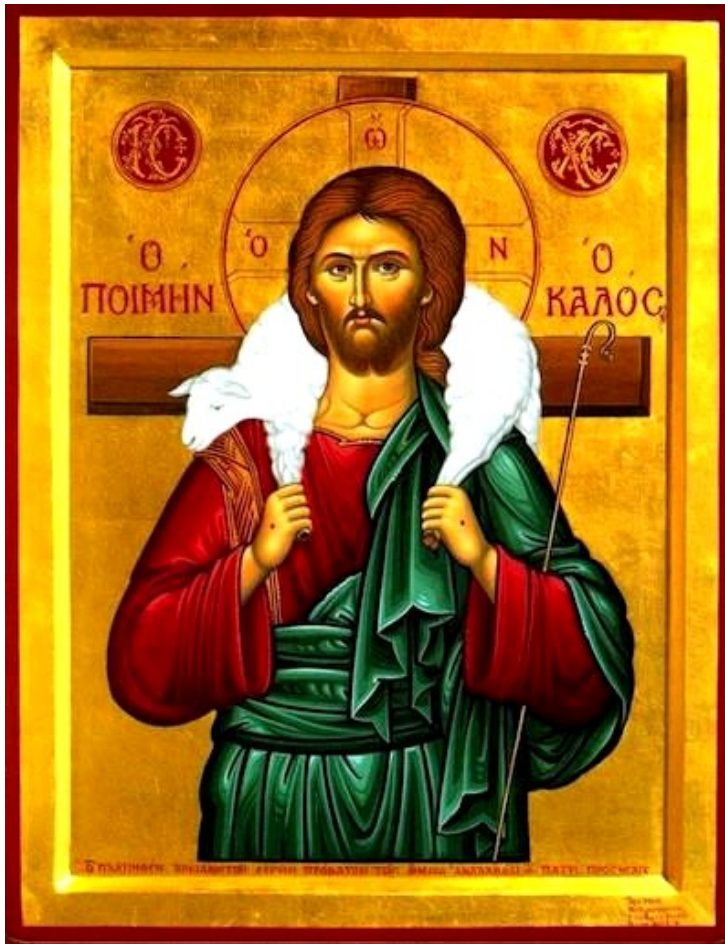
There is no limit to the holiness to which our Savior calls each and every one of us. We are all weakened by our own sins and those of others. We may find it impossible to believe that our lives will ever manifest the holiness of God’s temple. That was surely true of St. Paul before his conversion, as well as of the Gentile Christians who came to faith from pagan backgrounds.

Our culture teaches us primarily to believe in ourselves, but we must primarily believe in the healing mercy of our Savior, which extends even to the most unlikely candidates “to make holiness perfect in the fear of God.” If before such a high calling, you feel as unworthy as a Corinthian pagan, then

thank God for that profound insight and use it for your humility. For we never stand before the Lord based on what we deserve.

The best way to thank Him for His mercy is to extend that same mercy to others, which is possible only if we refuse to define ourselves as anything but His beloved sons and daughters, as His holy temple. The more we embrace this blessed calling, the more strength we will have to turn away from everything that would separate us from fulfilling our vocation to become like God in holiness.

In some ways, the message is really very simple. We are the temple of God by His grace. It is time we started living like it as we show love, do good, and extend mercy to neighbors who need His grace just as much as we do.



Values and Social Life (cont'd from p.2)

Members of society pay with isolation for individual morality.

In ancient Greece, the city held the third dimension, the vertical, as regards the structuring of civic, social and moral life. This means that the whole of people's lives was directly linked to civic life and subject to it. Ethics and Civics, to which Aristotle devoted two works of those names, together make up a unified 'philosophy concerning human affairs', which contains the dimension of the vertical perspective. This perspective is built up from below. It is a civic, philosophical and religious invention by people and has a metaphysical, though not supernatural, character. In this way, the value system also remains closed and secular-centered, though it does assume metaphysical extensions. Everything is founded upon the human person. This is also true of religious transcendence, which, by its nature, has a created provenance.

As created beings, people are unable to penetrate the uncreated. They recognize created values which are useful for their personal life and for social cohabitation. These values are usually self-determining and function within society as values in themselves or as minor divinities. To some extent they satisfy the deeper human desire for the absolute and the eternal, but in reality are a distraction because they trap people and bind them to that which is transitory and created.

Something similar has been noted [by Saint Justin Popović] about modern, secular Europe, in the sense that it 'does not suffer from atheism, but polytheism; it does not suffer from the lack of gods but from an excessive number of them. Having lost the true God, it wants to satisfy its hunger by the creation of many false gods, of idols'.

Self-validated human values are dangerous not only for our spiritual and religious life but also for the moral and social life, because they easily transform themselves into means of self-justification and distraction. This dual function of values is due to their impersonal and created nature. What is created is always relative; it is never absolute. Even less, of course, can that which is created forge anything absolute, except in the imagination. But even absolute values which originate in the uncreated cannot function properly when they are taken as being impersonal. As Saint Sophrony says, where there is no personal form to being, there is nothing that lives. There is no good and no evil.

Good and evil, moral and immoral always exist in relation to persons and their intentions. If their intentions are good, values function positively. When their intentions are wicked, however, values act negatively, even if they appear to be beneficent. In this way, many of the values which have been formed over many years under the influence of Christianity but have gradually become separated from their spiritual basis, have been expropriated, side-tracked and ridiculed. Their true content and the purpose of their existence has been forgotten and they have become rooted in unstable and fleeting worldliness: they have become secularized.

The phenomenon of secularization has a broader context and differs in essence in the East and the West. Secularization of Christianity did not begin with modernity and its questioning and abandonment of traditional values; nor

has it been completed by the post-modern annihilation of these values. From the point of view of Orthodox theology, secularization begins with the estrangement of life from faith; with the objectivization of the truths of faith and their divorce from their spiritual context. When the truths of faith are formulated rationally and are institutionalized within society as moral and social values, their spiritual depth is restricted and they become secularized. Thereafter, once they have become entirely estranged from their spiritual profundity, these values shrivel, become moribund and can be used as a means of overturning or altering their original context.

Christ's Gospel essentially overturns all human values. The concept of value, which is also used in

theological language, actually belongs more to the level of secular theology. A proper view of values can be achieved only in the apophatic spirit and in relation to absolute, personal value in and of itself. For Orthodox theology, this is the uncreated Triune God, Who manifested Himself in the world with the incarnation of the Word of God, Christ.

The unbridgeable gap between the created and the uncreated and the insurmountable obstacle which exist between them cannot be bridged or overcome through human efforts and achievements. Bridging takes place through the incarnation of the Word of God in the person of Christ and through the communion of the Holy Spirit, Who assembles the Church and guides to 'all the truth'. In the person of Christ we have the unconfused union and interpenetration of the created and the uncreated.

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