

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 9 Issue 440 25th Sunday after Pentecost– Jesus heals the disabled Woman Sunday, November 29, 2020



There are times when we do as little possible in order to meet a requirement that is not very important to us. There are other times when we do our very best because it really matters. Some requirements can be checked off easily with little effort and do not change us in any significant way. Those that re-

quire dedication from the depths of our souls, however, will transform us profoundly.

To view the Christian life as a battle for which we need the full armor of God is very different from thinking that religion is about emotion, politics, or simply being a decent person. The point is not to make ourselves feel a certain way, to gain worldly power, or even to become moral. Instead, our faith calls us to participate personally in the healing of the human person that Jesus Christ was born to bring to the world.

As we await the coming fulfillment of God’s Kingdom, answering that call requires a difficult and constant struggle. Even though Christ has conquered death in His glorious resurrection on the third day, none of us has yet fully embraced His victory over sin.

(continued p. 3)

***25th Sunday after Pentecost ***

Martyr Paramon and 370 Martyrs

Epistle: Ephesians 4: 1-6

Gospel: Luke 13: 10-17

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.*

The Good of the Soul, by St. Isaac of Syria

It takes a great struggle, because the passions are very powerful. But by God’s grace those who are courageous and fight with all their strength will be victorious.

Bodily effort and study of the holy Scriptures preserve the purity of the mind. And then it needs a lot of prayer, so that divine grace will shelter those who are struggling. If we’re to acquire the grace of the Holy Spirit, it needs a great spiritual struggle, because we’re easily led astray into

wickedness, and, in the blink of an eye, lose what we’ve gained through great striving.

In our hearts there is good and evil. Which of the two will prevail depends on the effort we ourselves put in. If we give a free rein to our self, without trying to curb it, evil will prevail. On the other hand, if we strive, goodness and virtue will overcome.

This struggle is harsh. You’ll fall and you’ll get up again. Then you’ll fall again and get up again.

It’s a life-long struggle. Because Satan doesn’t leave us alone for even a single moment. He’s just waiting for a moment of inattentiveness, so that he can exploit it and do harm to our soul.

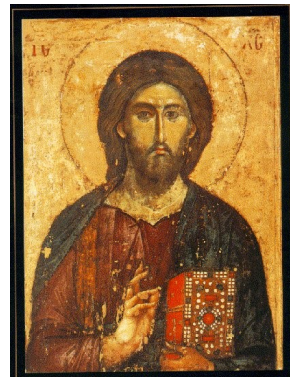
As we said above, the spiritual struggle requires humility. Because the Lord hears the prayers only of the humble. The prayer of the humble ‘enters the ears of the Lord. The eyes of the Lord are on the humble of heart.’ In a humble

(continued p.2)

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, Jack, Stephen, Louise, Marcia, George, Evan, Ryan, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Paula, Andrea, Matthew, Corella, Mike, Ron, Renee, Daniel, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

The Holy Angels

We know that the angelic world exists parallel to the physical world and that angels play a realistic and genuine role in our lives. We know and believe that when we serve the Divine Liturgy, the angels truly serve with us. They sing to God the triumphal hymn, they surround the altar

table on which abide the Holy Mysteries and they participate with us in the Small and Great Entrances. With fear and trembling they cover their faces in the presence of the performance of the Divine Eucharist, when bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ.

We don't know the manner in which the angels partake of the Divine glory. For us, communing with God and uniting ourselves with Him is only possible through the Mystery of the Eucharist, when the Body and Blood of Christ, God incarnate, mingles within and with us and becomes part of our own body and blood.

Therefore, with urgency we rush to participate in Holy Communion, the Holy Mysteries of Christ, knowing that this is a great power, which always helps us to abide with God and to not turn away from Him, experiencing within ourselves spiritual powers which are necessary for us in order to be true and good Christians. Let us as often as possible run to this sacred Mystery, seal ourselves with the sign of the Cross and pray to our Guardian Angel, that he would defend us from every evil.

The Good of the Soul, cont'd from p. 1)

frame of mind, call upon the Lord and say to Him: 'Lord, my God, if You wish, You can illumine the darkness of my soul'.

When the soul's been warmed with love for God, it sees everything as worthless trash. Night and day it thinks of nothing other than Jesus Christ. Our contact with God is sweeter than the most wonderfully delicious food. When the soul's united with God, then the tears of spiritual joy flow. And these tears are with you whether you're eating, drinking, reading or praying, as the fruit of the soul's struggle. This is the reward God gives to those who work at His commandments, to those who've set the good of their soul as their aim in life.

So when you're visited by these tears, take courage and go forward with greater strength, so that you can cross over the sea of the passions. But be careful not to lose the spiritual treasure from your struggle, either through egotism or negligence. If you haven't laboured at good

works, you've no business talking about the virtues. Because any virtue that comes without effort is like an excrescence in the eyes of God. The



sighing of your heart, prayers and vigils will help you acquire virtue.

But no matter how you cry out in prayer to the Lord, He won't listen to you if you're not humble. Observation of the commandments and, above all, humility are what make us

gods on earth. Faith and charity bring us to purity more quickly.

Those who have warm love for God are attracted by the good things to come. Those who are warmed with the hope of eternal benefits are free of worldly things. But reaching this exalted state requires great effort. And you have to start with the simple and easy things if you're going to get to the difficult ones. You have to attain the first rung on the ladder of the virtues, then go on to the next and so you'll slowly progress in the spiritual life. You won't reach the heights by taking one great leap.

Let's first learn how to observe God's commandments and then, after many great efforts, God will send us His grace. Happy are they who've chosen to tread the path of sorrows for the love of God, so long as they don't turn back. They'll quickly arrive at the harbor of the Kingdom of Heaven. After their efforts and trials, they'll enjoy rest and recuperation. And they'll rejoice eternally, enjoy-

(continued on p.4)

(Homily on Jesus healing the disabled Woman, cont'd from p.1)

Regardless of whether our temptations are obvious or subtle, we must all engage in a struggle against the paralyzing forces of evil in our own souls. This is not a matter of going through the motions to meet a minimal standard, but a calling to invest ourselves fully in an ongoing battle through which we hope, by God's grace, to be transformed in holiness as partakers of the divine nature.

The woman whom Jesus Christ healed in today's gospel lesson certainly was transformed. She suffered from a kind of paralysis because she had not been able to stand up straight for eighteen years. She was stooped over and had probably lost all hope of ever being healed. The Lord saw her in that condition in the synagogue and restored her to health, saying "Woman, you are loosed." Since it was the Sabbath day on which no work was to be done, the leader of the synagogue criticized Christ for breaking the Old Testament law. He responded that people care for their animals on the Sabbath, so how could it possibly be wrong to heal "this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for eighteen years"? That response silenced His critic.

There is no indication that the woman asked the Lord to heal her; instead, He took the initiative when He saw her that day in the synagogue. He took the initiative in extending His merciful love toward her in a way that was not minimalistic or perfunctory. His healing transformed and empowered her to live as a healthy human being in a way that she had not been able to experience by her own strength. In the very Jewish context of a healing on the Sabbath in a synagogue, the Messiah described her as "a daughter of Abraham," a rightful heir of the blessings promised to Abraham and his descendants.

In these weeks of Advent, we prepare to celebrate the loosing of all people, and of the entire creation, from being stooped over and corrupted by the power sin. Left to our own abilities, we will remain bound to our infirmities of body, soul, and spirit. We will be unable to straighten ourselves up, much less to conquer death. We

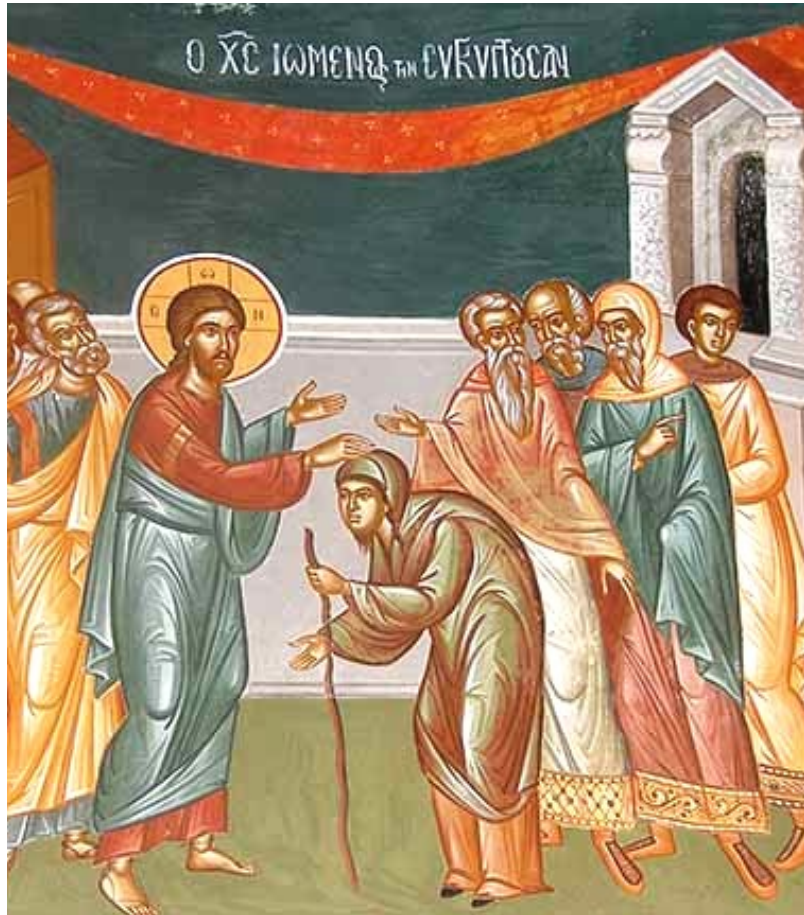
will be unable to heal our own distorted natures. The glorious good news of this season is that the Son of God has made our healing possible by becoming one of us, uniting humanity and divinity in His own Person. Because of the Incarnation of the God-Man, we are all set free to become spiritually fruitful by the power of His grace. We are all loosed from our barrenness.

If we have any spiritual insight at all, we will see that embracing that healing is no small or easy undertaking. Too often, we become like the ruler of the synagogue who hypocritically interpreted the rules in a way that ignored the profound importance of healing a beloved daughter of Abraham. We settle for that in our own lives when we think that any tendency, weakness, or habit is so powerful that Christ cannot set us free from slavery to it.

Regardless of how powerfully we are tempted, no power in heaven or earth can make us sin unless we choose to do so. As we prepare to welcome Christ at His Nativity, we must remember that He became a human being in order to unite us to Himself in holiness. So in order truly to celebrate Christmas, we must be in the process of being loosed from the paralyzing power of sin in our lives. We must be growing in our ability to live faithfully as sons and daughters of Abraham who are not defined by our present weaknesses and infirmities, but by the healing mercy of our Savior.

We must be on the road to victory over spiritual barrenness as we welcome the Messiah more fully into our lives and play our unique roles in the salvation of the world.

In the remaining weeks of Advent, let us do all that we can to cooperate with our Lord's gracious will to loose us from the spiritual barrenness that holds us back from being united with Him in holiness. Let us "put on the whole armor of God" so that we will not settle for some watered-down view of religion that totally misses the point of why Christ was born. Let us accept the blessing that is ours as daughters and sons of Abraham through faith in Him. Surely, there is no better way to prepare ourselves to welcome the Savior at Christmas.



The Good of Our Soul (cont'd from p.3)

ing the good things which are to come.

Those who run the difficult way of virtue don't turn back, nor do they consider the difficulties they'll encounter, but they advance enthusiastically along the narrow, rough path, giving thanks to God, Who has enabled them to progress. But those who are afraid and make their way gradually and fearfully will never arrive at their destination and won't gain the crown of victory which Christ awards to those who strive in faith.

Idle people never make a start with repentance and constantly put it off. So when they arrive at the hour of their death, they're unprepared. If you want to progress in virtue, take no notice of the demands of the body, because the body's the enemy of the soul. Place your hope in God and tread the path of virtue in humility.

You should know that, without God's help, you'll be poor and naked, deprived of all spiritual benefit. Don't be overcome by fear and anxiety during the struggle. If a farmer waits for the wind to drop before he starts sowing, he'll never get round to it. Better to die for the love of God than live in shame and idleness.

When you want to make a start on God's work, you must first abandon all hope and support in this life. Just as those who are preparing for death think about nothing other than this dread event, so those who wish to become united to God have to die to all the things of this world. Let me remind you: you'll come across obstacles, but don't lose hope.

Be strengthened by faith in God and by the thought that the things of this world are fleeting and vain, and that the greatest treasure is the Kingdom of heaven. God has prepared this for those who strive, not for idlers and malingerers. Start your efforts enthusiastically, not fearfully, because even the best task is useless if it's performed by people who are in two minds, one with God and the other with the things of this world. God wants all of us. Be assured of your hope in Christ, so that your hard work isn't for nothing.

The Lord's merciful and gives His grace to those who demand it persistently. He gives His rewards not in accordance with the work we do but with the willingness we've shown. Do what you can for the salvation of your

soul. Pray with tears, read the divine Scriptures, do works of charity. Just so long as you warm your soul with love for God.

Don't worry about the physical weakness of the body, in case you lose heart. Cast aside self-centeredness, greed and egotism. Hate the works of the sinful flesh and strive bravely to acquire virtue. And if, since you're human, you fall, well, you'll get up again. Don't return to your former sinful life. Always go forward joyfully and gladly to do the work of God and He will elevate you to the peak of the virtues.

* * * * *

God and Prayer-Can we find Hope?

God is interested in being present with us and helping us. He wants to answer our prayers, but there is an important point we cannot neglect to mention. Not everything that we pray for, not everything we desire is beneficial for our salvation. So if God doesn't answer your particular prayer it doesn't mean that He doesn't exist or that He doesn't care about you. He cares for you deeply. He loves you more than Jairus loved his own daughter! The Lord wants the very best for you.

Sometimes that means that He doesn't answer our prayers exactly as we hope for. Sometimes He doesn't answer our prayers exactly when we expect them to be answered. Sometimes the answered prayer comes much later than we would have expected. But who can know the mind of God? Thank God that He answers our prayers in precisely the way that He chooses, because His way is better than anything we

can imagine.

Each of us has faced or will face dismal situations in our own lives. Situations that are terrifying, difficult, painful, nearly impossible to handle. Be comforted my brothers and sisters., be comforted. Christ our Lord will never ever leave us or abandon us. But don't you leave and abandon Him either! And never doubt His power to change your difficulties or to redeem them and to restore us and help us in our struggles. God is in the business of healing what is broken and working what seems impossible in our lives. First and foremost, He aims to heal our spiritual brokenness and restore each of us to spiritual life and health. He aims to bring us back from the dead.

