

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Reformed Orthodox Christian Church



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Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be Forever!



Volume 8 Issues 4

35th Sunday after Pentecost – Parable of the Talents

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When the stock market goes up or down, almost everyone hears about it and many pay attention. But those who have money invested in the stock market really take notice. The reason for their interest is clear: their wealth just went up or down. And people do not usually invest in order to shrink their assets; no, they want them to grow.

Today's gospel reading presents a similar situation. Three servants received large sums of money, called talents, from their master when he went away on a long journey. He was a shrewd businessman and expected them to make the most of what he had entrusted to them. One invested so wisely that his five talents turned into ten. The one given two talents did the same and earned two more. They both doubled their money and earned the praise of their master when he returned.

But the third servant, who had only one talent to invest, was not such a good steward. Out of fear that he might lose what little he had, he simply buried the money in the ground and produced nothing at all. The master scolded him for not even putting the money in the bank and earning interest. *(continued p. 3)*

**** 35th Sunday after Pentecost ****

***** New Martyrs of Russia *****

Epistle: Colossians 3: 12-16

Gospel: Matthew 25: 14-30

St. George Orthodox Christian Church is a community of believers who strive to live a life according to the Gospel of Christ and the 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.*

Time and the Church by George Mantzaridis (cont'd from last week)

Limiting time to a one-dimensional movement inevitably leads to disenchantment and disappointment. The history of civilizations is one of disenchantments. Even what we call Christian civilization, as a human creation in the straight line of historical time, shares the same fate. But what the Church offers is an exit from the secular cul-de-sac. It is a transfer from the pointless temporal flow and maelstrom into the fullness of divine love and life.

Secular space and secular time are linked to love of the world. But they are transformed into positive factors when they are used as starting points for entry into the truth of eternal life. As Saint Basil the Great observes, this present life is, to all intents and purposes, death. The life that Christ calls people to is different. It is the life which is not subject to the deviousness of the world and the disenchantment of death. It is the life which transforms

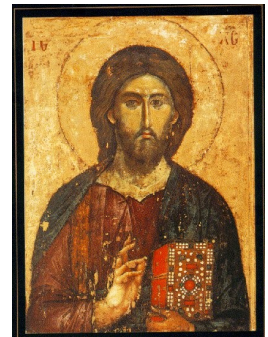
people and places them beyond human capabilities and perspectives. It is the life of the kingdom of God, which is manifested in the Church of Christ and is offered to people here and now.

Christians are called upon to use their time well and to invest it in the prospect of eternal life (See *Eph. 5, 16; Col. 4, 5*). The relativity and incongruity of the present life are not negative circumstances or mere episodes, but opportunities *(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 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, Candice, Lillian, Anne, Claudia, Meg, Xavier, Pam, Jennifer, Larissa, Stephen, Louise, Marcia, George, Joseph, John, Katie, Regina, Dorothy, Peg, Christopher, Jackie, Karoline, the homeless, the hungry, those victims of abuse and violence, and those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Sayings from St. Seraphim of Sarov

On Despair

“Just as the Lord is solicitous about our salvation, so too the murder of men, the devil, strives to lead a man into despair. A lofty and sound soul does not despair over misfortunes, of whatever sort they may be. Our life is as it were a house of temptations and trials; but we will not renounce the Lord for as long as He allows the tempter to remain with us and for as

long as we must wait to be revived through patience and secure passionless!

Judas the betrayer was fainthearted and unskilled in battle, and so the enemy, seeing his despair, attacked him and forced him to hang himself, but Peter, a firm rock, when he fell into great sin, like one skilled in battle did not despair nor lose heart, but shed bitter tears from a burning heart, and the enemy, seeing these tears, his eyes scorched as by fire, fled far from him wailing in pain.

And so brothers, St. Antioch teaches, when despair attacks us let us not yield to it, but being strengthened and protected by the light of faith, with great courage let us say to the evil spirit: “What are you to us, estranged from God, a fugitive from heaven and evil servant? You dare do nothing to us. Christ, the Son of God, has authority both over us and over everything. It is against Him that we have sinned, and before Him that we will be justified. And you, destroyer, leave us. Strengthen by His venerable Cross, we trample under foot your serpent’s head”

To God be the Glory. Amen.

Time and the Church (cont’d from p.1)

ties for a transferal ‘from action and instability to solidity and immobility’ (Gregory the Theologian, Discourse, 7,19). In this perspective, everyone finds their place and their validation. Nothing is abandoned. Nothing is ignored. Nothing is treated as coincidental. God is the Lord of the world and of history, the All-Observant and All-Powerful. Joy and pain, success and failure, progress and catastrophe are not mutually destructive but are offered as means of personal completion, for the overall richness of our lives, a process which is realized in the Church.

The Church does not abhor time, but is manifested within time. It neither mourns what is past, nor worries about that which is to come. The close of the day which has passed is the beginning of the day to come. Every Vespers introduces the new day. And while people may be concerned about what they have lost or be glad over what awaits them, while they may be sad about the past or fearful of the future, the Church calls

upon them, steadfastly and calmly, to proceed along a path which has been entrusted to the hands of God. The Almighty, Who is the Lord of time and history.

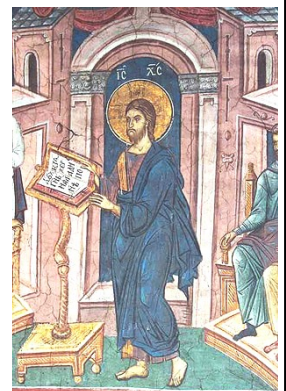
Offering Thanksgiving

There are plenty of things in life that we take for granted, without feeling any obligation to anyone else for these everyday gifts. Our self-sufficiency and self-confidence leave no room for gratitude to God, our Benefactor. It’s difficult for our lips to say ‘Thank you’, while it’s very easy, almost spontaneous, to express cries of entreaty for help in times of need. And this is where something absolutely typical occurs: once the time of need has passed, we don’t just forget our moment of frailty and feel embarrassed about it, but, with a show of bombast, we even try to counterbalance the weakness we showed.

This is an entirely human stance and reveals how trapped we are within the defensive walls of our egotistical

thinking regarding the self. And yet, the saving love of God surrounds us on a daily basis. Christ’s Cross isn’t merely the culmination of a series of redemptive actions that God has performed for us, His creatures, but it’s also the beginning of the boundless gifts He showers upon humankind. The most important of these is the triumph over the fear of death and the blossoming of the hope of the resurrection.

Opening our heart to God is our response to His infinite gifts, the gift of life which He’s generously offered us. It’s our ‘Thank you’ to Him. It’s an expression of thanks which should certainly be accompanied by behavior appropriate to such a divine gift.



So he took away his talent and gave it to the first servant. Near the end of the parable, we read that “to everyone who has, more will be given and he will have abundance, but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.”

Jesus Christ used this story about investing money as a reminder of the importance of being a productive steward of all that God has given us. Life itself and all our blessings and abilities come from the Lord. Ever since He created us in His image and likeness, He has called us to invest ourselves in ways that enable us to flourish as His sons and daughters. He invites us to an abundant life that bears fruit for the Kingdom, blesses others, and radiates the light of holiness throughout the world.

Most of us probably wonder, however, whether that is really possible for us. Perhaps we are so consumed by the practical challenges of just making it through the day that we find it difficult to imagine that our struggles could have any larger significance. Maybe we think that only what rich, powerful, and famous people do really impacts the world in meaningful ways. Perhaps we imagine that holiness is a possibility only for people with no problems or who have never done anything wrong. It may be that our previous efforts to grow in faithfulness have been somehow disappointing or frustrating, so we have given up. I imagine that many of us identify with that cowardly servant who had so little confidence in bearing fruit that he simply buried his talent in the ground.

That might seem like a practical response, but it is actually the opposite; it leads to nothing but weakness and loss. Just as a person who is unable to move physically for a long period of time quickly loses muscle mass and strength, any ability, talent, or gift that we have will become weaker the less use we make of it. Playing it safe by becoming stagnant never works. Nothing in this life ever stays exactly the same over time, and if we are not actively using our gifts to bear fruit in whatever circumstances we face, we will end up worse off than when we started.

What St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians in today's epistle reading applies to each of us, regardless of whether we have one or ten talents, regardless of whether we think that our present situation is especially conducive to becoming a great channel of blessing to anybody. As St.

Paul put it, “Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (2 Cor. 6:2) If we are going to be faithful stewards, we have to begin with our lives as they are now. To wait until all is perfect and we have time, energy, and resources to spare is to fall prey to an illusion, for life in this world will never be without its challenges. Cowardly servants will always find reasons to be afraid and to bury their talents in the ground. The more practice that we have in doing that, the harder it will be to invest ourselves in ways that bear fruit for the Kingdom. It is nothing but a lie and a delusion to think otherwise.

No matter how much or how little money someone has, the basic principles of making a budget and planning for the future are the same. That is also true about the life in Christ. Regardless of the details, we will all invest ourselves for the abundant life of the Kingdom through common and familiar practices, such as prayer, fasting; generosity to the needy; repentance; forgiveness; reading the Scriptures, the lives of the Saints, and other spiritually beneficial writings; and doing whatever we are able to do in the service of the Church and our neighbors. We do not have to be billionaires to live lives of abundant blessing or to be able to bless others in profound ways. We do not have to be spiritual superheroes to be faithful stewards of our talents and play our role in fulfilling God's purposes for the world. We simply have to offer

what only we can offer to the Lord in obedience and let Him do the rest.

Nobody else can save or invest your money; you have to do it. Nobody else can become a faithful steward of your life and blessings; you have to do it. The choice that we all face is whether to cower in fear of failure as we bury our talents in the ground, weaken ourselves, and refuse to do what only we can do for the healing and transformation of the world. Or will we make a solid investment of our talents, no matter how large or small they may be, and grow in the abundant life for which God created us in His image and likeness? If so, then we will receive back infinitely more than what we offered in the first place. And our life in this world, regardless of the outward details, will then become an icon of the Kingdom, producing fruit “thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.” What shrewd businessperson would not want that rate of return? Amen.



The Church in our Lives by Elder Emilianos of the Holy Mountain

The king's consorts are the angels and archangels, thrones, ancient powers, powers, powers, the cherubs and the seraphim. The generals of the king are the saints. The Queen is the most holy. Theotokos. Soldiers are Christians, those who are ready to follow Christ whatever their cost, all those who are willing to bear his honored name, all those who make up his Church. So everyone, Christ, the Saints, the Theotokos, the angels,

Therefore, when the priest says, "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father", he forgets himself, his home. He forgets the world, all he sees, and sets his heart and his thoughts to the ones he understands, the secrets, the invisible, which Christ presents before him. That is why, by feeling the glory of Christ, the king of heaven, with knees trembling, with a soul that bends under the burden of responsibility, with eyes penetrating the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, he trembling says, "That must be in all glory, honor and adoration," to you, my Christ, you are so glorified, you are being ensnared by so many saints and angels, to you is glory and honor and worship. In front of us is the entire Church. In front of us, is truly, Christ! There am I among them, says Christ.

So what is our function? You will have noticed on the white screen of the cinema how a man, a landscape that appears in the background, far away as a sign, is slowly magnified and revealed clearly. This is the function in front of our eyes as Christ slowly reveals his kingdom. Christ, as he taught, as when he made the lame rise up and walk, the blind to see, the dead to rise, so it is right in front of us at this time. We do not just bring it to our thoughts, but it really comes before us, He, the teacher, the prophet, the miracle worker is present. Now is Christ in front of us who was crucified, raised, taken up!

All that we see here, the chandeliers, the priest, the holy blessing, the gospel, the precious gifts, the small and the great entrances, everything are signs of the presence of Christ.

Therefore, with the divine function, we continue the work of Christ and, whenever it is done, it is as if we are bringing with us Christ himself. That is why the priest, when he wishes to commune, looks at Christ with the eyes of his soul and speaks to him in the second person.

"And they have earned your strong hand, they are transplanted by your righteous body and your blood." You, my God, with your vigor and strong hand, give me your precious body and your life-giving blood. If we have spiritual eyes, we can feel that Christ is before us. What will you do when, where you are sitting, and someone you love comes close by? You will run close to him. The effort and desire is a movement, a run, an attempt to grab Christ, to catch him.

Let us leave our family, our work, our children, and keep running and searching. Look how much love and wisdom God bestows on us. All of the everyday events of our lives can draw us to the kingdom of God, become bridges that will lead us to it. Everything can express our love to God! Love for your wife, sacrifices for your children, your daily pain, your anxieties, your tears, the secret bitterness of your life, all of which you cast into the kingdom of the heavens. God gives you the power and gives you the desire to search.

All this takes a place and a value before Christ, as long as we do not forget that our purpose, our end, is the kingdom of God, and our soul to thirst for it. Our goal is to be like Him. Our country is the sky. And that is what we mean when we say Amen: Yes, My Father, heaven, all you tell me I accept and my journey started it, "I entered the road that would take me to heaven. I will not stop if I do not reach where you are.

Therefore, in the process we traveled to the kingdom of Christ and at the same time we are in it. Christ has brought us to heaven or better down to our church in the sky.

Here, we are searching, and there is the entire Church of Christ. We become the temple of Christ, we become members of Christ, we become Christs and that is our head. Head, "Christ is Head of the Church" which means the source. When you are thirsty, you will go to the fountain to quench. It is Christ who waters our thirsty heart. Our members and our flesh and bones become members and flesh and bones of Christ. We live the life of Christ, and Christ takes over our own life. As one is the bread that we take as the holy bread, as one is the bread that we put in the holy cup, as one is Christ, we too are united with Christ.

(continued next issue)

