

# 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 8 Issues 12

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Great Lent-St. Gregory Palamas

March 24, 2019



Lent challenges us to evaluate where things are at between us and God, to 'seize the day,' to make use of this holy season for our growth, healing, and salvation, so when we die, or when Christ comes again, we're not found unprepared. So, we have this opportunity to ask ourselves: Where are things between me and God? Am I

ready to be changed this Lent to make spiritual progress towards healing and salvation? Am I striving for life with God more than all else? Is my life with Him who is Life Eternal my priority? If not, God helps us change our priorities.

God created us in His great love for us that each of us should be with Him for eternity. But love and relationship (communion) can never be forced on anyone; otherwise, it's no longer love or communion, which has to be freely given and received. God the Holy Trinity is Himself a relationship and union of love—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is the God we worship and commune with, this is the God we call on for help, for love, for healing, for salvation. This is the God who feeds us with the medicine of immortality in the Eucharist.

*(continued p. 3)*

**\*\* 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Great Lent \*\***

**\*\*\*\* St. Gregory Palamas \*\*\*\***

Epistle: Hebrew 1:10-2:3

Gospel: Mark: 2:1-12

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.*

## ***How Death is Overcome, by Archimandrite Iakovos (Kanakis)***

We can't accept that God is the 'maker' of the wrongs we see all around us. It's not possible that God created corruption, pain, sickness and, finally, death. But then, how do they exist?

There are a variety of explanations and, of course, the Church has expressed its own theological view on the issue. This is a view which is 'embodied' when there's faith and not so much in rationality, arguments and proofs.

In chapter 3 of Genesis,

the tragic moments of "the Fall" are described. People 'rebelled' and sought to become gods themselves, 'an illusion of autonomy'. Instead they achieved rupture, division, separation and solitude.

They ruptured their relationship with God, other people and the rest of creation. Confusion reigned, as is clear from Babel (Gen. 11, 1-9). It became an effort to produce the bread they ate (Gen. 3, 19) and the earth itself also took its re-

venge, in its own way, with 'thorns and thistles', which pricked them and made them bleed (Gen. 3, 18). Because of them, the whole of creation is now subject to decay, not because it has any blame, but because that's what the people wanted who thus subjected it (Rom. 8, 20). We should note here, that the person who sinned is actually each and every one of us, our common human nature.

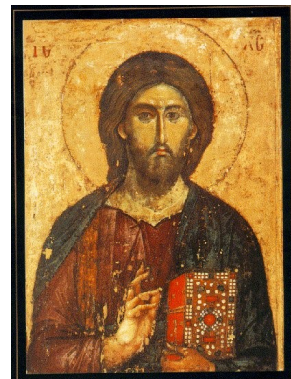
But Saint Paul gives us the prospect of Hope.

*(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, Lillian, Meg, Larissa, Stephen, Louise, Marcia, George, Peg, Christopher, Jackie, Karoline, Evan, Ryan, Kathleen, Sandy, the homeless, the hungry, those victims of abuse and violence, and those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

### **A meditation on the "Our Father" by Mother Alexandra of Ellwood City.**

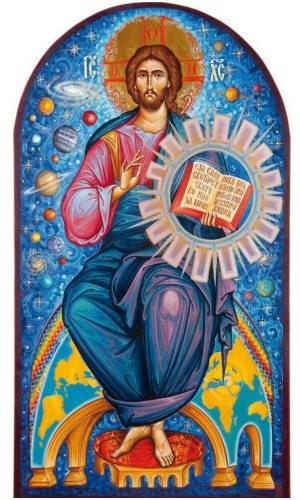
*Pt. VII, Thursday Evening:*

#### *Our daily bread*

For all I have had this day I bless and thank Thee, O Lord. At no time has my need been left unsatisfied; only in those hours when I turned from Thee have I known want. I thank Thee, dear Lord and Master, for all that this day my brethren have shared with me. I thank Thee for sun

and air, for house and food, for dear ones and friends, for every hour that has been mine. I thank Thee, also, for the hours of pain and stress that have widened my understanding. I thank Thee for the darkness that has made me see the light more clearly. I thank Thee for the enmity that has taught me to forgive.

How rich I am!  
How much hast  
Thou given me.  
Each day is added  
to all I already  
have. How generously hast Thou dealt with me!  
From the hour of my birth to this evening hour so much, so much hast Thou given me I cannot count it, I can but humbly thank Thee for Thyself: my daily bread.  
Glory be to Thee, O Christ our God.  
AMEN



### **How Death is Overcome, cont'd from p.1)**

God was unable to look upon His creation in a state of decay. Hope didn't die (Rom. 8, 20). The head of the serpent will be crushed (Gen. 3, 15) and, for those who desire them, bright days will return. Humankind will be reborn from its ashes.

The path to the tree of life will be reopened (Prov. 3, 18). For those before the Incarnation of Christ, this will happen through observance of the Law, while for those reborn 'in Christ' it will occur through true faith in Him. They will be the continuation of the sacred remnant of the Old Testament. He came and took upon Himself all our burdens, He raised His own people onto His shoulders and in His wounds we have found our own healing (Is. 53, 5). He came in the form of a servant, 'He became a worm, not a man' (Ps. 21, 7). He was dishonored, mocked, condemned and yet became the new progenitor of the human race, a spring of life with cleansing water.

He remains alone, but unites everyone. He sets to rights, heals, sancti-

fies, and gives meaning to the human perspective from the outset. He labors at humility and exaltation (Phil. 2, 8-11; Heb. 1, 3) and does so with discretion, without noise or fanfare. He entered the kingdom of death and destroyed it, so that 'Hell was embittered'. It 'laments aloud'.

The antidote which 'prevents death' now exists. Death really doesn't exist when we believe in Christ and His Resurrection. We have the opportunity to become united to our immortal God. Immortality's a fact for such as us, and we have the saints as living examples, very close to us. And here we have evidence that all this isn't just theory, but actual truth experienced in our own days.

I once happened to experience such a sign of immortality, at the funeral for a blessed man of God. There were a lot of people there but no bitterness. Human sadness certainly, among his close colleagues and spiritual children, but the dominant feeling was something else: divine enthusiasm, joyful sadness. This service, in the

presence of the body of the saintly elder, exuded the Resurrection. It made you realize why God wanted us: co-heirs and kings. This is what we felt, the everlasting joy over the fact that nothing ends with death, but rather that everything then begins. Resurrection, awakening, immortality, joy, hope, all mixed together with those present.

The path in this life is one-way and the paths are all alike. So we follow in His footsteps. We seek His Person and He's already waiting for us to want a relationship and His companionship.

Christ continues to bleed for everyone and revives us with His blood. He strengthens us with the blood He is continuously offering. He invites us to walk with Him.





But are we open to the change necessary for healing from our passions and rebellion against God's love? The ways that you and I "miss the mark," reject God's love and initiative to make us into the men and women of God He's created us to be? This is the question posed to us today.

The paralytic and his friends in today's Gospel desire change, healing; they desire more than anything to get into the near presence of Christ God, the Great Physician, the One who speaks the truth because He is the Truth. They desire this so much that they go so far as taking a section of the roof apart to get their friend, the paralytic, to Jesus, when all other ways are blocked.

Seeing their faith, Jesus gives the paralytic the greatest of gifts: his healing from his paralysis? No: forgiveness of sins, healing from his sin-sickness. That is the priority—that which is eternal. Having been forgiven and cleansed of his sins, there's nothing standing between him and God, between him and Eternal Life. Just as Christ says, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you." (Matt. 6:33)

It's only after this miracle that Christ, to demonstrate to those who doubt and scoff that He is God, that He is Life, that He alone has the power of giving life, that He heals the paralytic. Jesus prioritizes the soul over the body; we so often do the inverse. So, we fast so that we can bring balance back between our souls and bodies. When we fast, all is laid bare; we realize how utterly weak we are, how incapable we are of saving ourselves and how much we need God. So, through fasting we learn to desire God more, we learn to pray more—and mean it.

Where does your paralysis lie? What aspect of your life have you not yet relinquished fully to God? As C.S. Lewis says, "If we accept Heaven, we shall not be able to retain even the smallest and most intimate souvenirs of Hell."

Lent gives us the opportunity to relinquish our hold on these "souvenirs," these passions, habits, coldness of heart, indifference to the things of God, that keep us

from experiencing and submitting ourselves to the love of God and the life that is only in Him.

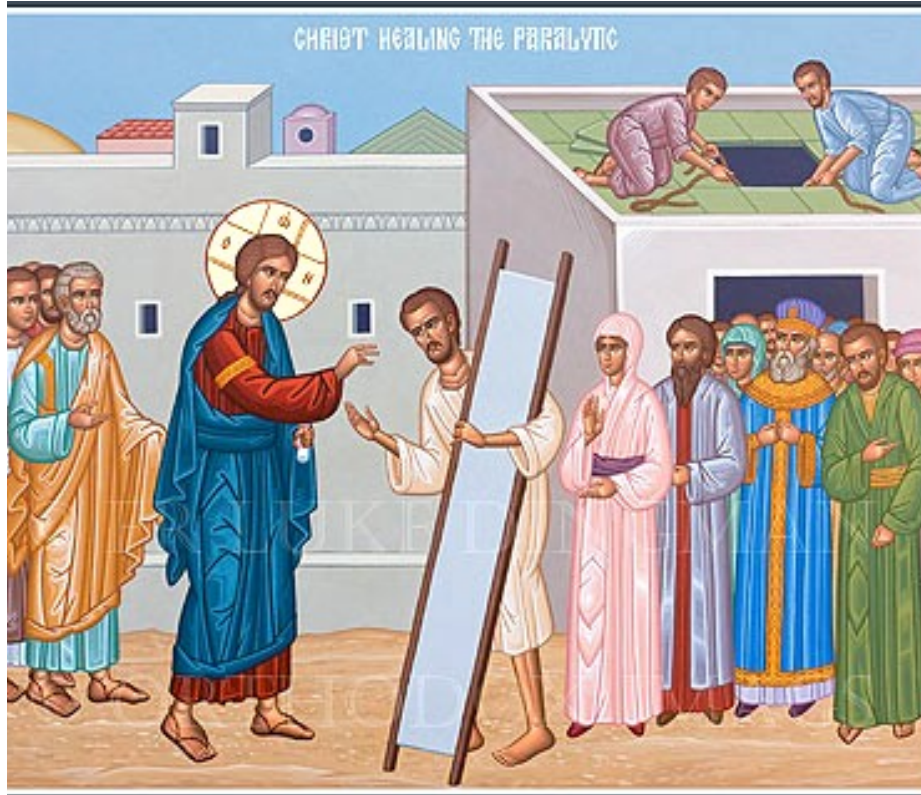
In the case of the paralytic in today's Gospel, his affliction, his paralysis, brought Him to Jesus, the One who created him, the only One who could save him. He presented himself fully to the Master of all and he was changed in a single moment, he was made whole, a new life began for him. Both his spiritual paralysis and his physical paralysis found healing from the Lord.

Is there anything holding you back from the fullness of the life in Christ offered through His Church, which He desires to give each of us? Is there any spiritual sickness or disease of the soul that you need to bring before Your

Creator and ask to have healed through Confession? If the spirit is willing, God will take care of the rest.

St. Gregory Palamas, whose Sunday we celebrate on this Second Sunday of Lent, reminds us of this truth, saying, "Since the Kingdom of God is at hand and within us and will soon arrive, let us make ourselves worthy of it by works of repentance."

I encourage you as I encourage myself to 'seize the day,' to open yourself up more to God and His



healing this Lent through repentance, that we may expose those wounded and sin-sick places of our hearts, whatever hardness of heart, to the love and light that is Christ God, He who alone can heal us of all our infirmities. In so doing, we'll find healing for our souls and be prepared, not only to meet Christ at Pascha, but also at His Second and glorious Coming.

#### **St. Gregory Palamas on Prayer**

"Prayer changes from entreaty to thanksgiving, and meditation on the divine truths of faith fills the heart with a sense of jubilation and unimpeachable hope. This hope is a foretaste of future blessings, of which the soul even now receives direct experience, and so it comes to know in part the surpassing richness of God's bounty, in accordance with the Psalmist's words, 'Taste and know that the Lord is bountiful' (Ps. 34:8). For He is the jubilation of the righteous, the joy of the upright, the gladness of the humble, and the solace of those who grieve."

## *Incense in the Church*

During our Church Services, the priest burns incense in a censer, which is a metal vessel suspended on three chains about two feet long, and provided with a cover to regulate the burning of a small disk of charcoal placed therein. On the chains are twelve small bells, signifying the voice of the twelve Disciples of our Lord. Grains of incense are placed on the burning charcoal.

Incense is a material used to produce a fragrance when burned. It is a mixture of spices and gums burned during religious rites to produce a fragrant smoke. These grains of spices are obtained from trees in Eastern and tropical countries.

The priest places incense on the burning coals in the censer which the server swings to and fro ... causing clouds of smoke to go heavenward. The ascending clouds of an incense in the Old Testament made up of fragrant gums and spices is an offering of earth's treasures to their Creator, symbolizing prayer.

"Let my prayer be set forth in Thy sight as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice ..." (Psalm 141: 2) Accordingly, the people would pray before the Holy of Holies while the priest within was making the sacrifice. "And the whole multitude of people were praying outside at the hour of incense." (Luke 1: 10) The prayers went up to heaven unto God as the smoke of the incense does leaving behind the sweetness of the odor of it all the sweetness of the Holy Spirit.

So, too, in the New Testament does it have a prayerful meaning as St. John the Divine Disciple beheld how in heaven "an angel came and stood at the altar, with a golden censer; and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden Altar before the Throne of God; and the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the Saints from the hand of the angel before God." (Revelations 8:3-4), but it has a much deeper meaning; the transformed ideal. The burning coal is the burning ember. Christ, Who takes away the sins of the world as we behold in Isaiah at the calling of the prophet Isaiah, "then flew one of the Seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the Altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips: your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven.'" (Isaiah 6:6-7)

Incense used at the Divine Services represents:

- a. Adoration or the worship paid to God alone, present in the Eucharist. The burning of the fragrant spices shows the unimportance of all creatures before their Creator.
- b. Prayer, which rises to God like smoke.
- c. Grace, which God pours into our souls as incense pours fragrance throughout the Church.

The Church incenses relics, ikons and Holy things:

- a. To honor God who crowned the saints in heaven, who worked wonders through them here on earth, who sanctified and glorified their bodies.
- b. To show respect and devotion to the special friends and servants of the Almighty.

The Church incenses the clergy in order to honor in their person Jesus Christ, whom they represent and with whose sacred character they are clothed.

The Church incenses the faithful in order to honor in them the likeness to Christ which was imprinted upon them in Baptism ... to show them forth as the temples of the Holy Spirit. At the censuring of the parishioners make the sign of the cross upon their bodies in respect to this meaning.

The Church incenses the bodies of the departed to honor the bodies which were sanctified and made holy by Baptism, and to beg God to receive the prayers and petitions we offer for the repose of the soul of the departed in the Faith.

Incense shows forth several things: Its burning represents zeal in the service of the Lord. Think of that as you see the sacred smoke rising in the Sanctuary. Recall that you are to give of your time and talent, your service and means to

the worship of God. Are you going to let a mere material creature like incense outdo you in divine service? The incense is burnt for the glory of God. How about you?

Its fragrance represents virtue, pleasing to God as it always is. How pleasing is your life and your service? Can you feel that your devotion in Church, your thoughtfulness of God, your keeping of His law, is of a kind that will please Him?

The rising smoke represents prayer and shows that your prayers are rising too. The smoke reminds you to pray, if you are not praying. The fragrance of the smoke shows that our prayer and service are pleasing to God. God commanded Moses and His chosen people to use incense. The Church uses it in her service. Think of what all this means and it will be a source of grace and spiritual strength to you.

