

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

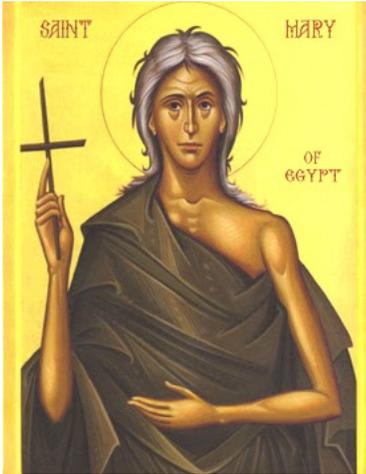
Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be Forever!



Volume 8 Issues 15

5th Sunday of Great Lent-St. Mary of Egypt

April 14, 2019



Human beings have an amazing capacity to miss the point, to become blind to truths that should be obvious. We often do that because we become so preoccupied and distracted with our own agendas and desires that we ignore everything else. That is especially the case when the truth goes strongly against our inclinations by

telling us what we do not want to hear.

That is what James and John did when they asked for choice positions of honor right after Jesus Christ had told them that He was to suffer, die, and rise from the dead. They were apparently so consumed by their desires for prominence and power that they refused to hear the Lord saying that He was nothing like an earthly king.

They boasted of being prepared to follow the Savior without having any idea of what that would mean. He responded by making clear that the path to true greatness was to follow His way of selfless service. "For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."

As we begin the last week of Lent, it should be clear to us all that we have
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** 5th Sunday of Great Lent **

** St. Mary of Egypt **

Epistle: Hebrews 9: 11-14

Gospel: Mark: 10: 32-45

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.*

God's Holy Angels by Demetri George

About a month ago while we were driving in our car, our children asked the question, "Are God's Angels strong?" I did not have the answer for them at that time. Then that same week Father Joseph assigned this paper on Angels to me. God saw fit that I should spend this past month studying about His Holy Angels.

This study has given me a knowledge that will comfort me forever. I hope I can communicate this knowledge to you

through The Word.

The title of my paper is "God's Holy Angels." I use the words, God's Holy Angels, to emphasize the special place Angels hold in God's creation. We use the word angel lightly here on earth as an endearing term, and of course there is Satan and his fallen angels. My paper is not about the fallen angels. It is about the faithful Angels, God's Holy Angels.

Angels belong to a uniquely different dimension of creation,

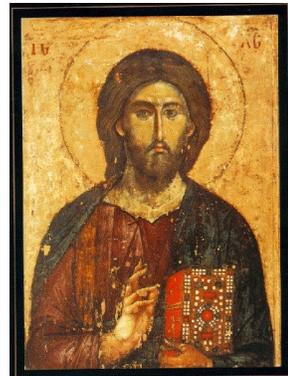
which our limited minds find it difficult to understand. God has given His Holy Angels special knowledge, mobility, and power to act as His ambassadors, His messengers, and His ministers helping to perform His Holy work.

What do we know about Angels? Our knowledge of Angels comes chiefly from the Bible where they are mentioned hundreds of times. The Bible tells us that there are literally untold numbers of
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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 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, Andrea, Samuel, Anatoly, 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. X Saturday Morning: Lead us not into temptation

From temptation spare me, O Lord. Let me not fall a victim to the wiles of the enemy who stands ever ready to guide me amiss. Let me distinguish the pearl without price and not be dazzled by the tinsel and the gold. Teach me to guard my tongue from useless words. Help me al-

ways to ask myself: is this of good report? Am I by saying or doing this working for the Kingdom of Heaven? Or am I serving Satan and his angels?

Give me clear eyes and judgment that I may throughout this day make the right choice. Where there is darkness, let me see light; in the midst of turmoil let me find the core of stillness. Let no fear enter my soul, but teach me bravely to face every problem and all enmity and never let me compromise with evil. Let me never forget that man does not live by bread alone, but by Thy word.



Let me owe no man anything but love so that in loving one another we may fulfill Thy law and set temptation at naught.
AMEN

God and His Holy Angels cont'd from p.1)

of Angels. Many times the Bible speaks of thousands of Angels. For example ten thousand Angels came down on Mount Sinai when God gave Moses His law. So we may be immediately relieved that there are enough Angels to act as guardians and messengers to us all.

It is also evident without doubt that there is an organization of Angels in terms of authority and glory. The Bible mentions nine classes or orders of Angels: Archangels, Angels, Principalities, Powers, Virtues, Dominations, Thrones, Seraphims, and Cherubims. There is great theological discussion as to the significance of these orders. Do some Angels have a higher place in Heaven? Do some Angels have a special place at God's side? Do some Angels have a special function?

One answer seems to be in the word, "order". Just as in all of God's creation there is order, so He created Angels in an orderly fashion. They seem to be organized according to function just as a large company may have a maintenance department, a secretarial

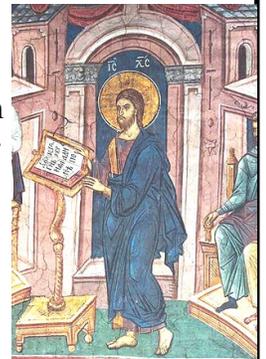
staff, and a public relations department or an army has artillery, tanks, and infantry. So the divisions or orders of Angels have special functions as messengers, guardians, and comforters.

There is even a special class of Angels to specifically glorify God. Seraphim comes from the Hebrew word, "love". We see in the Bible the Six-Winged Seraphim glorifying God. Cherubims glorify God and also act as guards. They guarded the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve had to leave the garden. God has made known to us the names of three of His Holy Angels: Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael.

Michael is the patron saint of some of our churches and is shown on the Iconostasis just south of the North Door. He is an Archangel and his name implies chief or first Angel. His function in God's order of Angels is in the department of administration. He also has the most important job as the chief of staff in the war against Satan.

In the Book of Revelations it says, "There was war in Heaven, Michael and his Angels fought against the Dragon. The Dragon fought and his angels prevailed not and the great Dragon was cast out." This is depicted on our Icon; Michael leads his Angels in the continued struggle against Satan, the Dragon, and all evil forces. Gabriel is the messenger Angel. He has delivered all the most important messages. He is shown on the South Door of the Iconostasis.

In the Book of Daniel, Gabriel tells of the End Time and what it will be like. Gabriel told the aging Zacharias of the forthcoming birth of John the Baptist. Gabriel told the Beloved Virgin Mary of the forthcoming Birth of Jesus Christ.



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not earned a place of honor in God's reign.

If we have practiced the spiritual disciplines of Lent with any integrity and honesty, we will know primarily our own weakness and brokenness. By revealing how easily we are distracted and how enslaved we are to our self-centered desires and habits, they show us that we cannot heal our own souls. And if we have not devoted ourselves to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving at all in the previous weeks of Lent, we should confess that in humility and thus gain a greater awareness that we stand in constant need of the Lord's gracious mercy. "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Regardless of how we have approached Lent so far, we must not become paralyzed with a sense of obsessive guilt for not living up to a standard of perfection, for not making ourselves worthy of the mercy of Christ. To do so is simply a form of self-centered pride, for it is impossible to earn grace as a reward for good behavior.

Becoming great among the Lord's servants means laying down our lives for others, lowering ourselves by placing the needs and interests of others before our own. That is the opposite of a self-centered obsession to prove that we are worthy of anything.

Today we remember St. Mary of Egypt, who had lived a grossly immoral life, but then gave herself up in repentance for decades in the desert, where she be-

came a remarkably holy saint. Instead of continuing to gratify her addiction to sexual pleasure, she died to self by rejecting everything that was a hindrance to the healing of her soul through incredibly rigorous repentance for the rest of her long life. She knew that such disciplines did not somehow put God in her debt, but were ways of opening herself to receive the gracious healing of the Lord, which we never deserve.

St. Mary of Egypt was not like James and John in trying to use the Savior to get what she wanted. Instead, she freely obeyed a divine command to turn away from fulfilling her obsessive desires by uniting herself to the One Who offered His life as a ransom to free us all from slavery to sin and death. Our Lord's disciples ultimately found victory over their passions in different ways, for they had to learn that greatness in the Kingdom comes

through selfless service to the point of suffering and death, not by yearning after what the world calls power and success.

In the remaining days of Lent, we all have the opportunity to embrace our Lord's way of selfless service in relation to those we encounter on a regular basis in our families, in our parish, at work, at school, and in our larger communities. We all have the opportunity to confess how we have enslaved ourselves to self-centered desires and then to take the steps we can to turn away from them. We all have the opportunity to fill our minds with holy things and give less attention to whatever fuels our unholy passions. We all have the opportunity to follow the example of St.

Mary of Egypt in doing what it takes to find the healing of our souls.

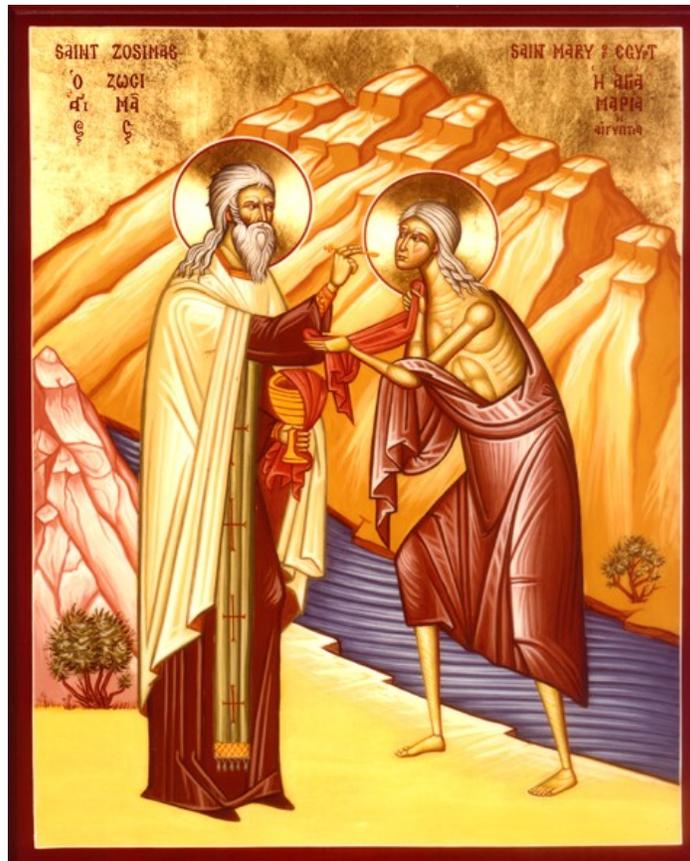
If our Lord could make a great saint out of her, then how can anyone remain paralyzed in guilt? Our great High Priest offered Himself on the Cross and rose in glory on the third day in order to save sinners, to restore all who bear His image and likeness. Thanks be to God, that includes even people as broken as you and me. In the coming week, let us open the eyes of our souls to this glorious truth through selfless service, humble prayer, and genuine repentance.

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Prayer of Repentance by St. Mary of Egypt

"O Lady, Mother of God, who gave birth in the flesh to God the Word, I know, O how well

I know, that it is no honor or praise to thee when one so impure and depraved as I look up to thy icon, O ever-virgin, who didst keep thy body and soul in purity. Rightly do I inspire hatred and disgust before thy virgin-purity. But I have heard that God Who was born of thee became man on purpose to call sinners to repentance. Then help me, for I have no other help. Order the entrance of the church to be opened to me. Allow me to see the venerable Tree on which He Who was born of thee suffered in the flesh and on which He shed His holy Blood for the redemption of sinners and for me, unworthy as I am. Be my faithful witness before thy son that I will never again defile my body by the impurity of fornication, but as soon as I have seen the Tree of the Cross I will renounce the world and its temptations and will go wherever thou wilt lead me."



St. Mary of Egypt-Transformation in Christ

This week of Great Lent, the Church celebrates the memory of St. Mary of Egypt. The story of St. Mary is the story of a repentant harlot. Why does the Church find this story so important? Why does the whole Orthodox world remember this woman?

Her life tells us about how, from her early youth, she carried on an extremely debauched life and then, more like a tourist than a pilgrim, decided to go to Jerusalem for the feast of the Exaltation of the Honorable Cross of the Lord. But a mysterious power would not let her into the church until she became conscious of her sins and called out to the Mother of God and to the Lord for mercy. Then she was able to enter the church, and shaken to the core, resolved to spend the rest of her life in prayer and repentance. Many years

later, the saintly monk Zosima met her in the desert; it is from him that we know her story.

What message—across centuries and countries—does her life give us? It is the story of finding hope. Mary had a reality, which, for the time being, suited her. As the poet said, “wine and men were her atmosphere.” But she had no future; she only had what one prefers not to think about. Soon her charms would wilt—especially soon due to her unhealthy lifestyle—and men would lose all interest in her, turning their attention to new victims with social temperaments, and she would become lonely, cast off, and lacking means for sustenance. But in turning to God she found hope—hope not only that her earthly life would be filled with dignity and meaning, but most importantly that before her is eternal life.

It is the story of finding dignity. Not long ago, I saw in an atheist internet social network a photograph of pilgrims on bended knee, with comments from unbelievers about how humiliating and slavish it is to kneel. This world considers that repentance is a denial of human dignity—as if during Mary’s depraved street life she was living in freedom and dignity, but when she rose up and went to her Father, she became a slave. The values of this world are turned inside out, and repentance offers a restoration of the true system of accountability.

It is the story of finding love. From the worldly point of view, a person who has gone out into the desert in order to dedicate her days to repentance and prayer must have done it out of bitterness and despair, from the inability to

have a “normal” life. Of course, God is not proud—He receives also those who come to Him out of total hopelessness, but more often it is not that way. People become monks who were quite well off by all worldly standards. Why? Because they saw the True Light; something was revealed to them that was so precious and inexpressibly beautiful, that for its sake one can joyfully leave everything behind. Mary met the One Who truly, sincerely, and eternally loves her—as a precious human being, called to eternal life.

This is the story of finding freedom. Traditional society can be considered more moral in some respects—depravity at least did not dare to glorify itself—but in certain respects it was much more hopeless. A “fallen” woman, whose reputation had already been made (and such a reputation could be made very quickly), had no hope of returning to “decent” society. All doors were closed to her, and the only thing she had left to do was to continue sliding down the hill that she had one day incautiously found herself on. Society literally pushed her there: once a harlot, always a harlot, and that’s that. But apparently God does not agree with “decent” society—He stretched forth His hand and completely changed this woman’s life; He made her a great saint, whom the Church has glorified through the ages.

In modern society, the pressure that pushes a once fallen person deeper into the pit is significantly weaker. But it is still very hard for such a person to turn away from the path he’s on. “Drink, and the devil will take you to the

end,” as the pirates sing in “Treasure Island”. People sometimes say that they have been “non-religious all their lives,” that they have “sinned too much”, that now it’s “too late to change their lives”, and all they can do is to keep going down the beaten path to the end.

But the story of St. Mary of Egypt reminds us that if you fall into a pit, you are under no obligation to dig in further; and if you slip, you don’t have to slide all the way down to the very bottom. As is written in the Scriptures, Because this is what the Lord says: He that falls, does he not rise up? ... and behold, and he that turns away, does he not return? (Jer. 8:4). A person is not obligated to go his whole life along the well-worn rut—he can turn around 180 degrees and change his life. And Great Lent is the time when the Church reminds us about our freedom: we can leave our former sins behind and turn to God.

