

JULY 2020

Voice of St. George

SAINT GEORGE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
OF THE DESERT

74-109 LARREA ST., PALM DESERT, CALIFORNIA



DEALING WITH FEAR AND FAITH

Inside this issue

Paul Evdokimov, a prominent Orthodox Christian theologian in the late 1960s and professor at the St. Sergius Orthodox Institute, once wrote: “[A Christian] is also one who is freed by faith from the ‘great fear’ of the bomb; of cancer; of Communism; of death. The faith of such a person is always a way of loving the world; a way of following the Lord even into hell.” (*Ages of the Spiritual Life*, pg. 242).

His words strike a cord with us today as we live through the dire threats of a global pandemic and a level of political unrest that borders on civil war. In the face of events over the past few months, Orthodox clergy and laity have had to reconcile their fears against their faith.

Yet, our rich Orthodox Christian Tradition has found expression in today’s conversation. Despite comments ranging

from near paranoia to fanatical faith, as the dust begins to clear, we find a more genuine Orthodox Christian mentality by which we can deal with our fears by being cautious *and* by having faith in God. Both are important to our salvation. It is caution that protects us from “tempting the Lord.” It is faith that gives us the power of prayer.

Through prayer we can avoid paranoia, which is a level of fear that cripples the ability to function responsibly. Prayer is to be made with absolute faith in Christ, through which we become watchful over our souls, so that we can glorify God in responsible ways. However, the distance between caution and paranoia is short. Caution wears a seat belt; paranoia avoids cars. Caution washes hands; paranoia is the avoidance of any human contact.

The Philokalia is a book

containing an anthology of writings issued by Orthodox Christian Saints. In sum, their advice prompts us to pray with watchfulness over our thoughts with the aim of avoiding deceptions caused by pride. Seeking spiritual counsel in the effort to avoid careless behaviors caused by pride is an expression of humility. Humility, in turn, is our obedience to God’s Commandments, knowing that, without Christ, we can do nothing.

One striking example of “caution mixed with faith” is that of the Myrrh-bearing Women. In their experience, we see the reward that faith in God brings. God respected their sense of caution, but rewarded their faith in Christ our God by revealing to them His Resurrection from the dead.

The Gospels are clear about the dangers that the Myrrh-bearers faced. Sol-

Dealing With Fear & Faith.....pg. 1

The Words We Choose.....pg. 2

Church & Wellness.....pg. 3

Spiritual Thoughts; Philoptochos News.....pg. 4

AHEPA News; St. George Book Store.....pg. 5

Prophet Elijah; In-Person Worship; Archdiocese Clergy-Laity Congress.....pg. 6

July 2020 Parish Calendar.....pg. 7

Mailing Address
St. George Church
 P.O. Box 4755
 Palm Desert, CA 92261
 Tel: (760) 568-9901
 FAX: (760) 568-9492
 Email: psaintgeorge@gmail.com
 Website: www.go-stgeorge.org
 -Fr. Theodore Pantels, Pastor--
 -Dcn. Euthym Kontaxis, M.D.

diers were posted to protect the tomb against anyone who would be so foolish as to visit. Also, a large stone covered the entrance to His tomb. Despite these obstacles, while the Disciples were in hiding in fear of persecution, these Women calculated an approach to God's Tomb with caution, even wondering about who would roll the stone away. Their fears melted away in the face of Christ's Resurrection from the dead, the ultimate expression of God's love for humanity.

We are called to approach all of the Holy Sacraments of the Church in the same way as the Myrrh-bears approached the Tomb — "*with fear of God; with love and with faith.*"

Let us understand what is meant by "the fear of God." In essence, this is the fear of committing sin due to our lack of faith in God. Placing our faith in false-gods and in our own pride leads to sin. That is why glorifying Jesus Christ so that others are not deceived into worshiping demons or idols has always been the highest priority for the Saints. The Three Holy Youth in the Book of Daniel, for example, considered giving glory to God to be more important than their own lives. They chose the fiery furnace rather than to betray God. In turn, their lives were miraculously saved. It is a reality that serves to strengthen our own resolve to glorify Christ in light of present-day circumstances.

Let us then avoid despair and anger, since they are born from lack of faith in God and give rise to many sins.

To the extreme, *remembrance of death*, rather than the *fear* of death, allows us to place our *faith* in Christ our God, as we remain cautious against all factors that lead to sin and away from our Savior.

+FR. THEODORE

THE WORDS WE CHOOSE

(excerpts)

In his booklet, *The Body of Christ* (orthodoxmarketplace.com) about making the Church accessible to those of us with disabilities, Fr. John Chryssavgis moves us from whatever phrase we have used in the past, such as "crippled," "handicapped" or "disabled" to the phrase that recognizes individuals as people first — "*People with disabilities.*"

This might be dismissed as just the latest politically correct phrase in a long line of politically correct phrases with which people are always correcting us. But is it?

Instead of the words, "handicapped," "cripple," "victim," "retarded," "stricken," "poor," "unfortunate," "autistic" or "special needs," we use the phrase "person with disabilities." This is called "person-first" language. It describes what a person *has* rather than what a person *is*. It reminds us that, first of all, we are describing *a person* — a person created by God with a unique set of gifts and abilities.

But words matter. The term "slaves" [calls to mind] the way people were treated for a long time in this country...So, once again, we might need to change our vocabulary, to recognize the personhood of those about whom we are speaking. "Enslaved people" makes us think and hopefully brings us to realize that God did not create people to be slaves. These people were "enslaved" by other people. The men and women it describes are human beings — persons created by God; human beings with the same inherent dignity, rights and feelings as anyone else.

In conclusion, we are called to see Jesus Christ in all people. He told us, "...as you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

These seemingly small changes in the way we see and describe our world can help to form in us virtues such as patience, kindness, honesty, empathy, and forgiveness. These, in turn, help us to grow in love for the other, and to avoid the pit-

Continued on the next page ----->



THE WORDS WE CHOOSE, Continued

falls of fear, anger and hatred. Instead of seeing only the appearance of the people God places in our path each day, we can look into their eyes and see the *person* created by God.

+FR. JIM KORDARIS,

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Director of Stewardship, Outreach, Evangelism.

CHURCH & WELLNESS

Orthodox Church Speaks Out Against Yoga

On June 5, 2020, the Greek Orthodox Church of Greece officially spoke out against the practice of Yoga (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52935478>). According to the ruling issued by the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, "*Yoga has no place in the life of Christians. [Yoga] is a fundamental chapter in Hindu religion... it is not [simply] a 'kind of physical exercise'.*" Speaking to the media (BBC), Fr. Michael Konstantinidis said that the reasoning of the Church on this issue is based on the "*experience of those who practiced yoga; if yoga offered what man wanted, we would be happy.*" This official position validates the warnings of several Orthodox priests and monks from earlier years. Priestmonk Kosmas of the Orthodox Monastery of Archangel Michael in Australia, back in 2014, warned that Yoga teaches that the *self* is *god*, whereby the focus of thought is more on techniques rather than on relationships – the chief of all relationships being a relationship with the True God. Hence, prayer, being a *relationship* with Christ is of ultimate value. It involves the power of the Cross and illumination of the Holy Spirit in revealing Christ to us. (See YouTube: "Orthodox Talks," Talk 61: "*Physical, Mental and Spiritual Illness: Orthodoxy vs. New Age Healing*").

In the Cross of our Savior, there is the vision of divine humility, through which human nature can take on the divine qualities of our loving God and Savior. This stands in contrast to the Yoga symbol of the Om. The Om symbolizes the energies of a cold and impersonal universe and suggests that emphasis is to be given to the "spiritual authority" of the *self*. In the Cross peace is achieved through loving sacrifice with the power

of Christ – ultimately the forgiveness from the Cross shared by followers of Christ. In the Om, peace is achieved through a sense of "zoning out" without necessarily offering the sacrificial love that leads to repentance and forgiveness of wrongs, by way of Christ-like humility and prayerful vigilance against temptations.

In the Cross, one sees the purpose of human life being that of unity with our loving God and Creator of the universe forever living in His Kingdom. In the Om, one sees the purpose of human life as being forever connected with impersonal "life-forces" of the universe, irrespective of whether or not those "life-forces" are demons leading to eternal misery, dehumanization and coldness. Indeed, human experience on every level reveals that whatever *feels* good, may be only an illusion and may, in fact, be an evil force within the universe itself. Acting on *feelings* only is the "stuff" of temptations.

According to St. Paisios the Athonite, peace within us and, by extension, outside of us is achieved when we stop worshipping our *self* and stop looking for false-gods and ideologies that help us *feel* good as "only human", rather than *being* good as saints.

With this in mind, St. Paisios gives this advice with regard to finding peace and fulfillment in our personal lives, as well as in the lives of others: "*Only when we are reconciled with God can inward and outward peace come. To be reconciled with God, we must first attain awareness [of our faults and weaknesses] and repent [by making every effort] to live according to God's Commandments. Then the grace and peace of God will enter us.*" (See: *Spiritual Counsels of St. Paisios the Athonite*, Vol. II, "*Spiritual Awakening*").

+FR. THEODORE

SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS

by

Deacon Euthym

"The Lord does not show Himself to a proud soul. The proud soul, no matter how many books it reads, will never know God, since by its pride it does not give place for the grace of the Holy Spirit, while God is known only by the humble soul. Pride does not allow the soul to set out on the path of faith. Here is my advice to the unbeliever: let him say, "Lord, if you exist, then illumine me, and I will serve you with all my heart and soul." And for this humble thought and readiness to serve God, the Lord will immediately illumine him... And then your soul will sense the Lord; she will sense that the Lord has forgiven her, and loves her, and you will know this from experience, and the grace of the Holy Spirit will be a witness in your soul of your salvation, and you will want to cry out to the whole world: "The Lord loves us so much!" St. Silouan the Athonite

We all experience doubt, but out of pride we hold onto the doubt since by humbling ourselves we open the door to the idea that we are wrong. In order to remove doubt we must first remove pride so as St Silouan alludes to, we can experience God's love first hand. Pride destroys us and in turn we harm others. Pride allows us to do the unthinkable. Pride prevents us from loving and experiencing love, primarily the love of God. In a pride-less world there would be no conflict and we would put God front and center. God presented Himself to humanity as a humble person, humble beginnings, humble ministry and ultimately the most humiliating of ends. In that humility God was glorified, conquered death, healed and resurrected from the dead, saving all of mankind. Can we not imitate this saving humility just a little? Let us move forward and eliminate the sin and the obstacle of pride in our life.

"False thoughts in the matter of faith immediately reveal themselves; they kill the life of the heart, which is a sign that they proceed from a liar, a visionary, having the power of death – the Devil. True thoughts show their truth by deeds; they give life to the heart, a sign that they pro-

ceed from the life-giving Spirit of God, the Life itself, Who proceedeth from the Life– the Father– and resteth in the Life– the Son. "By their fruits ye shall know them." – Righteous John, Wonderworker of Kronstadt

This is very helpful in identifying the source of our thoughts. When our thoughts lead to despair or anxiety and "kill the life of the heart" they are not from God. When our thoughts lead to filling our hearts with life and hope and lead us to bear good fruit, they proceed from, and are inspired by, God. They are independent of our worldly circumstances. Let us step outside of what is on our minds and take account of our thoughts. If they are troublesome and do not lead to repentance or "don't feel right" in our heart, push them out. If they lead to repentance, a desire to glorify God, bring us peace, and bring "life" to our heart, then these thoughts are inspired by God. Neither the devil nor God can "give" us our thoughts, they can suggest them (in the case of the devil), who suggests usually from worldly sources, or inspire them (if they are from God) and usually these healthy thoughts are inspired from the lives of the saints, Scripture or writings of the Fathers. Ultimately though, we have free will and "choose" our own thoughts. Since we have this great gift of free will we can choose what our focus is. The devil would have us believe that we are "stuck" with our thoughts. On the contrary, we choose, God gave us freedom to open our minds to thoughts, that gives our minds rest, makes our hearts sing and lead us to actions that glorify God.

PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS



Highlights from the St. George Philoptochos Chapter July 2020 newsletter, *Philo Strong*, which is sent to you with the July 2020 of the issue of *The Voice of St. George*:

Philoptochos Chapter President, **Rhonda Latkovic**, announced that, after our Philoptochos Chapter's first successful food drive in May that accumulated 480 pounds (1920 meals) of non-perishable food for the local food bank, we are

Continued on the next page ----->

PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS, Continued

continuing the food drive until June 28th with delivery of the food set for June 30th to "The Narrow Door" food bank in Indio, CA. We will update you in July with the amount collected. Our goal is to collect 1 TON (8000 meals) of food by September 1st! With your help we can accomplish this! "Thank You" to all who have contributed towards this project!

Our own Philoptochos sister, Vice-President **Athena Snarskis**, has continued her mission as a volunteer with the **CV Mask Project** to create masks for local valley residents. Athena has made over **300 adult & kids masks & 25 hospital gowns** since April!

This **August 21-22, the National Philoptochos convention will be held via Zoom**. The fee for a delegate to participate is \$50.00 per person, up to 3 voting delegates per Chapter. If you are interested in participating in this "virtual" convention, we are asking you to contact President, **Rhonda Latkovic** prior to **August 1, 2020**. Email: r.s.fleminglatkovic@gmail.com, or telephone: (714) 875-4661. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, and our inability to hold fundraisers over the past four months, we humbly ask that a participant cover the \$50 registration fee.

AHEPA NEWS

A specially trained PTSD dog is able to provide security and calming effects, as well as helping with one's physical exercise, making a positive difference in the life of those that suffer with post-traumatic stress disorder. The AHEPA Service Dogs for Warriors program directs funds towards purchasing service dogs for veterans in need. This past year's **Win for Wynn Program** in honor of our AHEPA President, **Wynn Storton**, to provide a service dog for Veterans' needs was very successful. Many thanks to those who have supported this worthy cause.

The **2020 AHEPA Family Convention** scheduled to be held in Orlando, Florida this summer has been cancelled. National and local AHEPA mem-

bers will be receiving reports regarding AHEPA Family ministries throughout the year. *The AHEPAN* magazine will prove to be a valuable means for receiving the year-round news and updates of the AHEPA Family projects and programs.

ST. GEORGE PARISH BOOK STORE

The coronavirus has taken a toll on our St. George parish book store. The inventory has not been selling at all.

Below are some of the items that were popular before the coronavirus came into our world.

All of our book store items are available for sale and will be mailed out for home delivery. Contact our parish office at (760) 568-9901, or (760) 880-5869 for information about item quantities and prices and to place an order to be mailed out (free shipping). Items include books, icons, crosses, incense, greeting cards, hand censors.

Requested items that are not in stock will be ordered for you.

Popular books available:

- *Your Thoughts Determine Your Life*, by Elder Thaddeus of Vitconica.
- ◆ *His Good Stuff*, by Dr. John Manassis
- ◆ *How to be a Sinner*, by Peter Bouteneff
- ◆ *Women Saints*, by Fr. George Poulos
- ◆ *A Cloud of Witnesses*, by Bishop Demetrios Khoury

Popular items available:

- ◆ Incense, charcoal
- ◆ Icons - small, large - wood mounted/framed
- ◆ Icon-Prayer bracelets
- ◆ Baptismal crosses



Many Orthodox religious books to be sold.



Parish Book Store icons, censors, religious cards

PROPHET ELIJAH: THE SECOND FORERUNNER OF THE LORD

The Prophet Elijah is introduced in First Kings 17:1 as delivering a message from God to Ahab, King of Israel. Ahab was a faithless king who was married to Jezebel, who was worse.

In preparation for Elijah's work, Elijah met Obadiah, one of Ahab's officers, who was seeking pasturage for cattle. Ahab met Elijah and reproached him for being a "troubler of Israel." It was then proposed that sacrifices be publicly offered to the false-god, Baal, on the one hand, and to the True God of Israel, on the other to see which one was the real, living God. This "contest" was done on Mt. Carmel. The result was that those present realized that Baal was a false-god and the God of Israel was the True God.

Jezebel became enraged by the fate of Baal's priests and threatened to put Elijah to death. Therefore, Elijah fled in alarm to Beersheba and lived alone in the wilderness. As he wandered in the wilderness, an angel touched him, offering him a cake and a pitcher of water, commanding him to go to Damascus and anoint Hazael as king of the Armenians in Syria, who, in turn designated Jehu as king over Israel. God sent him to the widow Zarephath and restored life to the widow's son (1 Kings 17: 2-24)

Having fulfilled his duty before the Lord and the people of God, the Prophet Elijah was taken up into heaven in a fiery chariot, but not before he bestowed his mantle to Elisha, who continued Elijah's God-centered ministry. In 2 Kings 2:13-15, it is clear that the Mantle was a double portion of Elijah's spirit.

In the Troparion Hymn that is chanted on the Feast Day of St. Elijah, we confess: *An angel of the Lord, the second forerunner of the coming of Christ...The glorious Lord sent grace from on to Elijah. Therefore, he pours forth healing on all who honor him.*"

While the Feast Day of St. Prophet Elijah is celebrated on **July 20th** every year, he is again hon-

ored on **August 6th** of every year, when we celebrate the Transfiguration of our Lord and Savior. Here, Moses and Elijah both appear with Christ -- a sign that shows the spiritual connection between this famous prophet of the Old Testament with the True God, our Lord, Jesus Christ. The Disciples were amazed during this event in the Lord's life, witnessing Moses and Elijah appearing with Him in His glory.

We thank God for the prophetic gift of Prophet Elijah and for what he gives to all of us. May we share in this gift and also see this light of the Transfiguration!

--MATTHEW DAVIS

WELCOMING ST. GEORGE PARISHIONERS BACK TO IN-PERSON WORSHIP

We have been blessed to see our parishioners returning to in-person worship here at St. George! This would not be the case if it were not for the dedicated efforts of all of our St. George parishioners, as recently noted by our "In-Person Worship" Chairman, **Peter Snarskis**. The return to in-person has become a reality because of the cooperation and understanding of each of our St. George parishioners, who have complied with the rules with humility and with sincere love for one and other.

We offer thanks to God for our wonderful parishioners who make glorifying our Savior as a community possible.

ARCHDIOCESE CLERGY-LAITY CONGRESS

The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese will hold its Bi-annual Clergy-Laity Congress on **September 9th and 10th, 2020**. It will be conducted in the ZOOM format.

The agenda includes reports from members of all Archdiocese Ministries and committees. Participants include clergy and representatives of the parishes. Updates will be provided daily online at: www.goarch.org.

Passage of the Archdiocese 2021-2022 Budget is expected.

PARISH CALENDAR FOR: JULY 2020

In accordance with CDC guidelines, we have sent our official "Welcome Back To Worship at our St. George Church" letter to all parishioners, stating the guidelines to be followed by each parishioner for participating in our Holy worship services. We encourage each one to "police themselves" so that we can maintain our status to remain open for all other parishioners throughout this stage of development in managing the current Covid-19 crisis.

Sunday, July 5th.....	4th SUNDAY OF ST. MATTHEW Orthros-8:30 a.m./ Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m. Epistle-Galatians 5:22-6:2; Gospel – St. Matthew 8:5-13
Tuesday, July 7th.....	"ZOOM" Bible Study – 10:00 a.m.
Wednesday, July 8th.....	Parish Council Meeting (via ZOOM) - 2:30 p.m.
Sunday, July 12th.....	5th SUNDAY OF ST. MATTHEW Orthros-8:30 a.m./ Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m. Epistle-Romans 10:1-10; Gospel- St. Matthew 8:28-34; 9:1
Tuesday, July 14th.....	"ZOOM" Bible Study – 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, July 19th.....	HOLY SAINTS OF THE 4th ECUMENICAL COUNCIL Orthros -8:30 a.m. / Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m. Epistle- Titus 3:8-15; Gospel- St. Matthew 5:14-19
Tuesday, July 21st.	NO BIBLE STUDY
Sunday, July 26th.....	ST. PARASKEVI Orthros-8:30 a.m./ Divine Liturgy -9:30 a.m. Epistle- Galatians 3:23-29; 4:1-5; Gospel – St. Matthew 9:27-35