

News from St. Nick's

Sunday, October 4, 2020

Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Apostolic Reading: 2 Corinthians 11:31-12:9

Gospel: Luke 6:31-36

(Sermon on the Mount - Love Your Enemies)

Tone 8 • Matins Gospel 6

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PARTICIPATING IN SERVICES. As a reminder, you may attend Liturgy on Sundays at church. Here are the [Guidelines](#) for attending Church services. Everyone **must wear a mask** while present, and **at this time we can comfortably accommodate approximately 50 people**. Please follow the directions of Parish Council members at all times as they will ensure it is controlled and safe for all.

WE ARE LIVE-STREAMING THE LITURGY. If you are not able or ready to return to church, you may access the live-stream of Divine Services. Go to: www.stnicholaschurch.org and click on "**Live Streaming of Services**". To view previous Services on our YouTube Channel, [click here](#).

FOOD PANTRY. Help is needed to staff our monthly responsibility at the Orthodox Food Center THIS Saturday, October 3rd, from 9 am-noon. About 4 people are needed. Donations of food are always needed, and may be dropped off at the Food Pantry housed at St. Spyridon Cathedral. If you can help in this worthwhile ministry, please. e-mail [Nicole Apostola](mailto:nicole.apostola@gmail.com) at nicole.apostola@gmail.com.

MUSTARD SEED MEAL. We are providing a meal for the Mustard Seed on Friday, October 16th for 100 people. Given the virus, the meals are now pre-packaged and dropped off, ready to be distributed by their regular staff of volunteers. If you would like to donate toward the cost of the meal (around \$300.00), or If you or your family would like to help with the preparation, please contact **Betty Anderson — by e-mail** (bettya16@verizon.net) or **phone** 508-353-9449.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CLASSES have begun. There are three classes, according to grade level. Class sizes are no more than 5 students. The standard Covid-19 protocols are followed. If you have questions or to sign your child up to attend class, please contact: for grades **K through 2nd**, Cristina Iusco at cristinaiusco@yahoo.com; for grades **3rd through 6th**, Gina Skaff at ginaskaff@hotmail.com; and for **grades 7th and up**, Fadi Girgis at elfady@yahoo.com. You may download a [Registration Form by clicking here](#).

THANKS TO THOSE WHO HELPED WITH THE ELECTRONICS/WHITE GOODS RECYCLING event last Saturday. The team is coordinated by Gerry Belba, and included: George Belba, Chris Seith and Nick Johnson. Thank you!

STEWARDSHIP. This is a difficult time for everyone, on so many levels. One is economic. But if you are able, please continue to send what stewardship offering that you feel you can afford. Keep in mind that **the Church is also in the same situation**. There are on-going expenses. You may mail any contributions to the Church address, or you may give on-line, at the parish website by [clicking here](#). God bless you and keep you safe!

WE HAVE A COVID FUND. There are people both in our parish and in the larger community who are in need during this time. **If you need help**, whatever it might be, including financial assistance, please contact Fr. Nick. We'll find a way to assist you. **ALSO**, we are asking the faithful in our parish **WHO ARE ABLE**, to perhaps contribute toward this fund. We've set up a small committee, headed by Fr. Nick, to administer this fund, and distribute what we're able to give as equitably as possible. **May God keep us all!**

COMMUNITY NEWS

The International Orthodox Christian Charities team in Beirut has reported on the heartbreaking impact of this tragedy and is planning how to best help the people of Lebanon. **Short-term assistance will include hygiene parcels, expansion of community kitchens, and building rehabilitation. Given the continuing danger posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, all activities will incorporate measures to prevent the further spread of the virus.** Your support of IOCC's work through their International emergency response effort will allow them to respond quickly and effectively in Lebanon. [Click on this link](#) for the online donation form.

HOLY TRINITY NEWS

Update for the week of Sept. 21st

COVID-19 Update—As we continue to monitor, test and communicate the COVID-19 situation, we have had one employee test positive. There have been no residents that have tested positive. Per the Department of Public Health guidelines weekly testing is continuing for those

residents and staff who have always tested negative, until we have 14 days with no new positives. We continue to have adequate PPE and use it per CDC guidelines.

Visitations– As always Facetime and phone calls are encouraged for all residents. Item drop off *is* welcome as well. At this time, residents who are fully recovered from a prior positive test and not showing any signs or symptoms consistent with COVID-19 can participate in outside or window visits. For the time being there are no compassionate visits unless an individual is actively dying. Please reach out to the nurse manager for individual questions. For more information go to <https://www.htnr.net/coronavirus>

Job Openings– Please click here <https://www.htnr.net/careers> to view the latest job openings.

Resident Activities– In order to keep our community safe and healthy we have scaled back on several activities until we have a clear 14-day window of no COVID-19 positive tests. The main dining room and salon is closed for now. However, our outside entertainment is continuing so residents can enjoy music via their windows. Divine Liturgy is limited to residents.

A Prayer of Fr. Laurence

Let us pray to the Lord,

The demons that abuse us at their whim are beyond counting, O God! They continue to nag at us, forever trying to trip us up by wearing down our resistance more and more, and we must confess that frequently they succeed. But we acknowledge our share of guilt, Lord, and our wrongdoing fills us with dismay. Therefore, come quickly to our aid and reinforce our perseverance.

For you are good and full of love for us, O God, and we give you glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: now and forever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

My Power is Made Perfect in Weakness

The Epistle lesson this week, the nineteenth after Pentecost, is taken from St. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians (11:31-12:9). In it St. Paul describes a vision of God that he had at the very outset of his Apostleship, and the profound effect it had on him. Using an experience from his own life, he instructs us in one of the great mystical paradoxes — that God's power is revealed to the world, not through our strengths, but through our weaknesses.

These Letters of St. Paul to the Corinthians present us with something of a conundrum. As I said when commenting on First Corinthians, all we have are St. Paul's responses; we do not have what the Corinthians initially wrote, and might have written back, either individually or collectively. Some passages seem to belong to a "third" letter that St. Paul refers to in the two texts that we have. In both letters there are places where the tone seems to shift erratically, suggesting that these sections may have been "pasted" into what we currently have. Without

belaboring the point, in both First and Second Corinthians St. Paul feels that the authenticity of his Apostleship is being attacked. In the passage we read today, as well as in the verses that precede and follow it, St. Paul decides to address this issue directly in order to defend his ministry.

When reading the passage, the first thing that we might notice is the change in the personal pronoun. St. Paul almost never uses “I” when writing to the Churches. Rather, he uses “we,” in order to impress on them that this is not a personal understanding of the Gospel, but one accepted by all Christian believers. However, in this section he speaks in the first person singular. If we sense the shift in language, certainly the original readers of his words did as well.

The second thing that he does is to speak of his weaknesses, of his sufferings. He doesn’t point out his accomplishments. (This is never very effective anyway. Do you believe the person who tells you how great they are?) Rather, he reminds them of how much he has endured for them and for the sake of the Gospel. He is so disappointed in their lack of trust in him that he feels the need to swear an oath: “The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I do not lie” (v. 11:31). And then he begins to tell them a story he has told no one else.

“At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped his hands” (v. 32-33). This part they already knew, but then he begins to speak of the vision he had. “I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter” (v. 12:1-4).

Over the centuries there has been some speculation about the kind of experience that St. Paul had. What we can say for certain is that no one really knows. Even St. Paul couldn’t describe it; words failed him. He had a vision of God that leaves the person receiving it entirely speechless. For him it was a powerful experience of the “Other” such that he had no reference points whatsoever. He is telling the Corinthians and us that this experience of God is true evidence of his Apostleship. The Church, simply put, believed him.

Now notice how he relates the ecstatic experience in the “third” person. He doesn’t want it to appear as though he is bragging. He tells them: “On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses” (v. 5). He wants the Corinthians and us to believe his words on their own merit, not because of who it is who is telling them the story. It is God’s truth—the truth of who and what Jesus the Christ is—that matters. Nevertheless, he says, “Though if I wish to boast, I shall not be a fool, for I shall be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me” (v. 6).

Then he tells us how God has tempered his 'vision': "And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me" (v. 7-8). There are three points in these two verses that we should note. First, St. Paul makes it clear that the experience described above was not the only revelation he had. He speaks of "the abundance of revelations." Second, God tempers Paul's ecstasy with real obstacles—"a thorn in the flesh." Some think that this was an actual bodily ailment; St. John Chrysostom thinks it was his persecutors both inside and outside of the Church. Either way, Paul saw this as God's continuing attempt to keep him humble. And third, that after having prayed multiple times for it to be lifted from him, he reconciled himself to the deeper spiritual reality. He heard and understood God's word: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (v. 9).

We need to truly meditate on St. Paul's words: "I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (v. 9). So often we think that our own resourcefulness, our own zeal, our own intellect, will prove God's truth. The reality is that God's truth becomes clear to others when we don't stand in the way.

Fr. Nicholas Apostola

Orthodox Links

[Romanian Orthodox Metropolia](#) of the Americas
[Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America](#) (Assembly of Bishops)
[International Orthodox Christian Charities](#) (IOCC)
[Orthodox Christian Mission Center](#) (OCMC)
[Orthodox Christian Radio Network](#) (OCN)
[Council of Eastern Orthodox Churches of Central Mass.](#) (CEOC)

Dates To Remember

Oct 3 - Food Pantry - 9 AM - NOON
Oct 16 - Mustard Seed Meal

[St. Nicholas Orthodox Church](#)
[34 Gold St | Shrewsbury, MA 01545-6238](#)

508-845-0088 | fax: 508-845-8850 | email: ParishCouncil@StNicholasChurch.org
www.StNicholasChurch.org

Sunday Services: Matins at 9:00 am and Divine Liturgy at 10:00 am