

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church

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The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost (08.27.2023.)

Matthew 19:16-26

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. **(KJV)**

Possessions impeded the man in the current Gospel from a life of perfection. The man said he had lived according to the commandments. He was unwilling to give up his possessions to follow Christ and to seek eternal life.

Believers are born into this world with God's blessings. Believers take no earthly possessions with them when they depart this life. Jesus Christ defined the steps the rich man was to take in his desire for eternal life.

The rich man's desire for eternal life was not complete. This is a Gospel lesson for believers to assess their personal commitment to Jesus Christ. At Baptism the full person is dedicated and committed to Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the defining standard for all that a believer does from the time of Baptism until departure from this life. All personal thoughts, actions and goals of the believer are to conform to the teachings, life and way of Jesus Christ.

We know from Christ's teachings that the way to eternal life is narrow and difficult, (Mt. 7:14) Adhering to the narrow path throughout life requires strength, wisdom and knowledge from Jesus Christ.

Following the path defined and illumined by Christ entails decisions that are pleasing to Christ. When a believer stumbles, makes errors or takes a wrong turn, repentance is necessary. God's forgiveness and mercy are necessary and beneficial.

Attraction to possessions can cloud the believer's mind and influence personal actions. Desire for material possessions can consume an individual's or family's interests and energy.

Husbands and wives may differ over the interest in acquiring material possessions. Children may be raised to pursue material wealth with little thought given to the care of their souls.

Parents, relatives and friends set examples for the youths in their midst in the goals they adopt and pursue. When the Kingdom of God is the priority, the accumulation and managing of material wealth is put in perspective.

The present Gospel calls upon believers to assess the degree of personal investment in the Kingdom of God. The Gospel raises the question: "Are material possessions more important than possessing eternal life?"

Today's Gospel uncovers the most prized part of the rich man's heart. The man's possessions are what he prized the most. He prized his possessions more than eternal life.

Parents are challenged by the present Gospel to consider the goals being established for their children. Mothers and fathers are asked to examine if they are raising their sons and daughters with the goal of eternal life?

Not all believers are parents. Questions regarding personal values apply to all believers. Honestly examining the heart, mind and soul will reveal the true interests and goals of personal life.

The present Gospel is a measuring statement for personal and family values. Do individuals and parents devote so much effort to work for material possessions that little time and energy are left to pursue the Kingdom of God?

The hunger of the soul is not satisfied by the accumulation of material possessions. The desire for God and eternal life comes through centering the heart, mind and soul in Christ.

Our relationship with Jesus Christ is defined in our personal relationships in the home, at work and in the community. The way we live with and treat each other reveals whether Jesus Christ, God's Kingdom and eternal life are primary interests,

When Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God are the primary interests in life, all other aspects of life take their proper place. Relationships, goals and possessions in life are to be viewed in accord with Christ's teachings and example.

At Baptism, belief in Christ is professed as King and as God. Daily life until departure from this life is to be lived in accord with Christ being King and God.

Personal possessions and pursuits are to conform to the path to God's Kingdom.

Love and honor for the Lord God are revealed in the way the believer lives after exiting the Baptismal font until departure from this life. In the end, each person will stand before the returning Christ for the Great and Final Judgment.

The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost. Holy Prophet Micah. Forefeast of the Dormition.
August 14/27, 2023. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania.

Father Rodney Torbic

ST. STEPHAN OF FILEIKA ON PRAYER

Extracts from His Works

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Rom. 10:13).

The [purpose of the Christian life](#) on earth is to strive for union with God, so that man, gradually developing the spiritual abilities placed in him by the Creator, could in the end unite with Him in eternity and enjoy communion with Him. Those who desire to achieve the salvation of the soul must not only fight with sin, but also strive to acquire the virtues. According to the teaching of the Vyatka ascetic and spiritual writer St. Stephan of Fileika, the most important aspect of spiritual work, and a means of acquiring the virtues, is prayer.



St. Stephan at his cell

It's impossible to imagine the spiritual life of a man without the asceticism of [prayer](#), because “without prayer, not only does any virtue weaken, but the spiritual life of the perfect itself ceases in a man.” “To labor with a good feat of faith and complete the course of our earthly life without stumbling, we must pray vigilantly.”

Prayer, according to the teaching of the saint, is firstly a necessary and irreplaceable means “of freeing us from darkness and entering into the wonderful light of God, or, in other words, coming out from under the power of satan (cf. Acts 26:18) and settling into the Kingdom of God.”

Secondly, it is necessary for the preservation of the grace given by God. “The flame kindled by prayer doesn’t allow any sinful thought to reach the heart,” Fr. Stephan teaches. And thirdly, prayer is the core and breath of the spiritual life, without which a man dies in spirit: “As the life of a fish ends without water, so without prayer, the soul of man, separated from the Spirit of God, freezes or falls into a mortal sleep.” “Here is a sign of a soul that has died for God: numbness of heart, the cessation of inner prayer.” Many spiritual ailments, according to Fr. Stephan, are directly connected with the absence of prayerful activity in the life of man: “This is why a man loses heart—because he stops praying.”

The saint defines prayer as “the petition of the mind and heart to God, the union of the soul with God; and by its action—the revitalization and breath of the immortal Spirit.” At the same time, the essence of prayer should manifest itself in the appeal of the mind and heart of man to God, without which “external prayer is like a soulless, stillborn fruit of the womb.” In the understanding of St. Stephan, prayer itself is a gift of God: “Man learns prayer only by God, Who gives prayer to the one who prays.” From man is required the participation of his heart: “He who truly prays is he who prays with his spirit, without which even the most eloquent petitions are in vain. Therefore, don’t consider it success in prayer when you read many prayers, but when every word comes from your heart.”

How to pray

Speaking about prayer, St. Stephan doesn’t emphasize the prayer rule itself, but speaks about prayerful work as such. It should be noted that St. Stephan celebrated the full cycle of daily services and read akathists every day. He gave special preference to the akathist to the [Holy Protection of the Most Holy Theotokos](#) and advised others to read akathists every day.

Neither the place nor the position of the body play an essential role in the success of the work of prayer. “If you have a broken heart, then people won’t hinder you, and location won’t impede you from offering your sacrifice to God at any time. You can sit on the ground and look up to Heaven and sigh about your sins—even lying down is no worse than standing in church—and beseech mercy from God, for God doesn’t disdain any position from a man of prayer if he has a spiritual disposition towards Him and a repentant heart.”

At the same time, the saint sharply indicates the need to go to church services: “We know that there is divine ministry in the house of God; because if someone doesn’t go to the house of God, it means he doesn’t want to serve God; whoever doesn’t want to be a servant of God, he involuntarily becomes a slave of the enemy of God—the devil, and shall forfeit the inheritance of the slaves of God—the Kingdom of Heaven, and go into the torment prepared for the devil and his accomplices.” It should be noted that a separate work of Fr. Stephan, *Talks on Serving God on Feast Days*, is completely dedicated to fulfilling the fourth commandment of the Law of God. For successful prayer, we need humility and the fear of God. “The Lord, as it’s said, *will perform the desire of them that fear him: and He will hear their supplication* (Ps. 144:19); therefore, when you begin to pray, think about who you are and Who it is you’re daring to speak with.”

According to the saint, a necessary condition for proper prayer is renouncing your own will and completely trusting in God in the matter of receiving what you beseech: “So, for example, a man

desires to do some good, which he's unable to do, or which is incongruent with his way of life, or it's premature, when he has neither knowledge nor humility; then the evil spirit kindles a desire and compels him to do good, from which there is confusion of soul, despondency, and even despair. That's why we should pray not according to our own desire, but as is pleasing to God; for He alone knows how the soul of every man can be saved."

It would be irrational to pray from an impure heart, from an unbroken spirit, asking for vain and earthly things at the expense of the spiritual. "But perhaps the greatest of these evils," concludes Fr. Stephan, "is to pray with malice against our neighbor. If a man brings hatred for another to the house of God instead of the God-pleasing sacrifice of a contrite spirit, his prayer will be sin for him, will bring him great condemnation, and he will be rejected by God."

"External prayer with malice, without the forgiveness of our neighbor and done for show for the sake of our vanity is not only unacceptable, but sinful before God. God's longsuffering is put to the test by those of us who turn to God with less reverence than to a nobleman, who read prayers so hastily that the mind can't follow the words; and therefore our thoughts, like the smoke of Cain's sacrifice, only swirl about above the earth." No less important in the work of prayer are the temperance of the belly and divinely-wise silence.

St. Stephan reveals the problem of a scattered mind in prayer. In line with the Patristic experience, he encourages man not to despond and not to give up prayer, but to "strive with all his might to turn his mind to God or to enclose it in the meaning of the words of prayer," to direct one's thoughts to God if only for a short time. Through frequent prayer, man can acquire "that prayerful spirit that will be poured out before God from the fullness of the heart."

The Jesus Prayer

Of course, St. Stephan places special emphasis on the [Jesus Prayer](#): "The invocation of the name of the Lord, or the prayer, 'Lord, have mercy! Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!' is a work without which it's impossible to be saved. For we're not saved by our own power, but by the mercy of God; therefore, with every petition we cry out in church: 'Lord, have mercy!'"

"The prayer of the heart, or noetic prayer, is accompanied by the vision, the contemplation of God Himself, which is achieved by constantly forcing yourself to think about God, relentlessly entreating God's mercy for yourself... Whoever cleanses his heart from all vain thoughts and establishes his mind in thoughts of God, his soul will be filled with joy in the presence of the Lord and will enjoy blessedness at His right hand forever (Ps. 15:11)."

Such a man "no longer ceases from prayer, if he gives himself up to self-abandonment, for the Spirit of God within him constantly intercedes for his salvation and produces groanings in his soul that are, as it's said, inexpressible . Then, even in a state of sleep, as in a state of wakefulness, prayer never ceases in the soul; but whether this man takes food and drink or something else, even in deep sleep, prayer flows from his heart without any difficulty. Such a prayer, though it

may fall silent externally, always emits a sweet fragrance in the soul, always leads it to tenderness, to contemplation of the inscrutable goodness of God.”

Therefore, a man who has acquired such a dispensation strives for greater silence and removes himself from fellowship with people. And it is precisely such a prayerful state of spirit that’s precious before God, when “the hidden man of the heart offers its petitions and the gratitude of a meek and silent spirit to Him.”

How to learn the Jesus Prayer

For those who haven’t acquired the skill of praying in the spirit at all times, St. Stephan exhorts them to pray verbally more often and to strengthen this prayer with prostrations. “Noetic prayer and prayer of the heart isn’t acquired overnight; but it happens as a result of increased compulsion and constant exercise in prayer,” concludes Fr. Stephan.

According to the saint, forcing ourselves to nighttime prayer helps us acquire prayer, which doesn’t stop anymore, even in the silence of sleep.

But at the same time, it’s important to remember that “the power of grace-filled consolation of prayer lies not in words but in the disposition of the soul and the union of the heart with God. Therefore, don’t worry about saying the Jesus Prayer (so called because the name of Jesus Christ is repeated) as much as possible, but try to keep your mind and heart stuck on God and find all goodness in communion with Him.”

“The best way of silent prayer—noetic, or spiritual—is as follows: Draw the mind’s attention to the heart and keep it in that state without any thought, internally saying: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.’ And this simple action brings the soul into the most peaceful state, establishes the Kingdom of God within, and produces wonderful consolation and an insurmountable rest in God.”

Speaking of the heights of prayerful activity, the saint often comforts his reader with such thoughts: “Of course, you can’t immediately reach the state where you pray with true prayer; the saints didn’t immediately reach this high blessedness; but with effort, constantly engaging in prayer, they produced fruit in patience.”

Prayer and alms

But for all the importance of the work of prayer, “prayer alone isn’t enough for salvation,” St. Stephan admonishes, “for the Lord Himself declares: *And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not*

the things which I say? (Lk. 6:46). Faith without good works is dead (cf. Jas. 2:20). Therefore, we have to look at God-pleasing works that animate the soul and elevate man to the kingdom of eternal life.”

“For the soul to soar from earthly to Heavenly cares, we have to, as someone said, give it two wings: prayer and alms. Almsgiving delivers us from death,” Scripture says, “and doesn’t allow us to go into darkness (cf. Tob. 4:11). In pursuit of Heavenly blessings, prayer serves as a second wing. To defeat the celestial spirits of evil (cf. Eph. 6:12), which plunge the soul into unbelief and despondency, we need diligent prayer to God the Savior...”

St. Stephan, himself a great man of prayer who experienced the fruits of the work of prayer, inspires by his advice to go out to meet the God Who is seeking us by means of prayer, to enter into communion with God and achieve knowledge of God. The saint’s advice inspires every man who desires to save his soul to take up the work of prayer: “The prayer of the most sinful man can do much when it rises from the depths of a contrite and humble heart; the experience of all the ages shows that all who hope in the Lord are accounted worthy of His favor.” “So, have zeal for prayer and no longer consider it useless; don’t think you’re wasting time and energy when you offer verbal service to God.”

Priest Alexei Veretelnikov
Translation by Jesse Dominick

Services this Week

- ❖ **Monday- 08.28.2023. – Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary - FGSS will be celebrating its annual Patronal Feast, at the St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Church in McKeesport -The Hierarchical Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM**
- ❖ **Friday – 09.01.2023. – PARALYSIS - THE OFFICE OF SUPPLICATION TO SAINT NECTARIOS -05:00 PM – Confession**
- ❖ **13th Sunday after Pentecost– 09.03.2023. – 10:00 AM Divine Liturgy – Prayer for the beginning of the new school year**

Donations August 20, 2023

Offering - \$ 968.00

Candles - \$71.00

Large Candles

In Memory of Panie Patty Martinovich from Dan & Dyne Tomak

In Memory of Steve & Stella Baich from Kathy Szmyd

In Memory of Connie Bartis from Kathy Szmyd

In Memory of Irene Martinovich from Dorothy Podolak

In Memory of Lazo & Bosa Vuckovich from Helene Gleason

Please visit our St. Nicholas Web Page <https://stnicholasjohnstown.org>
We have now added a "DONATE" button to make it easier for you to send your donations. Please take a look.

Recently we received an anonymous donation of \$1,000 for the purchase of buying new altar robes for the altar servers. The total cost of the new robes is \$1,543.36. We have surpassed our goal and are now saving for a second set of robes. Please contact Carole McAllister or Carly Zahurak.

Thank you to the following for helping us meet and surpass our goal!!!

Melanie Schall, Frank Palmer, Brian Gjurich, Dyne Tomak, Kathy Urban in Memory of her Mother, Irene Martinovich, Mame & Brandon Simms, Dorothy Podolak, Rick Kondas, Donna Zimmerman, Sylvester Gjurich & Joseph Golden

**Beginning Sunday September 10th,
Divine Liturgy will begin at 10:00 AM**

SLAVIC FESTIVAL WORKERS!!!!

Please sign up in the candle room or see Suzette

UPCOMING EVENTS



*Work schedule
sign-ups begin next
week*

Slavic Festival – September 15-16, 2023

KOLO SLAVA

Sunday, September 24, 2023

BASKET PARTY

Sunday, October 29, 2023

