

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church
971 St. Clair Rd, Johnstown, PA 15905
Rev. Presbyter Dragan Vukovic
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The Twenty First Sunday after Pentecost
(11.17.2024.)

Luke 8:5-15

A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience. **(KJV)**

The Holy Gospel is proclaimed in each Divine Liturgy. Ears listening to the Holy Gospel differ in reception. Each person at the Divine Liturgy listens with varying degrees of making the Gospel a permanent part of life.

The Gospel is read with the intention each person will take the Gospel to heart. The Gospel is proclaimed for each person to become more Christ-like. Lasting change takes time.

The Gospel describes the honest and good heart as bringing forth fruit with patience. Developing an honest and good heart takes time. The heart and mind must be cleansed of sinful thoughts.

An honest and good heart will reveal the dominant presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. An honest and good heart welcomes the Lord Jesus Christ as the primary occupant.

The heart is a battleground where good needs to conquer evil. For Christ to dominate in the heart, the Gospel will be heard and cherished with regularity. Christ is the power to overcome evil.

Christ destroyed death as the barrier to eternal life. Christ's Resurrection proved Christ destroys the limits of death. The heart filled with the Gospel brings forth fruit with patience.

Moment by moment, perilous temptations and inclinations must be rejected and expelled from the heart. Moment by moment throughout life, Christ of the Gospel needs to transform and purify the heart.

Regular use of the Jesus Prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me a sinner" is effective in purifying the heart. The regular use of the Jesus Prayer leads to the development of a good and honest heart.

Joy radiates when Christ dominates the heart. Constant prayer in the heart makes a decided difference. When the Gospel is firmly welcomed, improved differences occur in the person.

The church is not a social club. The church is where Christ comes alive in the heart. The church is where Christ is proclaimed and experienced. The church is where individuals become more Christ-like.

At Holy Baptism, the whole person is dedicated to Christ. Christ is professed as King and God at Holy Baptism. Each remaining moment of life is the opportunity to serve Christ as King and as God.

The condition of the heart dictates the way a person lives. The heart desirous of Christ welcomes the content of the Holy Gospel. Christ is the content of the Gospel.

Christ is the authentic food for the soul. Christ is the most cherished and desired Word. The serious believer never tires of listening to Christ. The serious believer seeks Christ regularly in the Gospel.

Seriously drawing near and loving Christ comes from the heart. The good and honest heart matures with patience. The serious believer is resolute in wanting Christ to fully occupy the heart.

The Jesus Prayer has cleansing effects on the heart. The Jesus Prayer brings change to the heart. Christ fills the heart when the believer practices the Jesus Prayer.

Jesus told one young man: "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God:(Mt:10:17) The good and honest heart is the heart filled with God.

The good and honest heart requires the believer to desire Christ more than anything else. When the person experiences the joy in Christ, all else in life is insufficient.

The good and honest heart has the qualities of Christ. Compassion, forgiveness and love characterize the good and honest heart. Forgiveness and mercy come from the good and honest heart.

The Divine Liturgy is the best place to learn of the good and honest heart. The good and honest heart is fully at home in the Divine Liturgy. Christ is everywhere present at the Divine Liturgy.

Thank God for the renewal possible as a result of the Divine Liturgy. Thank God for making good and honest hearts possible. Christ is the constant hope for good and honest hearts in each person.

The Twenty First Sunday after Pentecost. Venerable Joannicus the Great. November 4/17, 2024. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic

“WEEP NOT!”

The elders are soldiers of Christ, shedding blood in prayer for their neighbors and for the whole world. Fr. Gabriel of Samtavro is called the “Great Love of the Twentieth Century,” because this amazing elder’s labor of love was beyond the understanding of the human mind.

He would walk the streets of Tbilisi barefoot, in rags, with a metal diadem on his head, peering through the neck of a broken jug looking for those whose souls cried out for help. He would cover them with prayer, like a mantle, sharing his faith and sacrificial love. And after his departure into eternity, it all continues: Fr. Gabriel still finds those who are desperate, perishing, and most in need of help.

When I took a blessing from my spiritual father to write a book about Fr. Gabriel, he gave me these mysterious words: “Of course, write, if the saint himself blesses you!” I didn’t ask again—I just took it as the will of God and waited for an answer from Heaven. Probably six months went by after that and the book was almost ready. But how was I to know if the Elder blessed it, and in general, how could he bless me? It was beyond reality...

And one evening, when I was reading one of the stories about him again, my gaze stopped on the words: “Weep not!” My heart froze, and in my soul resounded: “This is the title of your book!” And I immediately remembered what my spiritual father had said.

“Weep not!”—this is indicated by the Elder’s loving gaze and extraordinary soul-warming smile. With these words of comfort, he appeared in a dream to a woman who was on the verge of despair. And when I found out about her life, I realized that St. Gabriel had “introduced” us for a reason. After all, there are no coincidences, especially when you’re taking part in the glorification of God’s saints.

Olga Ivanovna considers St. Gabriel her friend.

“I became deeply attached to the Elder with all my soul,” she said. “I carry his icon with me. And wherever I go, I say: ‘Batiushka, let’s go!’ His icon lies next to me on the pillow, and I entreat: ‘Fr. Gabriel, bless me, pray for me!’ He feels so much like a friend, a father, a loved one, a brother—there’s no one closer. Only the Lord knows...

“And what a joy it was when some benefactors brought to my house an icon of Fr. Gabriel for Lugansk, blessed on his relics! As though he himself walked to my house! And before it was time for it to be transferred, I didn’t know where to take it—several churches asked for it. And while I was in doubt, the saint himself chose a place for it.

“When there was just a little time left before leaving for Lugansk, I begged: ‘Batiushka Gabriel, tell me, what should I do, where should I give your icon? I don’t want to offend anyone!’ I went to bed, and I had a light dream, like I wasn’t really sleeping, just dozing a bit. I saw some unfinished church being built from cinder block—the finishing wasn’t done yet. I heard people singing the Cherubic Hymn. Someone said: ‘Go up to the second floor!’ There was a staircase going straight there with no banister. I quickly went up and I saw the singers. They were standing on the left, and on the right, there was a huge icon of the [Most Holy Trinity](#) hanging on the wall. There was a golden lampada burning in front of it. I saw a priest with a censer coming towards

me. I moved to the right to not be in his way, and I stood by the icon of the Trinity. There was an empty spot next to it. Then suddenly I saw Fr. Gabriel next to me. I heard his voice: ‘This is where I belong!’

“I immediately woke up. These words rang out as though spoken aloud: ‘Do you believe this dream or not?’ I decided not to tell anyone about it, but all I could do was think about it. I didn’t know where this church was! An hour later, a friend from Lugansk called me.

“‘Olga, I heard that you want to bring us an icon of Fr. Gabriel? Maybe you can give it to us? Our rector reveres the Elder very much!’

“At first I objected: ‘No, Galina! It’s not for me to decide. I’m waiting for the priests to choose a place for the icon!’

“And then I asked: ‘Who is your church consecrated to?’

“‘It’s named for St. Nestor the Chronicler. But we’re building a second floor too—we’re going to have an upper Church, named for the Most Holy Trinity.’

“It took my breath away.

“‘The Holy Trinity? And is your church made of gray cinder block?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘And is there a staircase going up to the second floor, with no railing?’

“‘That’s right, no railing. Everything’s been built, but the finishing work isn’t done yet.’

“‘And if we go up the steps, the kliros is on the left?’

“‘That’s right!’

“‘Galina, the icon’s coming to your church!’ I said, and told her about my dream.”

And when Olga arrived in Lugansk and went to this church, she was bewildered.

“It was like I was in another dimension,” she recalls, “because this was the church I had seen in my dream, down to the smallest details! The second entrance from the side of the building, the columns, the steps, the staircase with no railing, the cinder block walls, the boarded-up window over the door, which in my dream I thought was an icon. You go inside, and to the right should be a solid wall, with no windows. And so it was, everything down to a tee! I saw a large shining icon of the Most Holy Trinity, and I remembered the Elder’s words: ‘This is where I belong!’”

Indeed, Fr. Gabriel himself chooses where he should go. He chose our Moscow Church of the Meeting of the Lord in Biryulovo as well. First, his icon, brought from [Samtavro](#), was placed in the temporary wooden church, and after that we began building our new stone church.

I remember when it was being built, Fr. Gabriel suddenly appeared to our benefactor, Artemy, in a dream. That day, Artemy had read an akathist to him, and that night, in his dream, the Elder took him to the market, led him to a counter where they were selling porcelain toys, and bought two—one for himself and one for him. The Elder said: “Try some!” Artemy refused, then Elder Gabriel said: “My dear, remember: Building a church is harder than eating glass! And to gather donations is to shed blood!”

And when Vladyka Thomas served with us on the thirtieth anniversary of the ordination of our rector, Fr. Dmitry, during the festive meal, Batiushka recalled how the cross was consecrated on the site of the future church.

“It was St. Gabriel who built the church for you!” said the dean. “As soon as his icon arrived, it started right away!”

And when, three years later, the church was erected through the prayers of the Elder, our benefactors ordered a large icon of Fr. Gabriel for it. So now, by the will of God, we have two revered icons of Fr. Gabriel: one brought from Samtavro and one painted in Moscow. Perhaps this is the only church where two icons of the saint reside in such an unconventional way. Grace for grace, as they say. And the blessing hand of the Elder is felt in everything, and he continues to act foolish, although it's hard to get used to it. And everyone who has come or been brought to our church to pray at the icons of Fr. Gabriel has received what they asked for: Peace would reign in their souls as if from the blowing of a gentle breeze, all seemingly unbreakable barriers and obstacles would disappear, families would reunite, long-awaited children would be born, and those possessed by addictions would come to their senses. But most importantly, the soul would begin to feel the presence of the Creator, reaching towards eternity. And all of this through the prayers to Christ of the Fool-for-Christ Father Gabriel.

The handmaiden of God Natalia started coming to our icons of Elder Gabriel from another church. She shared the story of her misfortune with us. One fine day, she let her guard down and got into a conversation with some scammers on the telephone, and they managed to deceive her in a major way. After talking with them, Natalia rushed off to take out a bank loan for 900,000 rubles [\$9,380] and immediately gave it all to the scammers. This happened last year. I remember her voice of despair: "Now I'll be paying this huge amount back till the end of my days!"

This is probably what would have happened if she didn't have faith and didn't turn to God: He shall cry unto Me, and I will hearken unto him (Ps. 90:15). Natalia also enlisted the prayerful support of Fr. Gabriel.

"She often came to his icon and read his akathist," the candle seller recalled. "I saw it. Sometimes, when there was no one here, we would read it together."

Then suddenly some unknown man gave Natalia 150,000 rubles [\$1,560]. The church also gathered about 10 or 15,000 rubles [\$104–\$156]. Gradually, money was brought to her and in the end, this huge loan was fully repaid. It simply disappeared before our eyes! And of course, Fr. Gabriel's hand was felt in this incredible story.

And not too long after that, St. Gabriel was even "canonized" as one of the saints of our district. On that memorable day, a tall man walked into the church with a springy gait and said to the person on duty:

"I'm the hockey coach from the Penguins sports school. Please, who can we pray to for victory, to help the game go well?"

"To St. Gabriel of Samtavro," the person at the candle desk replied confidently.

The coach beamed and opened the door:

"Guys, come on in!"

And a robust team burst into the church: about twenty teenagers around thirteen years old. They filled the entire candle stand at Fr. Gabriel's icon with the largest candles.

"So, guys, we're Orthodox, so we cross ourselves with two fingers!" the coach commanded.

"Three!" the person at the candle desk said.

"Of course, three!" the coach said, regaining his bearings. "Guys, let's pray to Gabriel of Biryulovo. He'll help us!"

They crossed themselves clumsily, looked at the face of Fr. Gabriel with hope, and for some reason they had no doubts that they would win: “Gabriel of Biryulovo” wouldn’t let them down! I remember, sometime later, I went to Liturgy, and suddenly a flock of young hockey players overtook me—in windbreakers, hats, big bags behind their backs with hockey sticks poking out. Suddenly, they slowed down and stopped at the door. Silently, as if on command, they took off their hats, crossed themselves, bowed to the church, then joyfully started chattering and jogged off to the rink. Apparently, the Elder had helped them then!

And it’s probably no coincidence that my book about God’s help through the prayers of the saint became the hallmark of our Church of the Meeting of the Lord in Biryulovo. After all, Fr. Gabriel “built” it in an incredibly short time.

And when the time came to release the book, it took me a long time to choose which of two photos of Fr. Gabriel to put on the cover. We decided to turn to Metropolitan Seraphim (Jojua) of Borjomi and Bakuriani, who had given me an interview and his blessing. Vladyka hesitated: “I like both! It would be better to ask some child!”

I didn’t have to think too long about which child to ask. Of course Lazar—he was born by the prayers of the saint, after all! A year and a half before his birth, Fr. Gabriel foretold to Natalia, his mother, in a dream: “You’ll have a son. Name him Lazar!”

And this miracle happened after Natalia humbled herself before God. He showed her his mercy, and instead of the bitterness of childlessness, she received the joy of motherhood. And it was announced by a saint whom she had never even heard of before. Soon after she offered a penitential prayer at the icon of the Savior, Natalia had a dream where she and her husband had gone to some kind of covered market. They had to buy some onions. And they saw behind the counter a dark-haired man of eastern appearance, middle-aged, with a small beard and very kind radiant eyes. Natalia started picking onions when the man said, “You’ll have a son. Name him Lazar!” She thought: “Lazar? What a strange name! I’ve always wanted to name my son Mark...” And the woman froze in thought by this counter and even forgot about the onions...

Then she and her husband went to the exit, and when Natalia opened the door of the pavilion, her heart finally accepted this man’s words: “I agree, let him be Lazar! It’s a beautiful name; I like it!” And just then she woke up...

“Lazar? What a nice name!” said my husband, who really liked this dream. So the couple began to wait for Lazar. And Natalia also told her priest about it: “Batiushka, I had a dream: Some man said that I would have a son and that I have to name him Lazar! And if it really does come true, can we name him that?”

“Of course you can!” Batiushka said smilingly.

“We had a good laugh,” Natalia recalls, “and we forgot about it. And when after nine months I got pregnant, I immediately remembered my dream. At first, my husband and I kept it all a secret—we didn’t even tell our parents. And when the time came, I went for an ultrasound. Thank God, everything was fine! I was thirty-six then. I told one parishioner of our church about my dream when I was in my last trimester. When she heard about the man who gave me the name Lazar, she exclaimed: ‘That was Fr. Gabriel (Urgebadze) who appeared in your dream—no doubt!’ I was surprised: ‘Who is this Gabriel (Urgebadze)? I’ve never heard of him!’ So I decided

to look him up and read his life. When I saw a photo of him in his youth, I was stunned. My mouth fell open: The man from my dream was looking at me! I still get goosebumps when I think about it. That’s how Batiushka Gabriel gave me the joyous news about our son!”

Lazar was born on January 26, on the feast of St. Eleazar of Anzer. The name “Lazarus” is the Greek form of the Hebrew name “Eleazar” (“God helps”). That is, “Lazar” is a version of the name “Eleazar.”

It turns out that the baby was born on the day of his name, although the priest named him in honor of [St. Lazarus the Four-Days-Dead](#). And Fr. Gabriel announced the will of God for this child nine months before he was conceived. So he has two Heavenly patrons, two Lazars! Although, not two patrons and intercessors, but three, counting Fr. Gabriel as well, of course!

So when we asked Lazar which photo to use for the book cover, he immediately pointed to the one where the Elder was smiling. The same thing happened when choosing the color for the cover: Lazar preferred red and white. In this amazing way, the colors on the cover matched the colors of the Georgian flag. There was no longer any doubt—we accepted it as Fr. Gabriel’s own answer. And the title of the book, which St. Gabriel suggested, reflects the main quality of his immortal soul. “Weep Not!”—these words contain all of Fr. Gabriel, who suffered and endured so much for the sake of Christ and others. “Weep not!” his eyes say, and warmth comes to the soul. And he who has despaired and lost all hope, finds it again.

“I’ll help you!” the Elder says comfortingly, and lovingly embraces the poor lost soul. “The most important thing is not to despair, and to weep not!”

Maria Pukhova

Translation by Jesse Dominick

Services this Week

- **Thursday (11.21.2024.)**
 - **Synaxis of the Archangel Michael and other Bodiless Powers**
 - ***Divine Liturgy starts at 09:30 AM.***
- **21th Sunday after Pentecost (11.24.2024.)**
 - **Holy Great- martyr Menas, Holy Martyr Stephen of Dechani, King of Serbia**
 - ***Divine Liturgy starts at 10:00 AM.***

Donations November 10, 2024

Offering - \$656.00 Candles - \$75.00
Dues - \$150.00 Donations - \$25

Large Candles

IMO Grandparents Amelia & Pete Matovich from Richard Kondas
For the Health of Joanne Todorich from Pete Todorich
IMO Shawn Novatny from Dan & Diane Tomak
IMO Lazo & Bosa Vuckovich from Helene Gleason
IMO Parents Mike & Mildred Tumbas from Milica Tumbas
IMO Bonnie Niemann from the Malich Family

TODAY!!

Sunday, November 17, 2024

Pancake & Sausage Breakfast

Sponsored by the Men's Club - Donation Appreciated

UPCOMING EVENTS

FISH FRIES

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2024 - 3:00 TO 6:30 PM

ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING - SUNDAY,
DECEMBER 8, 2024 - LITURGY BEGINS AT 9:30 AM

ST. NICHOLAS SLAVA CELEBRATION -
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2024