

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church

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The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost (07.23.2023.)

Matthew 9:27-35

And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed Him, crying, and saying, Thou son of David, have mercy on us. And when He was come into the house, the blind men came to Him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto Him, Yea, Lord. Then touched He their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it. But they, when they were departed, spread abroad His fame in all that country. As they went out, behold, they brought to Him a dumb man possessed with a devil. And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel. But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils. And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. **(KJV)**

The present Gospel makes clear that Jesus Christ is the healer of every sickness and disease. Faith certainly has a place in the healing. Drawing near to Jesus Christ and personally experiencing Christ is involved in the healing.

The Gospel describes the healing of two blind men and the curing of a person unable to speak due to being possessed by the devil. Jesus Christ's additional healings are further described in today's Gospel.

The Church wants believers to take the Gospel seriously. Attentive listeners are deeply affected by Jesus Christ's power over the devil and every sickness and disease. Every person's soul needs healing of the sickness and disease of sin.

Every person is a sinner. Each believer benefits by approaching the Lord Jesus Christ in repentance and strong faith. Healing the soul improves the heart, mind and body.

The eyes provide the believer the view of the world. Vision penetrates to the depths of the heart, mind and soul. The blind men seeking mercy from Jesus Christ were blessed to be healed and to see the world in ways previously unknown.

Jesus Christ opens the eyes of faithful believers to see the world with understanding. Believers find personal rest and are at peace when viewing the world through Jesus Christ.

The devil succumbs to Jesus Christ's power as described in the present Gospel. Believers need not fear the devil nor be defeated by the devil if they remain united with Jesus Christ.

The length of life's journey from the baptismal font to the last breath remains unknown for each person. Remaining united with Jesus Christ is essential for entry into the heavenly Kingdom and eternal life.

Viewing the world through Jesus Christ enables the believer to discern the path to the heavenly Kingdom and eternal life. Firm unity with Jesus Christ protects the believer against attacks by the devil.

Jesus Christ is the best protection against all forms of sickness, disease and afflictions. When sickness, disease or afflictions arise in life, faith in Jesus puts them into perspective and turns them into benefits for the soul.

Believers are challenged to live in Christ at every moment of time from Holy Baptism until departure from this life. The Church offers the necessary nourishment for constant unity with Christ for life's journey.

The Gospel proclaimed in each Divine Liturgy serves to nourish the soul and guide the believer in daily life. Attentiveness to the Gospel is beneficial throughout earthly life.

Jesus Christ is ever-present and within reach of each person. Jesus Christ provides security for every moment of life. The believer need only reach out in serious prayer to be firmly anchored in Christ.

God's saints and martyrs are beneficial witnesses through the centuries of being united with Jesus Christ. The man healed of blindness and the man freed of the devil in the current Gospel stand firmly as proof of Jesus' healing power.

Believers need not continue to live with a sick and diseased soul affecting health of the mind, heart and body. Healing awaits each person in Jesus Christ. Repentance, resolute prayer and strong faith make a difference.

Life is difficult in every age. Evil is always present. Life's challenges require great resources. Jesus Christ is the guide through the ages. Jesus Christ the healer must always be kept in mind.

God's Holy Church stands as the fortress and place of refuge and healing in times of distress and concern. The blind men and the man afflicted by the devil found healing and peace in Jesus Christ.

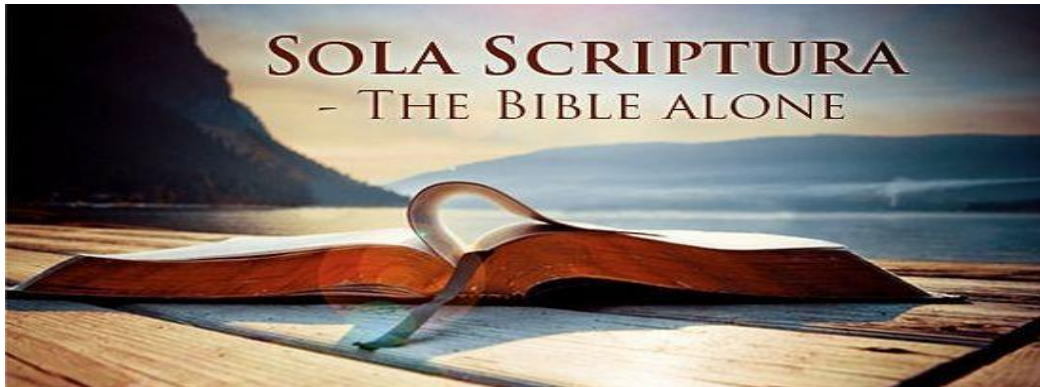
Thank God for the Church proclaiming the Gospel in the world through the centuries. Thank God for the Gospel verifying and teaching about Jesus' healing power.

Jesus is the way to bring personal suffering to an end. Jesus is the way to the heavenly Kingdom and eternal life. God's Holy Church assures believers of Jesus' teachings and healing power.

The Church has records through the centuries of healings by Jesus Christ. Healings occur everyday in every century. History validates: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever." (Heb. 13:8)

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost. Holy 45 Martyrs of Nicopolis in Armenia. July 10/23, 2023. Venerable Anthony of the Kiev Gaves. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic

SOLA SCRIPTURA



Most Evangelical Protestants do not have a great love for Latin (people of my vintage can remember when Latin was inevitably associated in Evangelical minds with the horrible benighted Catholics, who used Latin as their liturgical language), but there are two Latin words very close to their hearts: “sola Scriptura”, which is Latin for “Scripture alone”. Those dipping a little into Reformation history will recall that it shared the stage with a few other Latin slogans, such as “sola fide” (faith alone), “sola gratia” (grace alone), and “solus Christus” (Christ alone). The words formed something like a banner, a code for the entire Reformed package—and sometimes a war-cry shouted when going into ideological battle.

The phrase “sola Scriptura” at the time of the Reformation didn’t mean that the Protestants waving that banner had no time for tradition, the Fathers, or learning. Reformers like Luther and Calvin were happy to quote the Fathers (Augustine was a favourite), especially when the Fathers seem to agree with them. In the medieval western church, there were two ways of establishing a doctrine—[Scripture and Tradition](#). The Roman Catholic Council of Trent would eventually define that the truth of the Gospel was accessed by the twin means of Scripture and Tradition. The final decree read, “This truth and rule are contained in written books and in unwritten traditions.” The two realities—Scripture and Tradition—are clearly distinct one from another, and either one may be used to establish a doctrine or a practice. The Reformers were concerned not to jettison Tradition altogether, but to subordinate it to Scripture. The Reformers did not deny that the Fathers had a role in interpreting the Scriptures. They just said that the Fathers’ views could not be binding or authoritative. What they were taking aim at was not so much the ancient Fathers as the contemporary Catholic magisterium—and the Pope in particular, its leading representative.

The Reformers of course produced their own magisterial statements of faith. The Reformation ground out a good many of them: the Lutheran Schmalkald Articles, the Book of Concord, the Reformed Helvetic Confessions, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Presbyterian Westminster Confession, and the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles. But despite such an outpouring of magisterial teaching, the Reformers were clear that these confessions had a distinctly secondary and subordinate role. They were not to be considered as authoritative sources

of doctrine, but simply as reliable summaries of the truths of Scripture. Scripture alone was the sole authoritative source of doctrine. And it was thought that the main saving message of Scripture was clear enough to be understood by all who approached it humbly and with reliance upon God. There were parts of the Scripture that were less clear, of course, but the main message of salvation was clearly set forth. The Church's task was to proclaim this message and to order the life of its members. "Sola Scriptura" did not mean that Tradition was worthless, and it did not mean that an individual Christian could do without the Church so long as he had his Bible.

Now however, among most Evangelical Protestants, the phrase "sola Scriptura" has come to mean something rather different—and something that their Reformed ancestors would not have been happy with. Now the phrase means not so much "Scripture *above Tradition*" but rather "Scripture *and no Tradition*". The modern idea is that [Tradition](#) is bad, and that all a pious heart needs to understand the Bible is an open mind and a good intention, and the Holy Spirit will do the rest. The Lord's promise that the Spirit will lead His Church into all truth (John 16:13) is interpreted to mean that the Holy Spirit will lead every individual believer into all truth, so that the Bible alone is sufficient, and that everything in the Bible can be immediately and easily understood.

In this regard one sometimes hears (rather inane) slogans such as "My only Creed is the Bible", which is a bit like saying, "My only Creed is the theological library", since the Bible is not a single volume, but a collected library of over sixty-six books. One cannot easily translate the meaning of a whole library's worth of books into a tidy theological system, for the multiplicity of books allows for a multiplicity of possible meanings. Something outside the Biblical library must function as a lens through which the books are read if one is to find a single coherent meaning of it all.

Nonetheless, Evangelicals persist in saying that the single integrated message of all the sixty-six books of the Bible is plain to all impartial readers, and that nothing else is required to interpret it correctly. I remember one such Evangelical author, Harold Hill, in his book *How to Live Like a King's Kid*, refer to the Bible as "the manufacturer's handbook". In this view the Bible functions like a divine set of Ikea assembly instructions—all one needs to assemble a church and a Christian life is the Bible. No other sets of instructions are necessary. This view is sometimes expressed in terms of warm piety, as when a Christian man is described as "a man of one Book". The man reads the Bible and only the Bible and is able unaided to understand its main message, since the meaning of that message is abundantly self-evident. Sometimes this piety takes the added step of despising theological education, rejecting it as an obstacle to understanding the Bible, as a source of confusion which can only befuddle simple souls. Sometimes this piety even sets the individual Christian against the Church, and declares that the Church has no role in interpreting the Bible at all. The man of one Book can understand the Bible on his own, thank you very much, so why does he need a church or a pastor to tell him what it means? He can read it for himself just fine. There are two problems with this understanding of "sola Scriptura", even if one omits the grosser errors of rejecting theological education and of rejecting any role for Church or pastor.

First of all, it is crystal clear that the main message of salvation in the Bible is *not* self-evident, and that is why there are literally thousands of Protestant denominations, all reading the same Bible and all coming up with differing interpretations of it. And these interpretations sometimes differ about fairly basic things. Take the basic question, “What must I do to be saved?” Does becoming saved have anything to do with baptism? Does baptism save and regenerate? Who can be baptized—adults and babies, or just adults? Intelligent devout Christians disagree about this basic question, though all read the same Bible. Or take the equally basic question, “What does the Church do when it meets together?” Should it meet on Sunday or Saturday? Is the Eucharist to be celebrated every week? And what *is* the [Eucharist](#)? Is it a sacrifice? In it do we receive Christ’s true [Body and Blood](#)? May infants receive the Eucharist? Intelligent devout Christians disagree about this question as well. Other important questions remain too. May we pray for the dead? May we pray to the saints? Are we to face a particular direction when we pray? Is separation from a church to form a church of your own (i.e. schism) allowable? These are not side-issues of insignificance. The question of how one becomes a Christian, how one worships God every week, and to whom and for what one may pray constitutes the main message of the Bible, and it is precisely here that violent disagreements are to be found.

The confusion that reigns in answering these questions reveal that the Bible is not self-interpreting, but that a lens is required through which we read the Scriptures. Orthodoxy says that the required lens is found in the *consensus patrum*, the broad agreement found in all the Fathers. And regardless of what the magisterial Reformers said about the subordinate place of their confessions, it seems clear that these confessions actually functioned in the same way for them as the *consensus patrum* functions for the Orthodox. Devout Presbyterian teens do not believe in the Limited Atonement because they see that it is self-evident in the Bible, but because the Westminster Confession tells them that Christ died only for the elect. Even the Evangelicals have recourse to a lens of sorts—witness the popularity of Study Bibles, including the famous (or infamous) *Scofield Reference Bible* with its dispensational notes. The message of the Bible only seems self-evident to those raised in it from their youth, because they have been reading the teaching of their confessions into it. Note: what those confessions teach may or may not be true. But even if it is true, it is not self-evident. The problem with “sola Scriptura” is that for the *Scriptura* to be understood, it can never be *sola*. A lens is required to understand it.

St. Vincent of Lerins pointed this out long ago when he wrote, “It may be, someone will ask, Since the canon of Scripture is complete, and is in itself abundantly sufficient, what need is there to join to it the interpretation of the Church? The answer is that because of the very depth of Scripture all men do not place one identical interpretation upon it. The statements of the same writer are explained by different men in different ways, so much so that it seems almost possible to extract from it as many opinions as there are men...Therefore, because of the intricacies of error, which is so multiform, there is great need for the laying down of a rule for the exposition of Prophets and Apostles in accordance with the standard of the interpretation of the Catholic Church.” This “rule” is the *consensus patrum*, also known as Holy Tradition.

Secondly, when one looks into the Scriptures one sees that the apostles themselves refer to oral traditions as a source of equal authority. Thus St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11:2, “I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered

them to you”. Or again in 2 Thessalonians 2:15, where he writes, “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter”. What possessed authority was the teaching of the apostles, and it was irrelevant whether it transmitted orally (i.e. “by word of mouth”, oral tradition) or in writing (i.e. by letter, the epistles of the New Testament). Authority resided in apostolic Tradition, however transmitted. Paul’s epistles were not authoritative because God had turned on an inspiration switch before Paul wrote and then turned it off again when he finished writing. They were authoritative because Paul was an apostle—as he vigorously insisted. [St. Basil](#) knew that authority lay in apostolic teaching however transmitted, and that was why he wrote, “Concerning the teachings of the Church, whether publicly proclaimed or reserved to members of the household of faith, we have received some from written sources, while others have been given to us secretly, through apostolic tradition. Both sources have equal force in true religion. No one would deny either source—no one, at any rate, who is even slightly familiar with the ordinances of the Church” (from his *On the Holy Spirit*).

One therefore cannot legitimately sunder Scripture from the rest of Tradition, or speak of “Scripture and Tradition” as separate things as the West does. Scripture is a part of the capital ‘T’ apostolic Tradition, and one can no more speak of “Scripture vs. Tradition” than one can speak of “the New Testament vs. the Bible”. Scripture reigns supreme in the Church, but it is never sundered from oral tradition and is read as a part of the total Tradition. It is because this apostolic Tradition is supreme in the Church that the Church is the only authorized interpreter of Scripture. That is why St. Paul declares that “the pillar and bulwark of the truth” is not the Bible, but the Church (1 Timothy 3:15).

All Christian confessions read Scripture and do their best to be faithful to it. And every confession has some lens through which it reads the Bible and makes its interpretations. The ultimate problem with Sola Scriptura as defined by modern Evangelicals is that it serves to blind them to the fact that they too use an interpretive lens. And they will never be able to critique that lens and perhaps choose a different one until they admit in the first place that they have one.

Fr. Lawrence Farley

Services this Week

- ❖ *Wednesday – 07.26. 2023. Synaxis of the Holy Archangel Gabriel - 09:30 AM Divine Liturgy*
- ❖ *Friday – 07.28.2023. – Holy Mart. Gyricus and Julita - 09:30 AM Divine Liturgy*
- ❖ **8th Sunday after Pentecost; Holy Greatmartyr Marina**
– 07.30.2023. - 09:30 AM Divine Liturgy

Donations July 16, 2023

Offering - \$ 2758,.00 Candles - \$58.00 Dues - \$200.00

Building Fund

In Memory of Irene Martinovich from Diane Dunnington - \$25

In Memory of Sam Vuckovich from Lori Vuckovich - \$40

In Memory of Connie Bartis from Mike Bartis

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. Leaving a balance of \$543.36. If you would like to donate for the purchase of these robes, please contact Carole McAllister or Carly Zahurak.

UPCOMING EVENTS
PLEASE SAVE THESE DATES

JOIN US FOR



Taste of Serbia – August 12, 2023



Slavic Festival – September 15-16, 2023