

**Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church**  
*971 St. Clair Rd, Johnstown, PA 15905*  
Rev. Presbyter Dragan Vukovic  
**(814) 244-4063**

**The Thirty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**(01.28.2024)**

**Luke 18:18-27**

And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother. And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up. Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved? And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God **(KJV)**

God's love, mercy and goodness are necessary for believers to enter His Kingdom and experience eternal life. Even the most faithful followers of God commit sins that require God's forgiveness and mercy.

The present Gospel speaks about the rich man giving up his possessions for the benefit of the poor. He then was to follow Jesus Christ. Every person is rich in blessings from God in some way,

Each person is challenged to give up his or her riches for the benefit of the poor and to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ established the supreme example when while remaining Divine He took on human flesh.

Each person is constantly faced with the choice of become more Christ-like. Daily believers make decisions whether to retain personal riches or to give them away for the benefit of others and to follow Christ.

The battle goes on within the believer's heart, mind and soul as to whether to be imprisoned with personal riches or to be free to follow Christ. Growth in Christ involves being free of impeding restraints.

Growth in Christ requires constant sacrifice. Disposing of personal wealth for the benefit of the poor is a way to lay up treasures in heaven. Being obsessed with retaining personal wealth can be a barrier to unity with Christ.

The Church proclaims the present Gospel lesson for believers to engage in personal self-assessment and examination. Each person answers whether he or she is a prisoner of personal wealth and how this affects the soul.

God's Kingdom and eternal life are the primary goals set forth for Christian believers. Serious believers seek to remove the limits in daily life which impede being fully united with Jesus Christ.

The wisdom and action of Christ unveil in the heart, mind and soul the steps for believers to take for full unity. Complete love of Christ and devotion to Christ are necessary to discern and heed Christ's wisdom

Christ's forgiveness of sins makes unity possible. Repentance is required for forgiveness to take place. Being imprisoned and limited by personal wealth leads to sorrow and barriers to unity with Christ.

True freedom is experienced in Christ. (John 8:26) True peace is found in Christ. (John 14:27) True treasures are in heaven where moth and rust do not consume and thieves do not break in and steal. (Mt. 6:20)

Believers learn in the Church the path to follow to the Heavenly Kingdom and eternal life. The Church guides, instructs and offers the nourishment for life's journey.

Seriousness is required to follow Jesus Christ. Attentiveness is always necessary. Being alert to the manifestations of Christ in earthly life enables believers to discern the paths to take and the sound decisions to make.

Believers' eyes need to be looking for Christ in daily life. (Rev. 3:18) Believers' ears need to listen for guidance from Christ. (Luke 8:8) At times God will speak in the quiet moments of life. (I Kings 19:12)

Hunger in the soul exists in each person. God's Church is where to address the hunger. Jesus Christ nourishes believers in the Church. Believers learn the path to freedom in the Church.

The present Gospel offers timeless wisdom for attentive believers. Wise believers take the Gospel to heart. The present Gospel is to be actively applied to daily life.

Following Christ is not the path of sorrow. Following Christ is the path of joy and peace. Placing confidence and faith in Jesus Christ enables the peace and joy to occur. (Matthew 28:20)

The Gospel penetrates the centuries with timeless wisdom. The Gospel shines light on the dark roads of life. The Gospel illumines the heart, mind and soul. Being attentive to the Gospel opens the paths to God's Kingdom and life eternal.

The Serbian St. Sava heeded the Gospel and followed Christ. He gave up the opportunity for earthly riches to seek the heavenly. The Light of Christ shines through St. Sava to the present day.

St. Sava is an enduring example of the wisdom to follow Christ. Present day believers are enriched by St. Sava's example. Today is the opportunity to heed the wisdom to follow Jesus Christ.

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**The Thirty Fourth Sunday after Pentecost. Venerable Paul of Thebes. Venerable Gabriel of Lesnovo. January 15/28, 2024. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania.**

**Father Rodney Torbic**

## **The Great Blessing of Water and the Home**

The Great Blessing of Water in our homes takes place after the Feast of Theophany, the Baptism of Christ, bringing the holy water & prayer in which Christ was baptized to our homes, as a blessing upon our families.

Traditionally, in most Orthodox parishes, the priest personally visits all his parishioners each year to pray with them in the place where they live, and to bless their surroundings with the newly sanctified water of Theophany (January 19).

We also bring the blessed water to our homes to use throughout the year to bless our homes and to drink whether we are ill or as part of our daily prayer life.

"There are many occasions in family life when a sip of holy water can help to remind us of the blessing that was given 'to bestow sanctification', 'unto healing of soul and body', 'to be a fountain welling forth unto life eternal', as the priest prayed in the litany of Epiphany day."

### **Weaving Christ into Our Lives**

The blessing of homes by these holy waters maintains the spiritual association between the 'family church' and the parish, as well as again providing for the sharing of God's spiritual gifts. ... This annual blessing is not as elaborate as the blessing of the new dwelling, but because of this it should not be overlooked, for it is in this way that the grace of God is extended to individual dwellings.

When the children are present, they have the opportunity to see the parish priest in a different and personal situation. If the priest permits, they can lead the way through the house, or hold a candle. They can show him their rooms or pets or favorite toys. They receive a blessing with water. For children, the house blessing shows the connection of the Church to the home. This is a perfect time to introduce your small children to having their bedrooms blessed as a 'shield of armor' to protect them when they sleep and all the fears they may have as children do so often.

## In Summary

What does it mean to ask God to bless something? All things in the world have been spoiled right along with us. God must bless His world again in order for it to be the way that He wants it to be. For this reason God sent His Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit to the world: to bless everyone and everything that He made, to make all things good again. When the priest comes to bless our homes, he asks God to have mercy on the house, to rid it of every evil and to fill it with every blessing.

*What a wonderful way to begin the New Year!*

*Schedule your Visit with Fr. Dragan Vukovic directly by calling your parish priest 814-244-4063*

*God bless you all!*

# Sermon of Saint Sava on the True Faith delivered at Monastery Zica, 1220

Brothers and friends and fathers and children called by God, lend your God-loving hearts to hearing the divine dogmas. And hearing these holy words place them, brothers, in your hearts and the conscience of your souls and before the eyes of your mind and understand them.

God, all merciful and lover of mankind, having immeasurable mercy for man, bowed the Heavens and descended to earth, and with His Divine Dispensation and voluntary bearing of many different sufferings to His Divine Body, enlightened the human race; and He sent to the whole world the Holy Apostles, saying: „Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit“. But since they themselves did not come to us, our fathers, hearing in truth their words, believed them. And the gracious God, Who has endless mercy and does not wish that any one of us die, by that same first commandment and same manner, according to the teaching and preaching of the Holy Apostles, elevates me to that Sainthood (Archbishopric), wanting through me to „fulfill that which is missing“ of our fathers; and through the Holy Spirit He commands me to announce this word regarding your salvation, which you, hearing it with love, keep it that we might be in communion with the order of the Fathers.

## **Build your deeds on the foundation of the True Faith**

Therefore, brothers and children, putting all of your hope in God, I first pray that we, above all, hold to His True Faith. For, as the Apostle says, „for no other foundation can a man lay than what is laid,“ by the Holy Spirit through the Holy Apostles and God bearing Fathers, and that is – the True Faith, confirmed and preached at the holy Seven Ecumenical councils. And for this reason upon this foundation of the True Faith we need to build with gold and silver and precious stones, that is good deeds. For neither is there use in a correctness of life without the true and enlightened faith in God, nor can true confession (faith) without good deeds, bring us before the Lord, but we must have them both, that „the man of God be perfect“, that our life not falter because of the lacking (of one). For, as the Apostle says: „Faith which works by love“.

### **We believer.**

We believe, therefore, in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, singing to the Thrice Divine, Source and Creator of everything caused, visible and invisible. (The Trinity) Which is of one essence, that is nature, in three Persons, that is we speak of Hypostasis and Persons, by which we do not imply fashion or difference of three Gods or three natures or essences, but we confess One God and one simple and bodiless nature and essence, and we designate the differences of the Persons the difference in Hypostasis. Bowing down to the Trinity, One in Three Hypostasis and the Unity of the One in Essence and One in Might and Without beginning. Only Her do we recognize as Existing in Eternity, with no beginning, Uncreated, Immortal, Indestructible, Unsufferable, All-creating and (all)mighty and (all)providential.

And the One in Trinity, not the Father nor the Holy Spirit, but the Son and God born of the Father, the Word (Logos), beyond time and undivided from Him the Parent Born, and not created, One in Essence Parent and Ever-existing with Him; the Word (Logos) who through (His) goodness brought all things from non-being to being, and in hthe last days came down from the Heavens for us and our salvation and dwelt in the Virgin’s womb and united Himself with the spiritualized body, and a reasonable soul and mind received of essence of that same All Pure Virgin Mary (Theotokos). He, of one essence of Him God the Word (Logos), out of his great love for mankind deigned it, by the will of the Father and (Holy) Spirit, to save His creation. Descending from the

Father's bosom, from which He did not separate Himself, (not even when He entered the womb of All Pure Virgin) and took upon Himself not an earlier conceived body spiritualized with a reasonable soul and mind, came (out of the Virgin) as God Incarnate. Being born inexpressibly and preserving the virginity of Her who gave Him birth unharmed, He suffered neither mingling nor change, but remained that which He was and became that which He was not. Taking upon Himself the form of a servant, in truth and not illusion He depicts us in all things, except sin.

We know Him as perfect God and perfect Man, not another and another, but one and the same before the incarnation and after the incarnation, one complex Hypostasis; Him the One and same in two perfect natures and properties, and in two natures of will and action, both united by Hypostasis, unchanged. We confess Him, One, same will by desire and action divine (action) as God, and Him, One, same will and by desire and action human (action) as man. For He was not subject to natural needs, but was born according to (His) will, according to His will He was hungry, according to His will He was thirsty, according to His will He was tired, according to His will He was afraid, according to His will He died, in truth, and not illusion, He suffered all the natural and flawless sufferings of mankind. And He, Sinless, was crucified and tasted death, and is risen on the third day, His body not seeing decay, and His human essence unharmed and undead He resurrected and, taking it to Heaven, He sat at the right hand of the Father. And He will come again to judge the living and the dead. Just as He ascended with His body, the same way will He return and give unto everyone according to their deeds. For He says: „The dead who are in the tombs will arise and those who did good deeds“ with the true faith „will go eternal life, and those who committed evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.“

### **We bow down and respect.**

With this, we bow down and respect and venerate the solemn icon of mankind's Incarnation of God the Word (Logos), the anointed Divinity, remaining unchanged, so that He who through faith is anointed considers to see the very God Who appeared in the flesh and dwelled among men.

### **We accept the Orthodox Tradition and the heretical innovations we curse**

This is (my) God-loving ones, the dogma of the Orthodox Patristic Tradition. Following them, we also believe and confess thus, and all heretics and every heresy of theirs we curse.

We accept all the seven Ecumenical councils; the first which was in Nicea, 318 holy fathers; the second, in Constantinople, 150 holy fathers; the third, earlier, in Ephesus, 200 holy fathers; the fourth in Chalcedon, 630 holy fathers, the fifth, again in Constantinople, 164 holy fathers; the sixth, again in Constantinople, 170 holy fathers. And also that one, a little later in the Metropolis of Nicea, the seventh Council 350 holy fathers, against those who renounced the holy icons and do not teach them and do not bow down before them, impiously slandering Christians. We accept all the Holy Councils which were gathered by God's grace at various times and places for the establishment of the Orthodox evangelical teaching, which the Church accepts. And those whom the holy fathers renounce, we also renounce, and those they curse, we also curse.

For the devil has thought of many heresies at various times and periods, and many weeds of evil belief through his servants, the chief-heretics, he planted in the world for the spoilage and sickening of the true faith, which we curse, and those who invented the evil dogmas, and detest every dishonorable heresy. We, therefore, strive all the more towards every piety, taught to us by the divinely wise servants of God – the Prophets, Apostles and Saints, as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the Son of God, says, when He comes from the Father to the world, being incarnated and born a second time, of the All Pure Ever Virgin, and the dogmas of the dispensation of the Father and His beautifully fulfilled, since He was inexpressibly crucified on the Cross, and rose on the third day, and, after His Resurrection, remained here on earth for forty days, and since He willed to ascend to the Heavens to His Father, command His Disciples and Apostles, saying: „Go and teach all the ends of the earth, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to keep all the commandments I have given you“. And again: „Preach the Gospel to every creature. Who believes and is baptized, will be saved, and who does not believe, will be judged.“ This is, therefore, True Faith: to be baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

### **Pray to God, keeping all of His commandments**

And so, we who are Christian have promised that we will pray to God at all times, (keeping the His commandments and always doing His will). For „faith without deeds is dead“, according to the words of James. Therefore, my beloved brothers and children, just as I said at the beginning, we (need) to keep (and preserve) both with fear and trembling. Keep (therefore) the word of God and the Holy Faith of Christ, and with a pure heart call on His All-pure Name and, not laxing in

the holy prayers, fall down before Him, confess your sins and weep with tears before Him and singing to Him and singing in your hearts always, day and night, ceaselessly. For God, when people confess Him and pray to Him, assures man Himself and spiritually enters by faith into the hearts of listen well to His teaching. For, spiritual teaching is not a game, nor words of the thoughts of insane people, but it is the preached Holy Faith of God on which are founded the Holy Ranks in Christ our Lord, of whom the Prophets prophesied through the Holy Spirit of God, and the Apostles taught, and the Martyrs confessed, and all the Saints preserved, and the Venerable Fathers zealously as the undivided cornerstone of the Church, of Christ who is the Wisdom and Power of the Father – (and having kept that) by the Holy Spirit and powerfully and mightily and firmly and surely in the faith – and Who assures many to this day and establishes them and assures all of His Divine Faith. He, the All-gracious Lover of man, reaches even to us with His rich mercy, correcting that which we are missing, wanting as the true Pastor to gather us, the misguided sheep, to (His) heavenly sheepfold. Reaching that sheepfold with the eyes of our soul and mind, we always pray to Him, surrendering to Him at every hour, and confessing to Him, as He Himself gives us to state or think of and preserve it unspoken. And, having done His will, we will receive from Him salvation in this age and the next, if we faithfully preserve His commandments, which the Lord Himself commanded us to keep and promised us a heavenly reward, saying: „Truly I tell you: Whoever keeps My word will never see death“.

### **The Gift of Christ is – that we never die**

Yes, my beloved children, what is more reliable and righteous than these words to which Christ Himself testifies and confirms? What is better than this: to never taste of death? For, it only this not tasting of death is already far from sin, for through the tasting of sin the taste of death entered into all of mankind to the time of Christ. For that reason did He taste of death, He who is sinless and immortal according to His first birth by the Father, but He tasted of it for us, and He suffered, so that through faith in Him we taste of immortality, as the Prophet said: „Taste and see that the Lord is good“. Therefore, He (the Lord) is very good and righteous and faithful to all of His words, and all of His deeds are in faith. For this reason, my beloved children, we who love Him should do deeds of faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord, receiving from Him Immortal Faith, such a gift that we never die!



Thus, if you preserve this, you will be blessed (by God) throughout the ages, and your hearts will be blessed, and your souls will be blessed and blessed will be you who have received the Faith of God and preserved it in purity. Looking upon the Immortal Gift of Christ, always do good deeds in Christ: a pure faith and pray often, having love and hope in Him, and a clear conscious before God and man, fast and vigil, laying on the ground, truth in all things, a bodily purity and an abstinence of the soul, preserving the mind of Holy Baptism – the Enlightenment of God, by which we renounced Satan and all his ministers. And always love repentance and confession of your sins and weeping over them, humility and patience, righteousness, teaching, correcting your lives, hatred for sin, and not drunkenness and not fornication, but, on the contrary, a pure life, pleasing in the eyes of God.

### **That it be good to you and your sons**

For God is one from the beginning and in the endless centuries. And this is the first commandment said to those that love Him: “love the Lord God with your whole heart, your whole mind and your whole soul and all of your strength“. And may these words, which I command you today, be written on your hearts and souls, that you fear the Lord God Almighty and Him alone serve with fear and trembling and Him only offer glory and honor, and only Him give your fidelity to, and do not swear by His Name, but may your words – as the Apostle says – “yes be yes, and no be no“. And, in general, may no other god be mentioned other than He who created the heavens and the earth. To nothing „offer worship or serve from Heaven above or on the earth below and what is in the waters or beneath the ground“ other than your Lord God, in whom you were baptized and believe, and renounced yourselves of secret shame, and have become communicants of His „Good Faith“ and co-participants of His Immortality. Be with Him relentlessly for „before His eyes everything is revealed“ as the Apostle says, „our God is a fire which consumes“; and „visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation, to those who love Him and keep His commandments“. For He is “God of gods and Lord of lords, God who is great and mighty and awesome”. Yes, “keep His commandments and carry out before His eyes all the words which He has commanded you”, “that it be well for you and your sons after you, that they live eternally, if you do good and that which is well pleasing before your Lord God” to Whom be glory and without beginning to the ages without end. Amen.

# Services this Week

- **Wednesday (01.31.2024)**
  - St Athanasius the Great; St Cyril of Alexandria; St Maximus, Archbishop of Serbia - *Divine Liturgy starts at 09:30 AM*
- **The 35th Sunday after Pentecost (02.04.2024)**
  - Holy Ap. Timothy of the Seventy; *Holy monk-mart. Anastasius the Persian - Divine Liturgy starts at 10:00 AM*

**Donations January 21, 2024**

**Offering - \$ 1,424.00 Candles - \$20.00 Dues - \$200.00**

**Building Fund**

**In Memory of Donna Kaslin Wharton from Sharon & James Urban - \$100  
In Memory of Mary & Steve Stramanak from Sharon & James Urban - \$100  
Annonymous - \$20**

**Large Candles**

**IMO Mary Ellen Locher-Byrd from Helene Gleason  
IMO Mike & Mildred Tumbas from Milica Knepp  
IMO Grandparents Amelia & Pete Mastovich from Rick Kondas  
IMO brother Joseph Kondas from Rick Kondas**

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**Happy Slava to ALL of our children!!!  
Please join us following Divine Liturgy for the blessing of  
the Slavski kolac, a Luncheon and of course our annual  
Saint Sava Program!!  
Please stay and support our children, our future!**

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**Today will be the last day to take your poinsettia !!**

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**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**Men's Club Pork Chop Dinner  
Sunday, February 4<sup>th</sup>**

**FISH FRIES BEGIN  
Friday, February 16<sup>th</sup> and continue to  
Friday, March 29<sup>th</sup>.**