

# *Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church*

971 St. Clair Rd, Johnstown, PA 15905

Rev. Presbyter Dragan Vukovic

(814) 244-4063

## *The Second Sunday of Great Lent*

(03.20.2022)

### *Mark 2:1-12*

And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them. And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. But there was certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy, I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion. (*KJV*)

### *St. Gregory Palamas*

#### *John 10:9-16*

I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is

an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. (KJV)

God's Holy Church is now in the Second Week of Great Lent. Today's Gospel of St. Mark describes Jesus' power to heal and to forgive sins. Forgiving sins is a form of healing and renews energy and life in the believer.

Believers are encouraged to repent during Great Lent. Seriously confessing personal sins is certainly part of repentance. A great weight is lifted from the believer when confession occurs.

Experiencing communion with the Lord Jesus Christ follows serious confession. Jesus Christ welcomes the repentant believer with love, joy and unity. The hunger in the soul is satisfied with repentance, confession and communion.

Great Lent is the time for new beginnings in Christ. The believer's senses, heart, mind and soul are awakened to Jesus Christ. The Church fosters and encourages the Lenten effort for new beginnings in Christ.

Fighting sin and being moved to repent will be met with resistance. Deeply embedded sin is difficult to overcome. The Lord God provides the hope, the strength and the reasons to repent.

Life is much different when fully resting in the Lord God. Life focused in Christ and lived for Christ is filled with deep peace, love and joy. Relationships are better, stronger and more lasting when founded in Christ.

Love, hope and forgiveness are characteristics of the life in Christ. Greed, unbridled anger, jealousy and deviousness have no place in the Christian life. Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd and knows His own sheep and is known to them.

When Jesus Christ fills the mind, heart and soul, all else in life takes the proper perspective. The remaining days of Great Lent will be well used if the believer aggressively repels sin and adheres to the narrow path to God's Kingdom.

Investing in the Kingdom of God has a place in each day of life. Believers are firmly encouraged to invest in rooting out sin in the time remaining during Great Lent.

The Good Shepherd stands firm in protecting His sheep against the wiles of evil. God's Holy Church offers the nourishing environment to address sin and unite with Jesus Christ.

The Divine services during Great Lent offer instruction, guidance and nourishment. Believers seeking to repent and experience communion with Jesus Christ are able to do so in God’s Holy Church.

The time of life exists only once. Wise believers are grateful for life and cherish God’s granting of life. Life is restored to health when Jesus Christ’s is central to the heart, mind and soul.

Today’s Gospel readings illumine Jesus’ power to forgive sin, heal, love and protect His followers. Observant believers cherish Jesus Christ and their relationship with Him.

Each Gospel reading strengthens, nourishes and guides the believer. Great Lent is well structured in the Church and has an orderly progression toward Holy Week and Pascha.

Being attuned to the Church during Great Lent guides the believer through each day. Barriers and temptations are overcome when Jesus Christ is the Guide, the Shepherd and the Goal.

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*The Second Sunday of Great Lent. St. Gregory Palamas. Holy Seven Bishops, Hieromartyrs of Cherson. March 7/20, 2022. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania.*  
*Father Rodney Torbic*

## SERMON ON THE SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY *St. John of Shanghai*

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit!

“In the midst of two thieves, Thy Cross was found to be a balance of justice; for the one was borne down to hades by the weight of his blasphemy; the other was raised up from his sins to the knowledge of theology...” (Lenten troparion on the ninth hour, at the glory). Thus is it spoken about the Cross of the Lord. The balance of justice is found amidst two thieves; Pilate erected three crosses on Golgotha—two with robbers and one with the Giver of Life. But only the Cross of the Savior was salvation for all mankind; the Cross that stood in the middle is the weapon of peace, the invincible

victory—victory over the devil and over death. As for the other two crosses—one was saving for the man who hung upon it, while the other was a ladder to hell.

Two thieves hung on crosses next to the Lord Jesus Christ; one blasphemed Him the whole time and continues to blaspheme, while the other might have begun to blaspheme, but then came to reason, and coming to a knowledge of all his sins, cried out to the Lord: *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise* (Lk. 23:42–43). Thus, through the Cross, through suffering, the wise thief believed in the crucified Christ; he believed, as it says, to the knowledge of theology. But when the Lord forgave him his sins, the thief came to know in Him the Son of God Himself, and understood that this Man Who hung ingloriously and in dishonor is the glorious King of Glory; he understood that He Who now seems helpless and weak is the Almighty Creator and Ruler of the Universe Himself. Thus did the eyes of the mind, the eyes of the soul open for that thief who hung on the right side, to which he came through repentance, through humility. So also did Christ lower Himself more than all men; He lowered Himself in order to erase and destroy Adam’s sin of pride. So also the thief, humbly acknowledging his sins, asked the Lord for forgiveness, and through this the Lord appeared to him in all His glory. But the other thief who hung on the left side, *oshuyu* as it is in Church Slavonic, blasphemed Him the whole time, because he acknowledged that he was sinful, that he was a criminal, that he had violated both human and divine laws, but he did not want to repent, he did not want to humble himself. And he was blaspheming the very laws that he had violated, he blasphemed the Lawgiver Himself, Who gave the laws of nature, Who placed a conscience in people, according to which they write their human laws, albeit not always in agreement with the conscience; he blasphemed Him and continued to blaspheme until the weight of his blasphemy pulled his soul down into hell.

Here are the two paths that lie before people. Before us lies the [Life-creating Cross of the Lord](#). The Lord said, “If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross and follow Me” (cf. Mt. 16:24; Mk. 8:34; Lk. 9:23). Follow Him where? First through suffering, just as Christ suffered, and then he will enter with Christ into the Eternal Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ sits on His throne. There is no path other than following after Christ. And the thief who hung on the right side came to know God, and his soul went after Him. Of course he could not then miraculously change—this is not necessary; in his soul he followed after Christ, knew God in Him Who humbled Himself for the sake of man’s salvation; he humbled himself, acknowledged his sins, and went with Christ to paradise.

Before us are the paths of two thieves. What path will we take? Mankind has always taken one or the other of these paths. The Cross of the Lord was a stumbling block to the Jews, and to the Hellenes—that is, to the pagans—foolishness. How can one worship an instrument of humiliation, of punishment? They didn't understand that with this instrument the Lord saved all mankind from the devil's kingdom, from the kingdom of sin, from eternal destruction. For the Jews the Cross of the Lord was also a stumbling block; they wished to see their Messiah as the King of Glory, as an earthly king, who would raise the Jewish race. And so the Cross upon which Christ was crucified seemed to them a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness, but to us it is Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. What for some was destruction became salvation for others.

The Cross of the Lord divides people into two camps. Some believed in Christ, others stumbled on the stumbling stone and persecuted the Church of Christ, the Body of Christ, the Head of which is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The Church of Christ is the Body of Christ; He Himself heads it and feeds the faithful with His Body and Blood, He feeds the sons and daughters of His Church, so that we should be one with Christ both bodily and spiritually. We unite with Christ bodily through Divine Communion, and we should cleave to Him in soul and immediately follow His commandments.

We all sin, but some sin and repent, while others blaspheme all the laws that they violate. That is how it was in antiquity, when Arius and other heretics rejected the dogmas of the Holy Church, and then the faithful often suffered. The faithful suffered when there were impious rulers, who sent them to exile. Thus St. Athanasius the Great spent twenty of his forty-year episcopacy in exile. And other holy hierarchs also suffered for the truth, as did also many of the faithful; nevertheless, they saved themselves in the purity of Orthodoxy and opened gates of eternal life, the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven. The unbelievers often triumphed, often trampled upon Christ's Church, but then came the time for their destruction and fall—and their souls were sent not to the Kingdom of Heaven but to eternal torments in hell, just as Christ once sent Herod's soul to hell as well as the souls of others who sought His soul.

Before us lies either the path of salvation, or the path of destruction. Christians also stumbled on the Cross during the time of iconoclasm, when they began to persecute the holy icons, when they began to degrade other sacred objects, and the Cross of the Lord. And these are those who called themselves "right believing", even considering

themselves Orthodox. Thus, the iconoclastic heresy ruled for 150 years until it was finally crushed.



On the day of the [Triumph of Orthodoxy](#) we celebrate the victory of Christ over iconoclasm and over all demons. The Cross of the Lord separated the believers from the unbelievers, those who walked the path of salvation from those who walked the path of destruction. Today's iconoclast-Protestants and others who reject the holy icons likewise reject the Cross of Christ. They are ready to allow in their homes pretty images of some Gospel events, but they reject the veneration of holy icons, which reminds us that salvation is acquired by the hard and narrow path that our Lord Jesus Christ Himself walked; the path of struggle with our sins and vices, the path of fasting and prayer. This is not recognized by those who wish to see in Christianity only something rosy and beautiful, where you can enter into eternal bliss without any effort, without forcing yourself, without any struggle with your sins. They walk the path of the thief who hung at the left: They reject all the laws that the Lord Himself gave with His own lips and sent the apostles to preach throughout the inhabited world; they reject those rules and writings that the Orthodox Church sacredly preserves. And so through the Cross, some are saved to the knowledge of theology, to the knowledge of the truth, while others through the weight of their blasphemy go down to the torments of hell. Such a broad path stands before us Orthodox, and here there

are temptations that divide the faithful, if they want to walk the path that Christ showed them.

We all sin, we all violate Christ's commandments and the laws of the Holy Church, but some recognize that they are sinful in what they violate and repent of their sins, while others instead reject the laws themselves and do not want to submit to them, saying that these laws are outdated, no longer needed, and that they are supposedly smarter than those who gave us the laws of the Church—laws which the Lord Himself gave through his apostles and holy hierarchs. So, there are two paths before you: the path of the wise thief and the path of the one who went down into hades by the weight of his blasphemy.

Here before us are also those eternal icons. Some are ready to accept images as long as they are well-written, if they are beautiful and delight the eyes, while others honor those icons whereon the saints are depicted suffering, where their martyric suffering is shown, their fasting and prayers, the outward unsightliness but inner nobility seen on these sacred images. These, brothers and sisters, are the paths of the two thieves. Some desire salvation, while others desire only pleasures in this world; and when they are withheld from them, they blaspheme the laws given to us for our salvation.

Now also various divisions can arise for us. Because the laws of Christ's Church are immutable, Christians should submit to the laws and rules of the Church independently of how they are viewed by others, by society around us, be it favorably or negatively. Those faithful to Christ walk the path of those laws and rules that the Holy Church sacredly preserves. But those who desire superfluous comforts and joys in this earthly world, which will perish sooner or later, prefer other laws: not the laws of the Church, but those that allow them to live as they like and think as they like, placing their own will above the spirit of the Church, which was given by the Lord God Himself. And they call on others to follow their path.

Perhaps, brothers and sisters, soon troubles will find you here, and some of you will be called to take the path of rejecting the holy laws and submit only to those laws that are given by human authority. Fear this path! Fear this path, which the thief took who hung on the left side—for the weight of blasphemy, the weight of blaspheming Christ took him down to eternal destruction. And those who blaspheme the Church's laws blaspheme Christ Himself, Who is the Head of the Church; for the laws of the Church were given by the Holy Spirit through the apostles. And local laws were based on those same laws and canons of the Church. Let's not think ourselves wiser than the

holy hierarchs who established the rules of the Church; let's not consider ourselves greatly wise. Let us humbly cry out with the wise thief: Remember me, O Lord, in Thy Kingdom!

Pray for the forgiveness of sins. If we depart from the laws of the Church, if we continually violate them, pray that the Lord would have mercy and lead us with the thief to the Kingdom of Heaven. Then we will not take the path that the impious thief took, remaining impious to the end and falling into hell. May the Lord deliver you all from this. Amen.

*St. John of Shanghai*

## *The Prologue from Ochrid*

*St Nikolai of Zhicha*

*(03.22.2022)*

### **1. THE HOLY FORTY MARTYRS OF SEBASTE**

All of them were soldiers in the Roman army and steadfastly believed in the Lord Jesus. When the persecution of Christians began during the reign of Licinius, they were brought to trial before the commander. When he threatened to strip them of their honor as soldiers, one of them, St. Candidus, responded: "Take away from us not only the honor of being soldiers but also our bodies, for nothing is more dear or honorable to us than Christ our God." After that, the commander ordered his servants to stone the holy martyrs. While the servants were hurling stones at the Christians, the stones turned and fell back on the servants, forcefully striking them. One of the stones struck the commander's face and knocked out his teeth. The torturers, angry as wild beasts, bound all of the holy martyrs and threw them into the lake. They then stationed a guard around the lake to prevent any of them from escaping. There was a terrible frost, and the lake froze around the bodies of the martyrs. To increase their pain and suffering, and to persuade even one of them to deny Christ and acknowledge the idols of Rome, the torturers heated and illumined a bath by the side of the lake in sight of the frozen martyrs. Indeed, one of them was persuaded. He came out of the water and entered the bath. And behold, from heaven there appeared an extraordinary light, which warmed the water in the lake and the bodies of the martyrs. With that light, thirty-nine wreaths descended from heaven over their heads. Upon seeing this, a guard on the shore removed all his clothes, confessed the name of the Lord Jesus and entered the lake so that he could become worthy of the fortieth wreath in place of the betrayer. Indeed, the last wreath



descended upon him. The next day the entire town was astonished when they saw that the martyrs were still alive. Then the wicked judges ordered that the lower part of their legs be broken and their bodies thrown into the water so that the Christians could not recover them. On the third day the martyrs appeared to Peter, the local bishop, and summoned him to gather their relics and remove them from the water. The bishop with his clergy went out in the dark of night and beheld the relics of the martyrs shining brightly in the water. Every bone which was separated from their bodies floated to the top and glowed like a candle. Bishop Peter gathered and honorably buried them. The souls of these martyrs went to the Lord Jesus, Who suffered for all of us and resurrected with glory. They suffered honorably and were crowned with unfading glory in the year 320 A.D.

## **2. THE VENERABLE PHILOROMUS**

He lived and mortified himself in Galatia in the fourth century. It is said about him that he was so perfected in all virtues that he resembled an angel rather than a man. He was especially glorified because of his patience. He was persecuted by the Emperor Julian the Apostate and suffered much for Christ. After the death of Julian the wicked persecutor of Christ, St. Philoromus lived peacefully, benefitting many. He reposed in his eightieth year.

## **3. SAINT CAESARIUS**

St. Caesarius (+369), the brother of Gregory the Theologian, was also a theological writer. Among other things he attempted to answer the question: How long a time did Adam and Eve spend in Paradise before their expulsion? Some have determined the time to be six hours; others, twenty-four hours; and still others, three days. St. Caesarius was of the mind that the length of time was forty days. "Because," he says, "our Lord fasted forty days in the wilderness and during that time He was tempted by the devil. Since the old Adam could not resist the temptation of the devil in the abundance of Paradise, the new Adam resisted the devil valiantly in the hungry and thirsty wilderness."

### **HYMN OF PRAISE**

#### **THE HOLY FORTY MARTYRS**

Martyrs in the lake, shackled by frost,

Strongly adhering to the Holy Faith, illumined by hope,

Cried out to their beloved God: "Thou, Who didst astonish the world

By Thine awesome sacrifice and Resurrection--Oh, do Thou enliven us!

The firmament of heaven and all created things glorify Thee;

Behold, the abyss, fire, hail, snow, ice and heat glorify Thee!

Thou didst help the great Moses, Thy servant,

And Joshua Son of Nun, and after that Elisha,

By commanding nature to calm and divide the waters.

Now help Thy faithful as Thou hast until now.

Do not allow the frost to be stronger than man,

That we, Forty Martyrs, not become the subject of scorn.

Oh, Thou canst, if Thou willest, for Thou rulest over all;

Thou, when Thou wantest, canst change ice into heat and heat into ice.

For Thy name, the frost consumes us as an angry beast--

Oh, help us that the name of the Almighty may be praised!"

Martyrs in the lake, shackled by frost,

Were warmed from heaven by God's light.

Gloriously they fell and remained Forty Martyrs

To the fear, horror and shame of the darkened unbelievers.

## REFLECTION

Conceal your spiritual treasures and do not reveal them unnecessarily. Behold how men conceal and hide their material wealth, and how, when forced to reveal how much they have, they always conceal the greater amount and only reveal the lesser. Very few are they who wish to reveal all that they possess, and fewer still are those who would declare that they have more than they actually possess (and these the world considers frivolous and mindless). This clearly shows you how you need to conceal your spiritual wealth, that is, your virtues, good works, fasting, vigils, and prayers. Why do not the wise children of this world reveal their material wealth? For two reasons: So that neither would thieves hear of it, nor would evil men be

provoked to envy. There also exist envious and jealous thieves in regard to spiritual treasure. They are the spirits of malice. As soon as you reveal your spiritual treasure, they will endeavor to belittle it and to squander it. Just as soon as you reveal it without need--let us say, out of vanity, so as to be praised--they seize it and disparage it. And you, O rich man of spiritual treasure, will imperceptibly and suddenly become a poor man. Many who were spiritually rich, the saints, made themselves out to be fools before the world so that, by appearing foolish, they would conceal their great wisdom and strength within themselves. Abba Isaiah writes: "Those good works that are performed in secret are more pleasing to God." St. Nilus of Sinai says: "The covered skin of the body is white, but the uncovered skin is parched and black." So it is with our concealed and our revealed good works.

## CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the Lord Jesus in the hands of God's enemies gathered together in the home of Caiaphas:

1. How all of them hurriedly sought false witnesses, for they wanted by whatever means to kill Christ;
2. How they spat in His face and struck Him on the face;
3. How our Lord endured all with unspeakable dignity and without anger.

## HOMILY

### **on enduring to the end**

"But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13).  
O Lord most wonderful, Thou hast endured all--everything to the end. That is why Thou becamest not only blessed but also the source of blessings for all men who desire good for themselves throughout the ages.

The apostles endured all to the end and entered into blessed eternity. The saints willingly endured difficulties and sufferings to the end and were glorified in heaven and on earth. The martyrs willingly endured all pains to the end and became the adopted fellow heirs of the Kingdom of Christ.

Every founder of a new organization recruits followers for himself with the promise of good fruits and many pleasures, but deliberately remains silent about the hardships and labors that lead to those fruits and pleasures. Our Lord Jesus is the only one Who spoke the whole truth to His followers--both the bitter and the sweet side of the truth. He did not promise fruits without service, glory without suffering,

ultimate rest without the thorny path, victory without struggle, pleasure without bitterness, or the Kingdom without tears and self-denial. Although our Lord enumerated the many difficulties that would befall His followers, in the end He does not abandon them without consolation. He gives meaning to their sufferings and does not leave them in darkness. He says: *He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.* And what that blessing is which awaits those who endure to the end, He Himself has sufficiently revealed. This blessing has been witnessed to even until today and continues to be witnessed to by many saints, who have either appeared in glory to the faithful from the other world or who, while yet in the flesh, were raised in the spirit to a vision of that glory and blessedness which await those who are faithful, elect and persevering. O Lord, Thou art our strength. Help us to endure to the end in the faith that Thou art beside us.  
**To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.**

## *Services this Week*

- ❖ *Tuesday, March 22<sup>nd</sup> – The Holy 40 Martyred Youth of Sebaste – Divine Liturgy 09: 30 AM*
- ❖ *Saturday – **March 26<sup>th</sup>** – PARACLESIS - THE OFFICE OF SUPPLICATION TO SAINT NECTARIOS - 05:00 PM - Confession*
- ❖ ***3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent (Veneration of the Holy Cross)** (Sunday, March 27<sup>th</sup>) – 10:00 AM Divine Liturgy*