

ST OLYMPIA ORTHODOX CHURCH

POTSDAM, NEW YORK 13676

ORTHODOX CHURCH OF AMERICA
DIOCESE OF NY AND NJ



**Welcome to St. Olympia Orthodox Church,
a young and, God willing, growing community of worshippers.**

**Your priest is Fr. Peter Irfan, Acting Rector.
You may reach him at 716-342-8520 (cell) or at fatherpeter777@yahoo.com.**

**Please join us for prayer and fellowship.
Divine Liturgies are held every Sunday at 10 am.
Great Vespers are held every Saturday evening at 5 pm.**

Next Services

Saturday, November 3rd

**Great Vespers
5:00 pm**

Fr. Peter is available to hear confessions before Vespers by appointment.

Sunday, November 4th

**Matins
8:45 am**

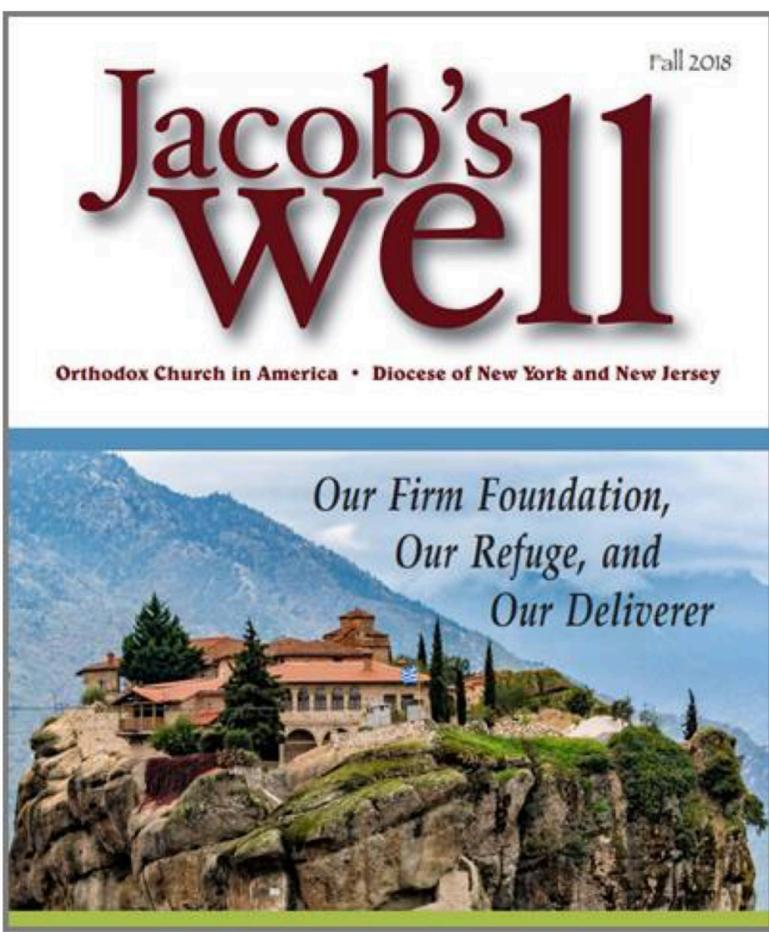
**Divine Liturgy
10:00 am**

Fellowship to follow

at

**St. Olympia Chapel
123 Main Street
Potsdam, NY**

*The latest issue of **Jacob's Well** features an article on our Mission Parish. Pick up your copy at church this coming Sunday.*



Save the dates!

Vladyka Michael will visit our parish on the weekend of Nov. 17th-18th. On Saturday, Nov. 17th, Mother Sophronia will present a lecture on angels in iconography in Knowles Conference Center, SUNY Potsdam campus. The presentation will be preceded by Great Vespers, also in Knowles. On Sunday morning, Nov. 18th, Vladyka Michael will be with us at St. Olympia Chapel for the Divine Liturgy and fellowship meal that follows.



Thoughts on Luke 8:5-15

Note: the following article was written by an anonymous contributor. It is included here by permission.

When I was young, strong and stately elm trees lined the streets in our neighborhood. They flourished: so full of life, so full of green growth, so strong, so firmly rooted. But one by one those trees became sick and died. What killed them? It was a little beetle carrying a fungus called "Dutch Elm Disease." So big... so strong...so sure...and it only took a little bug! Well, you and I are like those elm trees. We like to think that we stand tall, strong, sure, healthy and flourishing in our Christian faith; that nothing could shatter our faith or even call it into question. But something can---and it's not sickness, sorrow, disappointment or defeat. It's sin. The seemingly-tiny seed of sin, once planted in our hearts, has the power to erode and choke out faith and then plant within us unbelief itself. But unlike those elm trees for whose disease there was no cure, we have both a cure and protection. And that cure and protection, together with the spir-

itual plant food we need to nourish eternal life, is in Holy Tradition, especially the Sacred Scriptures, and in the Mysteries of Confession and Holy Communion.

And that brings us to Luke 8:5-15, the parable of the sower and the seed. In this parable Jesus describes four different places, four different types of soil, on which the seed fell, producing four different results. In the first of Jesus' examples, "some seed fell by the wayside," soil packed hard as concrete by constant traffic over it. And that soil, says our Lord, represents people who hear His Word, His truth; but "then the Devil comes and takes away the Word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved."

Now, our hearts are not so hard that the Word and grace of God just bounce off of them. After all, here we are, believing and worshipping the true God in the Orthodox Faith! But this does warn us that as we grow in the field of the Lord, the Devil is also there, waiting and watching for opportunity to snatch God's gifts of grace and faith from our hearts, to harden our hearts against Christ. And the means he uses is sin. Sin is me doing what I want--even though God knows and I know it's wrong--because it's what I want. It can start, not with bank robbery or murder, but with something seemingly small, like gossip. But every time I follow my will instead of God's will, I move myself just a little farther away from God and lay a brick in a wall between myself and God, until the day comes when He and I are miles apart, with a huge wall between us.

The second group of seeds "fell on rock; as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture." These people, Jesus explains, "are those who, when they hear, receive the Word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away." Now, you and I do have roots! God has grown those roots in us through our instruction in the Faith, instruction that began with our parents teaching us about Jesus and simply how to make the Sign of the Cross. Our roots have grown through the instruction we received in church schools, Bible studies, all the sermons we've heard over the years, and through our own reading and reflecting on the Scriptures. Our faith has roots by the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. But let's not fool ourselves into thinking that our roots are as deep as they need to be. Psalm 119:11 says to God, "Your word have I hidden within my heart, that I might not sin against You." Being so immersed in Sacred Scripture that the words sink deep into our minds and then into our hearts is what sinks our spiritual roots into the nurture power of the Holy Spirit Who, says Jesus, is given to us to "lead [us] into all truth."

No, "faith" is not first and foremost knowing and accepting as true a lot of facts about Jesus. But Jesus Himself says that He is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life;" so knowing, accepting, and by His grace living the Truth in God's written Word is essential to relationship with Christ. But, as St. Paul says in Philippians 3:10, real faith goes beyond the facts to personal relationship: "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings." It's being in that living relationship with the risen and living Jesus that's the only way to withstand Satan's attacks and tricks, the only way not to topple in the winds of time and temptation. In Holy Baptism our roots were planted in Christ started; but we need to remain well-rooted and develop ever deeper connection to, ever deeper relationship with, the risen Jesus in order to remain growing in the field of the Lord.

The third group of seeds "fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked it." The seed grows with a promising start, but then the thorns and weeds spring up and choke out the plants. These, says Jesus, are "those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity." Of all the warnings in this parable, this one is the most important for you and for me. Every day, sometimes every hour, we meet temptations and the people who bring them. These come to us in ways we usually don't imagine or expect, but they're there...often in disguise. For example: it's good and right to be a grown-up; to accept responsibility in life and fulfill it. But with responsibilities also comes the temptation to become overburdened with care, to be overwhelmed by them, such that we end up like Martha in Luke 10:41, becoming "worried and troubled about many things," forgetting that "one thing needful," which is "sitting at Jesus' feet and hearing His word." That's when those responsibilities—as good as they may be on their own—become a weed that needs to be pulled out of our lives; otherwise it'll gradually choke and kill our faith. We need to be rooted, but also weeded; we need to watch and pray so that the cares of this world do not overtake the care of our souls. Yes, by all means, we must fulfill our responsibilities according to the ability that God gives us; but we dare not let them overtake and overwhelm us, to the point where our faith suffocates and dies!

Jesus also mentions the "riches and pleasures of life." And let's understand clearly that there are things in this world God wants us to enjoy. In Psalm 104, which we chant every day at Vespers, verse 15 speaks of how God brings forth "vegetation for the service of man, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens man's heart." But where God gives blessings, the Devil will seek to plant the weeds of temptation trying to entice us to pursue instant gratification and to pursue self-satisfaction. Satan will try to convince you that we should always be "happy" according to our will, that we should always seek pleasure for our own that we should demand the right to go our own way, and return to what is right and God's way only if and when it's convenient and easy. These temptations and human tendencies are all thorns and weeds that need to be pulled up out of our lives just as soon as they begin to take root. If, instead, these weeds are allowed to grow, they will waste no time in choking out our faith.

Lastly, some seed "fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold." These, our Lord explains, "are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience." That speaks of the importance of being nurtured and fruitful. Not that we, in and of ourselves, are "good ground." In our fallen human nature we are sinners from the instant of our conception; as it says in Psalm 51:5, "indeed, in guilt was I born, a sinner since my mother conceived me," such that, as it says in Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." But we become "good ground," when the Spirit of God reclaims us by placing in our hearts faith in the Gospel and bringing us to new life with a new nature in the waters of Holy Baptism. It's in the heart with Spirit-created faith that the seeds of God's truth can take root and grow and produce what Galatians 5:22-23 calls "the fruit of the Spirit," "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness [which] is not weakness" but having all our power trained by God's discipline and surrendered into His control." It is by God's grace alone that we are able to produce fruits of faith. Remember our Lord's word in John 15:5, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" It is only by "abiding," by keeping in deep personal relationship with Him, that we, step by step and day by day, "yield a crop a hundredfold," results that remain. But the result depends on the ground in which the seed is planted. So what kind of ground are you and I choosing to be today?