

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

June, 2006 - Volume XI, Issue 6

St. Gregory the Great Orthodox Church - A Western Rite Mission of the Antiochian Archdiocese

A Reading from a Homily by St. Augustine of Hippo

*died AD430
feast day - August 28*

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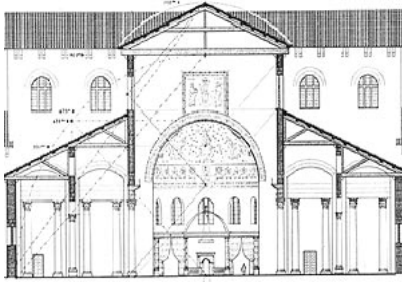
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This congregation is [gathered here for] the dedication of a house of prayer. The house then of our prayers is the one before our eyes, but we ourselves are the house of God. If we ourselves are the house of God, we are being built up in this age, that at the end of the age we may be dedicated. A building, or rather the process of building, involves hard work, a dedication means exultation.

What was happening here when that church of yours was rising has its counterpart when those who believe in Christ are brought together. By becoming Christians they are like stones newly quarried on the mountains or timber felled in the forests. When they are catechized, baptized, formed, they are, as it were, hewn at the hands of workers and craftsmen, they are set in line and evened up.

Nevertheless they do not make a house of God unless they are cemented together by love. If those beams of wood and those stones of the church were not joined to one another in a definite pattern, if they were not peacefully intertwined, if they did not by mutual attachment in a certain sense “love” one another, no one would dare to put a foot inside. In a word, when you see the stones and wood in any building securely fastened to each other, you enter there without dread, you fear no collapse.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, wishing to enter and dwell in us, used to say as though by way of building, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another.” “A commandment,” he says, “I give you.” You were lying in ruins, decrepit, no house for me. To be rescued from your state of ruin, you must now love one another.



Old St. Peter's in Rome

Let your love then consider that this house of yours, as was foretold and promised, is up to now being built in the whole world. For when the house of the Lord was being built after the Exile, as another psalm has it, it was said, "O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord all the earth." In that place "a new song" was spoken of: here the Lord said "a new commandment." What could a new song produce except new love? Singing is characteristic of a lover. The voice of this singer has the fervor of sacred love.

Therefore what we here see accomplished materially in these walls, let that be carried out spiritually in our minds; and what we see perfected in stones and timber, let that be brought to completion in your bodies, with the help of God's grace as the builder.

Above all, therefore, let us give thanks to the Lord our God, from whom comes every good endowment and every perfect gift, and let us praise his goodness with all the eagerness of our heart. For in order to build this house of prayer he has visited the mind of his faithful people, he has stirred their affection, he has granted help: he has inspired those not yet willing to be willing, he has aided the efforts of the goodwill to carry it into action. In this way God "who works in his own people both to will and to work for his good pleasure", has himself begun all these activities and himself completed them.

St. Silverius, Pope and Martyr

Feast Day - June 20

The amount of attention which has been given to the book and movie, *The Da Vinci Code*, shows how much people are interested in stories of suspense, intrigue, conspiracy and murder - especially those involving the Christian religion. It is unfortunate when what might have been an entertaining novel claims to be true and then presents a very false and harmful picture of the Church.

Novelists and film directors would do well to look at the true stories of the Church. Historical Christianity abounds with tales of plottings, scandals, and assassinations. But there is one important difference between these true stories and that of *The Da Vinci Code*: in the end, truth ascends over falsehood. Orthodox Christianity triumphs over heresy. Life conquers death.

The life of St. Silverius, 6th century Pope of Rome and martyr, is one of these fascinating tales. Sounding much like a suspense novel (or an Italian opera!), here is his story:

The scene opens at the Imperial Palace in Constantinople, where the Emperor Justinian is talking with his wife, Theodora. They have recently learned that Agapetus, the Pope of Rome, has died, leaving that see vacant. Theodora begins scheming at once to turn this situation to her advantage by having someone of her choice placed on the papal throne.

Justinian has concentrated on reuniting the Empire, codifying the law, and church building. Among others, he built the great Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, he rebuilt the Constantinian structures in the Holy Land, and beautified churches with mosaics, particularly those in Ravenna which bear his and Theodora's likenesses. Justinian adores his wife, whom he raised from her earlier life as a bawdy performer in the Hippodrome to be his Empress. The other person he most heavily relies upon is his chief general, Belasarius, who has distinguished himself in military service. It is noteworthy that the general is married to Antonina, the best friend of the Empress. These two women frequently commiserate in plotting strategy for getting their way.

On this occasion, Theodora is still fuming over the deposition of her favorite, Anthimus, as the Patriarch of Constantinople, at the instigation of the now-deceased Roman pontiff. Anthimus held monophysite beliefs, denying the two natures of Christ and rejecting the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon. Whether the Empress shares these beliefs or whether she just favors a pliable person in high places is not known, but whatever the reason, she now proposes to have Agapetus replaced by someone more "flexible" and open to compromise. (Unknown to all but Theodora, the deposed Anthimus, is in hiding deep within the Palace, courtesy of the Empress!).

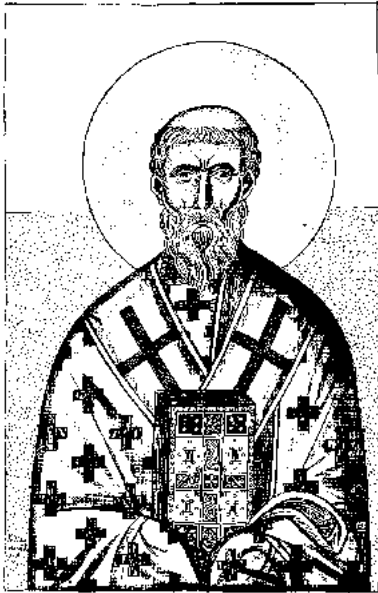
The person Theodora decides to put forward is Vigilus, a Roman archdeacon serving as the papal nuncio in Constantinople. His family pedigree is impeccable and he has several traits which are favorable to Theodora's plans - he loves money and he is extremely ambitious. He has courted her favor since his arrival in the city and he suits her purposes very well.

The scene now shifts to Rome where, as yet unknown to those in Constantinople, the situation has changed. Italy is now ruled by the Goths (who have adopted Arian Christianity, but who leave the Roman Christians to continue to maintain the apostolic faith). In his efforts to reunite the Empire, Justinian had sent Belasarius to Italy, and the troops are now moving through Italian territory. When the



Justinian from a mosaic in Ravenna

death of Pope Agapetus is reported to the Gothic king, Theodatus, he hurries the process of electing a new pope, hoping to avoid Imperial interference. When the election is accomplished, he does not notify Justinian.



*Holy Silverius,
pray for us!*

The man who is ordained pope (on June 8 in 536), is Silverius, a subdeacon whose father, Hormisdas, had been pope from 514-523. Silverius may have been a hasty choice, but he is a good one. Staunchly Orthodox, he would never lead the Church into heresy, but he desires to have the people live their everyday lives in peace. Consequently, when the imperial troops are about to force their way through one of the gates of the city, Pope Severius convinces the Gothic troops to depart out of the city by an opposite gate, thereby sparing the people from the terrors of a bloody battle.

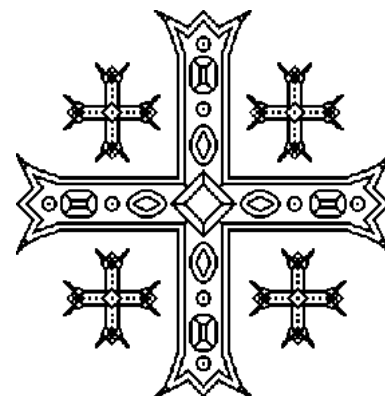
Meanwhile, back in Constantinople, the news that her original plan for Vigilius has been foiled has reached Theodora's ears. With conniving help from her friend, Antonina, she now devises a "Plan B". A letter is sent to Belasarius, ordering him to drive Severius out and have Vigilius elected pope. When the general receives the letter in Rome, he is very reluctant to participate in such a scandal, but he is caught between Theodora, Antonina, and the ambitions of Vigilius. This famous general, who has recently triumphed over the Vandals, is no match for his wife and the Empress! Just as he runs out of arguments for avoiding the plot, the perfect excuse presents itself.

The Gothic troops who had left Rome by the "back door" now reappear with many reinforcements, ready to do battle with the Emperor's army. The fighting goes on for nine days and now, at the end - with Belasarius' forces victorious - a new plot has been cooked up. A fake letter has been produced to "prove" that Pope Severius communicated with the enemy during the siege, so he is now charged with treason and ordered to appear before the Emperor in Constantinople. Upon hearing these charges, the pope at first flees to the Basilica of St. Sabina for sanctuary, but later he appears at the palace where Belasarius is staying.

As described by an eye-witness, this next touching scene opens with Antonina reclining on her bed and her husband seated at her feet. As Severius approaches the palace, his accompanying clergy are detained at the door and he is ushered, alone, into the general's bedchamber. Here, after much berating by Antonina and after many declarations that he would never abandon the Orthodox faith, the pope is roughly stripped of his papal garments, dressed in a simple monk's habit, and sent off to exile in Lycia. The next day, the announcement is made that Severius has been deposed and that Vigilius will be the new pope.

The scene now shifts to the city of Patara, in Lycia, where the local bishop has discovered the fraudulently deposed pope living in his diocese. Hearing the whole sordid story, he travels to Constantinople and confronts the Emperor, who has been kept in the dark about this latest plot. Justinian is justifiably startled by this information and sends word that the pope is to be returned to Rome for a proper trial and, if found innocent, to be reinstated in his office.

As this message is received in Rome, quick thinking is required if the plotters are to accomplish their goals. This time, they arrange for Severius to be waylaid on his return trip and taken to the island of Palmeria, a bleak, inhospitable place. To the satisfaction of all the schemers, Severius soon dies in this out-of-the-way place. Did he die of starvation or exposure, or was he murdered in a more direct manner? The facts will never be revealed. But Severius was received by God as one who had given his life upholding goodness and truth. His heavenly birthday occurred on June 20 in the year 538.



Now, the Empress Theodora, her friend, Antonina, her husband, General Belasarius, and the usurper, Vigilius could celebrate their victory. No doubt Theodora already has in mind the sequence of events and circumstances: with her “puppet” in the Roman see, the monophysite party will be welcomed back into favor, with a winking eye toward little theological differences; Anthimus will be brought out of hiding and restored to the patriarchal throne in Constantinople, and Theodora will once again be highly regarded by churchmen in high places (and her sins, as well as her heresies, winked at).

But our Lord has promised that not even the gates of Hell will prevail against His Church, so the closing scene of this exciting drama is very different from what was planned. Pope Vigilius, remembering whose steps in which he follows, has repented of his sinful conspiracy and is now a determined defender of the Orthodox faith. His predecessor, Severius, is revered as a martyr saint and honored by the Church on June 20. In the words of Fr. Alban Butler, in his *Lives of the Fathers, Martyres, and Other Principal Saints*, “the providence of God in the protection of his church never appears more visible than when he suffers tyrants or scandals seemingly almost to overwhelm it. Then does he most miraculously interpose in its defence, to show that nothing can make void his promises.”

Not many books or films could concoct a story more full of suspense and intrigue than this true story. We rejoice that, unlike fictional accounts, this story ends with triumph for the Church. Thanks be to God!

Parish News

On Sunday, May 28, Sebastian Ambrose O'Neill was brought into the Holy Orthodox Church through the sacrament of Holy Baptism and Chrismation. We rejoice with his family, Jim, Lien, and sister, Eve, and with his godparents, David and Jennifer Caldwell.

The Eastern Region Parish Life Conference will be held in Pittsburgh, hosted by St. George Cathedral, July 5-9. Please see Fr. Nicholas if you are able to attend.



*The Feast of Pentecost
is June 11th*

Work continues on our new church building. We are grateful to all who have given their time and energy to do the work we can do in preparation for the upcoming work of the electrician, plumber, and dry wall installer. The enclosed letter from Brian Green, the Property Committee chairman, provides more details. We are hoping to have the building ready for our first services early in August.

His Grace Bishop THOMAS has asked Fr. Nicholas to help bring a congregation of Continuing Anglicans into the Orthodox Church. Robert Waggener has resigned as Bishop of the Diocese of the Holy Cross, formerly part of the Province of Christ the King. Robert and the people of Christ Church are now catechumens and are being instructed in the Holy Orthodox faith. God willing, they are to be received into the Church on the afternoon of the Feast of Pentecost. Fr. Nicholas, together with the deacons and assistant pastors of the diocese will provide pastoral care for this congregation until September, when Bishop THOMAS has announced that he will ordain Robert to the sacred Priesthood. Please keep the people of this congregation in your prayers as they follow the path home to the Holy Orthodox Church.

An Orthodox Response to The Da Vinci Code

There has been much hype in the media in recent weeks concerning the movie adaptation of Dan Brown's book, *The Da Vinci Code*. Christians can certainly find better uses for their time and money than to bother with the book or movie. The Greek Archdiocese has compiled a number of helpful articles responding to the challenges to traditional Christianity made by this work of fiction. The articles can be found on the web site at: <http://www.goarch.org/en/special/DaVinci/>

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>June 2006</h1>						
				1 Ascension of Our Lord	2 Ss. Marcellinus, Peter & Erasmus, Mm, 304 FAST	3 Within the Octave of Ascension St. Kevin, Ab. 618 <i>6PM Vespers</i>
4 Sunday in the Octave of Ascension 8:30AM <i>Matins</i> 9AM Sung <i>Mass</i>	5 St. Boniface, BM, 754	6 Within the Octave	7 Within the Octave FAST	8 Octave of the Ascension	9 St. Columba of Iona, Ab., 597 FAST	10 Vigil of Pentecost <i>6PM Vespers</i>
11 Feast of Pentecost 8:30AM <i>Matins</i> 9AM Sung <i>Mass</i>	12 Whit Monday	13 Whit Tuesday	14 Ember Wednesday FAST	15 St. Barnabas, Apostle (tr from 6/11)	16 Ember Friday FAST	17 Ember Saturday <i>6PM Vespers</i> FAST
18 Trinity Sunday 8:30AM <i>Matins</i> 9AM Sung <i>Mass</i>	19 Ss. Gervase & Protase, Mm, 2 nd c.	20 Translation of St. Edward, KM, 980 St. Severinus, PM, 538	21 Feria FAST	22 Corpus Christi	23 Within the Octave of Corpus Christi FAST	24 Nativity of St. John the Baptist <i>6PM Vespers</i>
25 Pentecost 2 Within the Octave 8:30AM <i>Matins</i> 9AM Sung <i>Mass</i>	26 Within the Octave	27 Within the Octave	28 Within the Octave FAST	29 Ss. Peter & Paul, Apostles, 1 st century	30 St. Paul, Apostle, 1 st c. FAST	

Confessions are heard during the Psalms at Matins, following Vespers, and by appointment

Coffee Hour follows Sunday Liturgy