

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

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

A Reading from a Sermon by Saint Ephraim the Syrian

*Confessor and Doctor
d. 373
feast day - June 18*

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You have learned, Dearest Brethren, that God the Father sent His Only-begotten Son into the world for your salvation. Believe this with firm and undoubting faith: for God the Holy speaks only Truth. You have also heard that the Only-begotten Himself took flesh from the womb of the Holy Virgin, that He was truly born of Her, and conceived of the Holy Ghost. Keep these truths within your heart as most certain; and let nothing whatsoever incline you to doubt concerning that of which the Holy Gospel speaks daily to you. Rather let you receive all its teaching with fullest faith; ever contemplating the divine truths with the unclouded eyes of faith. And contemplate the Lord with the eyes of the soul; embracing Him with all your faith. Follow Him whithersoever He goes, and from the great love within your own heart bring light into each single place.

Let your soul rejoice when you behold the Lord, curing “all sick people” by His grace [Mt. 4:8], and casting out unclean spirits from the possessed, by His divine power and by His word only. Go with Him, as His inseparable companion, to the wedding Feast of Cana, and drink of the wine of His blessing. Let you have ever before you the Face of the Lord, and look upon His beauty, and let your earnest gaze turn nowhere away from his most sweet countenance. Go before Him into a desert place and see the wonder of His works, where He multiplied in his own Holy Hands the bread that sufficed to feed a great multitude. Go, my brother, go forward, and with all the love of your soul follow Christ wheresoever He may go. For if you so follow Him, and if you keep Him company, walking in love and faith, “there shall no evil come to thee, and the wicked on shall not come nigh to thee.” [Ps. 40:10, 7]

And follow Him to the Last Supper, in which he bequeathed, and to His Disciples, the Holy Mysteries, and ponder earnestly why it was that He there washed the feet of His Disciples, and, moved within you by the profound reflection of untroubled faith, with fear and wonder exclaim: God the Creator of all things, who of His grace made man from the dust has washed the feet of His own image, of His own creation! Ponder earnestly within you, O Brethren, and praise and adore His infinite goodness.



And lovingly behold Him as taking bread into His Hands, He blesses it, and breaks it, as the outward form of His own Immaculate body; and the chalice which He blessed as the outward form of his Precious Blood, and gave to His Disciples; and be you also a partaker of His Sacraments.

And going from there, and descending to the court of the impious and unjust Caiphas, enter in with your Lord, and stand there firmly, so that you may witness the insults He suffers for you, that you may then become a more perfect lover of your Lord. Follow Him still further, and stand at the place of His Cross, as a faithful servant by his Lord. Behold how blood flowed from His side, and water, for the redemption of your soul, O my Brother! And also look carefully where they laid Him, when taken down from the Cross. And go in the morning early; go with the women to His tomb, and see the stone rolled back from above Him, and see the Angels standing there. Listen to what the Angels say to the women: “The Lord is truly risen: as he told you.”

All these things let you prudently, fully, faithfully, and without faltering consider; and believe most fervently that all these things are true, as are the accounts set down concerning them. For unless you look upon all these things with the understanding eyes of faith you cannot be uplifted from earth to heaven, and behold the sufferings of Christ with spiritual understanding. For the eye of faith, when it shines clear and bright as light in the heart of any man, shall also clearly and openly behold the Lamb of God, Who for us was slain and sacrificed, and Who gave us His Holy and Immaculate Body that we eat of it for ever, and partake of it unto the forgiveness of our sins. [I Cor. 5]

He who possesses this eye of faith shall clearly and openly look upon the Lord, and with sure and perfect faith eat of the Most Holy Body of the Immaculate Lamb, the Only-begotten Son of the heavenly Father, and drink of His Blood; a faith that is far from presuming to scrutinize the divine and holy nature. For faith is a gift of God; and it is faith which works within us, and looks to the things to come; and it is ever called faith, and not curiosity.

Do you believe, Dearly Beloved, in Christ Jesus, the Only-begotten Son, and that for you He was born as man on earth? What need then have you to search into the Unsearchable, or to trace the Untraceable? For if you pry curiously into these things you shall be called curious rather than a believer. Be therefore a believer, and without blame.

Beyond the Jordan... by Fr. Nicholas Alford

Isuspect that I was not alone in forgetting how much of Holy Scripture took place East of the Jordan River. I received a wonderful “reminder” as my father and I traveled with a group of clergy to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan last month. It was a true blessing to make a pilgrimage to this other side of the Holy Land (and travel to Jordan is generally much safer than to Israel at this time).

Our tour through the Bible began back in the Book of Genesis as we visited places associated with the Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We traveled the King's Highway used by Abraham and later by Moses and the Children of Israel (Genesis 14, Numbers 20). We visited the ruins of the monastery built over Lot's cave where he lived with his two daughters (Genesis 19) after the destruction of nearby Sodom and Gomorrah. Crossing the Jabbok River reminded us of Jacob's struggle with the angel that resulted in his name being changed to Israel (Genesis 32). We enjoyed the same view of the promised land that Moses had from Mt. Nebo, though Moses was forbidden to enter (Deuteronomy 34). Modern day Amman was called Rabbath, the capitol of the Ammonites, in the Old Testament and was conquered by King David as he was getting into trouble with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11ff). As we journeyed south we passed through the land of the Ammonites, the Moabites, and the Edomites which we read of throughout the Old Testament and sing about in the Psalms.

The highlight of the trip was our visit to a place associated with both the Old and New Testaments - Bethany beyond the Jordan. It was here that the Prophet Elijah was taken up into heaven by a whirlwind (2 Kings 2). It was said that Elijah would return before the coming of the Messiah (Malachi 4:5) and the Angel Gabriel told Zacharias that John would have the spirit and power of Elijah to prepare the way before Christ (Luke 1:17). John went out across the Jordan River to preach and baptize in the place where Elijah was taken up. There he baptized Jesus as the heavens opened and the Father and the Spirit bore witness to the Son, as Christ began His work of healing and restoring



creation. Over the centuries this place became a major pilgrimage destination and both patristic testimony and archeological evidence confirm that this is the place where Christians have always venerated Christ's baptism. The site is owned by the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and is undergoing development in cooperation with the Jordanian government. A new Orthodox Church is under construction nearby.



We visited two other important places mentioned in the New Testament. At Machaerus we saw the ruins of Herod's fortress, where John the Baptist was beheaded following Salome's request (Mark 6). The modern day village of Umm Qays is built alongside the ruins of ancient Gadara, overlooking the Sea of Galilee and the Golan Heights. Gadara was one of the ten Greco-Roman towns called the "Decapolis." It was in Gadara that Christ encountered a man possessed by demons who lived among the tombs (a sign that he was spiritually dead) and Christ cast the demons out into a herd of pigs who rushed down to the sea and drowned (Mark 5). In the 4th century a basilica was built over one of the tombs which the local people remembered to be the tomb where the man had lived before Christ restored him to health and life.

Iwas also glad to meet Orthodox Christians in Jordan who are the "living stones" of the Church in that land. I was able to visit two churches in Amman where I met the priests and another church in Madaba (where the famous 6th century mosaic map of the Holy Land is on the floor). I was very glad to hear the Orthodox woman who drove me to the cathedral praise the new bishop (who is Greek), saying that he spoke no Arabic when he arrived, but that he asked that all services be written in Arabic but in Greek letters, so he could begin to serve the liturgy in Arabic. Today all services at the Cathedral are in the language of the people.

The Old Testament reading at Matins on the Sunday after our return spoke of places in Jordan I had been just a few days before. This trip was a blessing in many ways - to walk in the steps of Abraham, Moses, Elijah, John and Christ Himself. I pray for peace in the Middle East, that many more pilgrims may visit both sides of the Holy Land and be blessed by what they have seen.

Saint Paulinus of Nola - Feast Day, June 22

Paulinus had it all - he came from a prominent family with wealth and property; he had received an excellent education; he was respected as a lawyer and public official; he had achieved some

renown as a poet; he had a devoted wife. But something was missing, and finding it changed Paulinus' life forever. *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.* [Matthew 6:19-21]

Born in Bordeaux around 354 (the son of the Prefect of Gaul), Paulinus studied with the poet, Ausonius, and developed some skill at writing poetry himself. For a while, Paulinus served as governor of the Campania region of Southern Italy and here he learned about St. Felix, a 4th century Christian martyr, whose relics were in the city of Nola.

Paulinus married a Spanish wife, Therasia, and for several years, they enjoyed the leisurely life of Roman nobles, staying at their various properties in Gaul, Italy and Spain. A son was born to the couple but died shortly after birth.

Whether it was due to this tragedy, the influence and example of others, the memory of St. Felix in Campania, or the nagging discontent at not finding happiness, Paulinus and Therasia decided to become Christians (unlike his friend and correspondent of later years, St. Augustine, Paulinus did not record the turning of the heart, the change of mind, that resulted in his conversion). The two were baptized by Bishop Delphinus of Bordeaux around the year 390. *My soul is athirst for God, yea even for the living God: when shall I come to appear before the presence of God?* [Psalm 42:2]

Soon the couple began to retreat from the life they had been living. They gave away many of their possessions and moved to Barcelona, where they lived in quiet simplicity. In 395, Paulinus was ordained to the priesthood at the urging of the local people.

Returning to Nola in Campania, Paulinus and Therasia used more of their own money to build a guesthouse for pilgrims and debtors and they established a semi-monastic community in their home. Paulinus soon built a new church for the relics of St. Felix, which he adorned with marble, wall paintings, and a mosaic of the Holy Trinity in the apse. Each year, Paulinus paid homage to the saint by writing a poem for the celebration of his feast day. According to some reports, Paulinus introduced into the church the use of bells for calling the faithful to worship. *Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name; bring an offering, and come before Him; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.* [1 Chronicles 16:29]

Around 409, Paulinus was consecrated bishop for Nola and for over 20 more years, he continued his pastoral ministry among





*Ss. Peter & Paul,
Patrons of the
Patriarchate of Antioch
Sung Mass, Monday,
28 June at 7:30PM*

his people, caring especially for the poor. He maintained correspondence with other bishops and priests - notably with St. Augustine. He continued writing poetry and used this form as a means of pastoral expression (writing a hymn extolling the sanctity of Christian marriage for a friend and a poem of comfort for parents on the death of a child, his own personal experience providing inspiration).

St. Gregory the Great, in his *Dialogues* describing the deeds of the saints, tells of a heroic sacrifice on the part of Bishop Paulinus. When the barbarian Vandals invaded Italy, one of their practices was to steal the inhabitants of towns and force them into slavery. The only son of a poor widow of Nola was taken in this way by the son-in-law of the Vandal king. The woman pleaded with the bishop to use his influence to have her son returned, but Paulinus had already spent all his money ransoming others and paying the Vandals to spare the town. So, with nothing else to offer, the bishop offered himself in exchange for the boy. The Vandal was skeptical at first about the ability of this old man to be of any use to him, but when Paulinus told him that he could serve as gardener, his offer was accepted and the child was returned to his mother. While the bishop patiently tended the garden and provided herbs for the table of the king's family, he also talked persuasively to members of his household. Eventually, when the king learned that this gardener was an important leader of the community of Nola, he repented of the actions of his people and returned all the citizens of Nola who had been taken into slavery. *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* [John 15:13]

St. Paulinus died of natural causes in the year 431 and his feast day is celebrated on June 22, his heavenly birthday. May we, like St. Paulinus, seek happiness - not in the things of this world, but in service to God and our fellow man. *Surely thy loving-kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.* [Psalm 23:6]

Summer Conventions

The Easter Region Parish Life Conference will be held June 30 to July 4 in Scranton, Pennsylvania. The Special Archdiocesan Convention will be held July 16-18 (preceded by a Western Rite Vicariate meeting on July 15) in Pittsburgh. The convention will address matters required by the grant of self-rule to our Archdiocese, namely the revision of the constitution and the election of additional bishops. Speak with Fr. Nicholas for more details concerning these events.