

✠ 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 homily by St. Niceta of Remesiana

*died 414AD
feast day - June 22*

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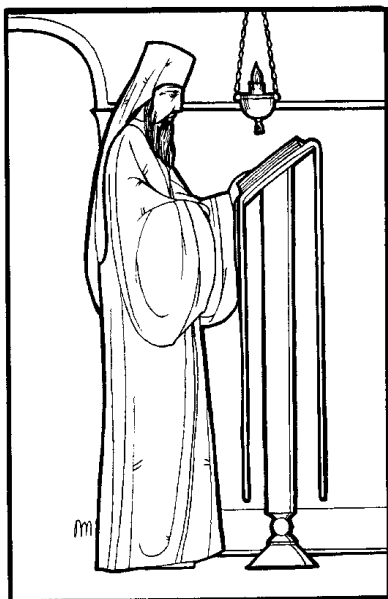
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Can any joy be greater than that of delighting ourselves with psalms and nourishing ourselves with prayer and feeding ourselves with the lessons that are read in between? Like guests at table enjoying a variety of dishes, our souls feast on the rich banquet of lessons and hymns.

Only, brethren, let us please God by singing with attention and a mind wide awake, undistracted by idle talk...That is, we must sing with our intelligences; not only with the spirit (in the sense of the sound of our voice), but also with our mind. We must think about what we are singing, lest we lose the fruit of our effort by distracting talk and extraneous thoughts. The sound and melody of our singing must be suitably religious. It must not be melodramatic, but a revelation of the true Christianity within. It must have nothing theatrical about it, but should move us to sorrow for our sins.

Of course, you must all sing in harmony, without discordant notes. One of you should not linger unreasonably on the notes, while his neighbor is going too fast; nor should one of you sing too low while another is raising his voice. Each one should be asked to contribute his part in humility to the volume of the choir as a whole. No one should sing unbecomingly louder or slower than the rest, as though for vain ostentation or out of human respect. The whole service must be carried out in the presence of God, not with a view to pleasing men. In regard to the harmony of voices we have a model and example in the three blessed boys of whom the Prophet Daniel tells us: "Then these three, as with one mouth, praised and glorified and blessed God in the furnace, saying: 'Blessed art thou, Lord God of our Fathers'" [Daniel 3:51-52]. You see that it was for our instruction that we are told that the three boys humbly and holily praised God with one voice. Therefore, let us sing all

together, as with one voice, and let all of us modulate our voices in the same way. If one cannot sing in tune with the others, it is better to sing in a low voice rather than to drown out the others. In this way he will take his part in the service without interfering with the community singing. Not everyone, of course, has a flexible and musical voice. St. Cyprian is said to have invited his friend Donatus, whom he knew to be a good singer, to join him in the office. “Let us pass the day in joy, so that not one hour of the feast will be without some heavenly grace. Let the feast be loud with songs, since you have a full memory and a musical voice. Come to this duty regularly. You will feed your beloved friends if you give us something spiritual to listen to. There is something alluring about religious sweetness, and those who sing well have a special grace to attract to religion those who listen to them.” And if our voice is without harshness, and in tune with the notes of “well-played cymbals” [Ps. 150:5], it will be a joy to ourselves and a source of edification to those who hear us. And “God who makes men of one manner to dwell in his house” [Ps. 67:7] will find our united praise agreeable to him.



When we sing, all should sing; when we pray, all should pray. So when the lesson is being read, all should remain silent that all may equally hear. No one should be praying with so loud a voice as to disturb the one who is reading. And if you should happen to come in while the lesson is being read, just adore the Lord and make the sign of the cross, and then give an attentive ear to what is being read.

Obviously, the time to pray is when we are all praying. Of course you may pray privately whenever and as often as you choose. But do not, under the pretext of prayer, miss the lesson. You can always pray whenever you will, but you cannot always have a lesson at hand. Do not imagine that there is little to be gained by listening to the sacred lesson. The fact is that prayer is improved if our mind has been recently fed on reading, and is able to roam among the thoughts of divine things which it has recently heard. The word of the Lord assures us that Mary, the sister of Martha, chose the better part when she sat at the feet of Jesus, listening intently to the word of God without a thought of her sister. We need not wonder, then, if the deacon, in a clear voice like a herald, warns all that whether they are praying or bowing the knees, singing hymns, or listening to the lessons, they should all act together. God loves “men of one manner” and, as was said before, “makes them to dwell in his house” [Ps. 67:7]. And those who dwell in this house are proclaimed by the psalm to be blessed, because they will praise God forever and ever. Amen.

Visions of the Mother of God

From the earliest days of the Christian Church, men and women whose holy lives - or deaths as martyrs for the faith - have served as examples and inspiration for generations have been honored as saints. And from the earliest days of the Church, St. Mary has been recognized as the chief of all the saints. She is the intercessor for all mankind. We bring to her our most heartfelt concerns and ask for her prayers. Perhaps because of the special role that St. Mary has as our intercessor, there have been numerous occasions of visions and apparitions of our Lady throughout the world and through the centuries. Reports of these visions began as early as around the year 40, when she appeared to the Apostle James (the Greater) as he evangelized in Spain. This vision eventually led to the establishment of the pilgrimage site of Compostella. Other places of pilgrimage have arisen following visions of our Lady: Guadalupe (Mexico, 1531), Lourdes (France, 1858), Fatima (Spain, 1917).



The Orthodox Church teaches that man is to seek communion with God and that God sometimes works in miraculous ways to bring man closer to him. Visions of our Lady and weeping or streaming icons are vehicles for getting our attention.

In the month of October, we observe two feast days which celebrate visions of the Theotokos. October 1 is the Feast of the Protection of the Mother of God on the Eastern calendar. St. Nikolai Velimirovic of Ochrid, writes of this feast day:

The Church has always glorified the most holy Mother of God as the Protectress and Defender of the Christian people, entreating, by her intercession, God's loving-kindness towards us sinners. The Mother of God's aid has been clearly shown times without number, both to individuals and to peoples, both in peace and in war, both in monastic deserts and in crowded cities... On October 1, 911, in the time of the Emperor Leo the Wise, there was an all-night vigil at the Blachernae church of the Mother of God in Constantinople. The church was crowded. St. Andrew the Fool for Christ was standing at the back of the church with his disciple Epiphanius. At four o'clock in the morning, the most holy Mother of God appeared above the people with a veil spread over her outstretched hands, as though to protect them with this covering. She was clad in gold-encrusted purple and shone with an unspeakable radiance, surrounded by apostles, saints, martyrs and virgins. Seeing this vision, St. Andrew gestured towards it and asked Epiphanius, "Do you see how

the queen and Lady of all is praying for the whole world?” Epiphanius replied, “Yes, Father; I see it and stand in dread.” As a result, this commemoration was instituted to remind us both of this event and of the Mother of God’s constant protection whenever we prayerfully seek that protection, that shelter, in distress.



On the Western Rite calendar, we observe the Feast of Our Lady of Walsingham on October 15, celebrating a vision of our Lady to a widow, Lady Richeldis de Faverches in the year 1061. (While this date is past the year 1054, which technically serves as the date for the “Great Schism,” the actions of the clergy in Constantinople were as yet unknown in Norfolk, England and were obviously being ignored by our Lady!) In the vision, St. Mary showed Richeldis the house in Nazareth where she had grown up and had received the visit of the Angel Gabriel, announcing her conception of the Son of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. She instructed Richeldis to build a similar house there in England to serve as a place where any who sought her could come to pray. So Lady Richeldis built a house for prayer near the town of Walsingham. She had a statue carved of our Lady as she appeared in the vision and set it up in the holy house. A spring with healing water was found there and soon, people began to make pilgrimages to ask for the intercessions of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

A church was built around the holy house and for 500 years, devout Christians traveled to this remote corner of the world to light candles and say prayers for loved ones and to drink of the healing water. But the divisions which had begun at the time of the “Great Schism” eventually led to more divisions, and the period of terrible iconoclasm which accompanied the English Reformation resulted in the destruction of the shrine and the burning of the statue (King Henry VIII had made 3 pilgrimages to Walsingham before he opened the floodgates which led to such destruction!)

The shrine lay in ruins until early in the 20th century, when an Anglican priest began the work of restoration. Walsingham has once again become a place of pilgrimage for Orthodox, Anglican, and Roman Catholic Christians. A small Orthodox chapel was established near the rebuilt holy house during the 1930’s and there is an Orthodox Church in the town of Walsingham. Our Lady, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, the Mother of God hears the prayers of all who seek her intercessions.

Holy Mary: The Seat of Wisdom

The following excerpts are from a homily given by Fr. Nicholas during a pilgrimage on the feast of Our Lady of Walsingham held at St. George's Church in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania in 1999.

The Syrian and Lebanese founders of our Archdiocese certainly understood love of Mary. They would more likely have expressed this in terms of devotion to Our Lady of Sayednia, a great place of pilgrimage not far from Damascus where Mary appeared to the Emperor Justinian in the 6th century. The icon of Our Lady of Saidnaya...shows Mary seated on a throne, and serving herself as a throne for the Christ-child. This is the same image of St. Mary represented in the statue of Our Lady of Walsingham. In this pose she is often referred to as “the seat of Wisdom.”

In Holy Scripture we encounter a particular type of writing in praise of Holy Wisdom which is often simply called “Wisdom Literature.” We find it in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiasticus, and in the Book of Wisdom. There we hear Wisdom proclaim, “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old, from the beginning. I was set up from everlasting from the beginning before ever the earth was. I was with him, forming all things...” Now, the Church has long understood the Wisdom passages as Old Testament references to the second Person of the Holy Trinity - the divine logos - Christ as Hagia Sophia - Holy Wisdom. But the Church has also used many of these same passages to speak of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We can understand why as we read in Ecclesiasticus, “Wisdom exalts her sons and gives help to those who seek her. Whoever loves her loves life, and those who seek her early will be filled with joy. Whoever holds her fast will obtain glory, and the Lord will bless the place she enters. Those who serve her will minister to the Holy One; the Lord loves those who love her.” [4:11-14]

Mary's Son is Holy wisdom. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He shows us the way to enter into the life of the Holy Trinity, to restore what was lost by our disobedience. More than any other person who ever lived, Mary was filled with the presence of God. She was the first to believe the good news of our salvation, announced to her by the Angel Gabriel. She was the one who held her maker, the maker of all things in her womb. It was of her that God took a human nature, our nature. She gave birth to her savior and ours. She nursed the One who feeds all of creation by his mercy and love. She held and guided and protected and clothed the One by whom “we live and move and



have our being.” She stood by her Son as He gave His life for the life of the world. She witnessed His victory over death and the coming of the Holy Spirit, as the Church was born. Every follower of Christ struggles to live like Christ, to become like Christ. In this she is our Mother as well - she was the first to believe, the first to obey, the first to follow. And having been taken up into heaven at the time of her death, she is also the first to enter into the promise of sharing in the resurrected and eternal life of her Son.



In speaking of the great mysteries of God, the Church often uses poetic imagery, seeking to describe the indescribable. The same is true of the way we speak of Mary - for how can we possibly fathom the significance of a woman, who so found favor with God that she was chosen to be the vessel of the Incarnation? Yes, she is the seat of Wisdom from which comes the cure for the folly of this world. She is praised in so many ways in the hymns and prayers of the Church. She is the new ark and the new Temple, replacing the Ark of the covenant and the Temple in Jerusalem as the dwelling place of God in the midst of his people. She is the burning bush, filled with the presence of God, yet not consumed by it. She is the portal of salvation, the fountain of grace, safe harbor for those caught in storm.

We can never adequately sing her praises. Her obedience overturned the disobedience of Adam and Eve. Their disobedience brought suffering and death into the world. Her obedience brought life and joy. We can make the mistake of confusing her with God, rather than seeing her as the best humanity has ever had to offer to God, as one who shows us how to live as her Son lived. Or we can make the mistake of failing to call her blessed, but we cannot express enough love, and thanksgiving, and praise for what she has done and for what she continues to do for us. She is our Mother, quick to hear our cries. She intercedes for us at the Throne of God. She always points us to our true home, she always draws us closer to our good and loving Father.

Whether we sing her praises as Our Lady of Walsingham, our Lady of Sayednia...or our Lady of some other place, matters little, as long as we do sing her praises. Walsingham is part of the cultural language of my prayers, as it may be of yours. But to slightly paraphrase Metropolitan ANTHONY (Bashir) of thrice blessed memory, you may prefer Kibbe or Piroggi to Steak and Kidney Pie and Fish and Chips, but both are equally nourishing. It is the faith that matters and we may express that faith in many different languages, as long as we don't change it, for it has been given to us as a treasure, to cherish, to grow by, and to pass on to others.

Devotion for the Mother of God is basic to the Christian life, for how can we love Christ and not love the one who bore Him to the world. St. Ignatius of Antioch understood this as he wrote, “he who is devout to the Mother of God will certainly never be lost.” May our Lady of Walsingham pray for us and may we join our voices to this ancient prayer: *We fly to your protection, O holy Mother of God. Despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin.*

(Walsingham pilgrimages are now held at Our Lady of Walsingham Parish in Mesquite, Texas, where Fr. Daniel Keller, who recently visited St. Gregory’s, is the pastor.)

Parish News

The two feast days we celebrate on Sundays in October are the Feast of the Holy Guardian Angels on Sunday, October 2, when we give thanks to God for the angelic orders he has provided for our protection; and the Feast of Christ the King, observed on the last Sunday of the month, October 30, when we pray for the reign of Christ as monarch in the hearts of all men.

Thanks to all who contributed to the relief efforts for those affected by Hurricane Katrina (and now, Rita). St. Gregory’s sent nearly \$1,500 for the Archdiocesan collection. With your contributions of items (soap, toothpaste, wash cloths, etc.), we have now assembled 22 health kits to send through International Orthodox Christian Charities. As we have many extra items, we will make more kits at a later time to send to IOCC.

We will begin a new Bible study this month on the Gospel of St. Luke. Our meetings will begin on Tuesday evening, October 4, at 7:30PM at the home of Matushka Margaret Kunkel, 5107 Allan Terrace, in Bethesda, MD.

The Church of Ss. Peter & Paul (our “Mother” Church) will have their beautiful new building consecrated on Sunday, October 9. There will be a number of special events surrounding this occasion, including a Choir Concert on Thursday, October 6 (7:30PM), a Hafli on Friday at 7:30 and Vespers at 5:00PM on Saturday, October 8 (St. Gregory’s will not have Vespers that evening). Most of our bishops and the trustees of the Archdiocese will be in attendance as the Archdiocesan Trustees meet here earlier in the week. Ss. Peter & Paul is located at 10620 River Road in Potomac.



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>October 2005</h1>						1 St. Remigius, BC, c. 530 <i>6PM Vespers</i>
2 Holy Guardian Angels <i>8:30AM Matins</i> <i>9AM Sung Mass</i>	3 Feria	4 Feria <i>7:30PM Bible Study</i>	5 St. Placid & Comp., Mm 6 th century FAST	6 St. Faith, VM, c. 287	7 St. Mark of Rome, BC, 336; St. Sergius & Comp. Mm, 303 FAST	8 Feria <i>5PM Vespers at Ss. Peter & Paul, Potomac</i>
9 Pentecost XVI <i>8:30AM Matins</i> <i>9AM Sung Mass</i>	10 St. Paulinus of York, BC, 644	11 Feria <i>7:30PM Bible Study</i>	12 St. Wilfred of York, BC, 709 FAST	13 Trans. of St. Edward the Confessor, KC, 1066	14 St. Callistus, BM, c. 222 FAST	15 Our Lady of Walsingham <i>6PM Vespers</i>
16 Pentecost XVII <i>8:30AM Matins</i> <i>9AM Sung Mass</i>	17 Vigil of St. Luke FAST	18 St. Luke, Evangelist, 1 st . c. <i>7:30PM Bible Study</i>	19 St. Frideswide of Oxford, V, 735 FAST	20 Feria	21 St. Hilario of Gaza, Ab., c. 371 FAST	22 St. Ursula & Comp., VvMm, 453 <i>6PM Vespers</i>
23 Pentecost XVIII <i>8:30AM Matins</i> <i>9AM Sung Mass</i>	24 St. Raphael the Archangel	25 Ss. Chrysanthus & Daria, Mm, 283 <i>7:30PM Bible Study</i>	26 St. Evaristus, BM, c. 197 FAST	27 Vigil of Ss. Simon & Jude FAST	28 Ss. Simon & Jude, Apostles, 1 st century FAST	29 Feria <i>6PM Vespers</i>
30 Our Lord Jesus Christ the King <i>8:30AM Matins</i> <i>9AM Sung</i>	31 Vigil of All Saints FAST	1 All Saints	2 All Souls <i>7:30PM Sung Requiem Mass & Potluck Supper</i>	3 (within the Octave) St. Winifred, VM 680	4 (within the Octave) Ss. Vitalis & Agricola, Mm, c. 304 FAST	5 St. Raphael Hawaweeny BC, 1915 <i>6PM Vespers</i>

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

Coffee Hour follows Sunday Liturgy. Catechumen classes and children's story time follow Coffee Hour.