

✠ 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 Treatise attributed to St. Dionysios the Areopagite

died c. AD96

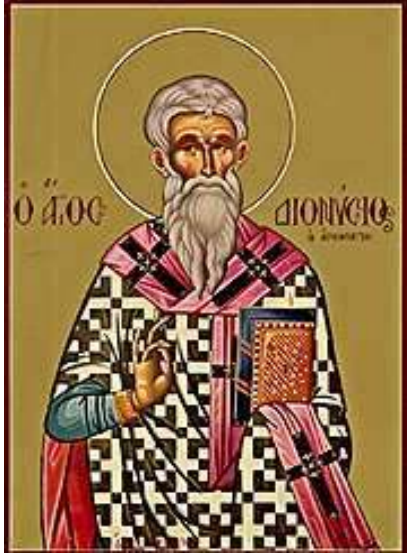
Feast Day ~ October 3

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We must not dare to apply words or conceptions to this hidden transcendent God. We can use only what scripture has disclosed. In the scriptures the Deity has benevolently taught us that understanding and direct contemplation of itself is inaccessible to beings, since it actually surpasses being. Many scripture writers will tell you that the divinity is not only invisible [Col. 1:15; I Tim. 1:17; Hebrews 11:27, etc.] and incomprehensible, but also “unsearchable and inscrutable,” [Romans 11:33], since there is not a trace for anyone who would reach through into the hidden depths of this infinity. And yet, on the other hand, the Good is not absolutely incommunicable to everything. By itself it generously reveals a firm, transcendent beam, granting enlightenments proportionate to each being, and thereby draws sacred minds upward to its permitted contemplation, to participation and to the state of becoming like it. What happens to those that rightly and properly make this effort is this. They do not venture toward an impossibly daring sight of God, one beyond what is duly granted them. Nor do they go tumbling downward where their own natural inclinations would take them. No. Instead they are raised firmly and unswervingly upward in the direction of the ray which enlightens them. With a love matching the illuminations granted them, they take flight, reverently, wisely, in all holiness.

We go where we are commanded by those divine ordinances which rule all the sacred ranks of the heavenly orders. With our minds made prudent and holy, we offer worship to that which lies hidden beyond thought and beyond being. With a wise silence we do honor to the inexpressible. We are raised up to the enlightening beams of the sacred scriptures, and with these to illuminate us, with our beings shaped to songs of praise, we behold the divine light,



in a manner befitting us, and our praise resounds for that generous Source of all holy enlightenment, a Source which has told us about itself in the holy words of scripture. We learn, for instance, that it is the cause of everything, that it is origin, being, and life. To those who fall away it is the voice calling, “Come back!” and it is the power which raises them up again. It refurbishes and restores the image of God corrupted within them. It is the sacred stability which is there for them when the tide of unholiness is tossing them about. It is safety for those who made a stand. It is the guide bringing upward those uplifted to it and is the enlightenment of the illuminated. Source of perfection for those being made perfect, source of divinity for those being deified, principle of simplicity for those turning toward simplicity, point of unity for those made one; transcendentally, beyond what is, it is the Source of every source. Generously and as far as may be, it gives out a share of what is hidden.

To sum up, it is the Life of the living, the being of beings, it is the Source and the Cause of all life and of all being, for out of its goodness it commands all things to be and it keeps them going.

We learn of all these mysteries from the divine scriptures and you will find that what the scripture writers have to say regarding the divine names refers, in revealing praises, to the beneficent processions of God.

St. Denysios the Areopagite

Feast Day ~ October 3

The task of a judge is to weigh evidence, to hear arguments for and against a case, to rise above the narrow limitations of his own background and experience, and to make impartial and fair decisions regarding the truth of the matter before him. This is a tremendous responsibility and one which is essential for a civilized, orderly society.

Many of the images of judges presented in the pages of Holy Scripture are negative ones: those of the Jewish Sanhedrin to whom our Lord was brought for trial before his Crucifixion and that of Pontius Pilate, who tried to avoid judgement of Christ by washing his hands of the whole affair. But there is one judge, named in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, who was a hero of the early Church.

Dionysios was one of the judges who presided in the Aeropagus of the city of Athens, the court on Mars Hill where arguments were heard and decisions were made regarding matters of public concern. In essence, Dionysios was a sort of Supreme Court justice.

The Apostle Paul arrived in Athens sometime around the year 55 to preach the good news of Christ to the educated, sophisticated people of this city. Speaking in the marketplace, Paul attracted the attention of some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers who asked, “What does this babbling man want to say?” [Acts 17:18] They took him to the Areopagus where they asked him to articulate his story before the judges.

St. Paul then preached one of his most famous sermons, pointing out that among the many temples of various pagan gods in this city, there was one which was dedicated to the “unknown god”. Paul proceeded to explain to the Athenians that the god whom they did not yet know is the God of all - the Creator who came to earth in human form and who will return to “judge the world in righteousness.” His audience listened politely to this sermon, but most began to ridicule St. Paul when he talked of the resurrection of the dead. One of the judges, however, was less skeptical of the Apostle’s arguments. Dionysios asked to hear more and St. Paul spent many hours telling him the story of our Lord Jesus Christ.

No doubt Dionysios’ rational mind was convinced of the truth of St. Paul’s teachings, but a curious event from his past also played a part in his conversion. He had been in Heliopolis, Egypt on a certain Friday more than 20 years earlier when a strange phenomenon occurred. The light of the sun was blocked and the earth became dark as night, but there was no eclipse or storm to explain this. The event had troubled Dionysios for many years until he heard the story of Christ’s crucifixion and knew that it was on that day that the darkness he had witnessed occurred.

According to tradition, based on the witness of the Apostolic Constitutions and the testimony of Dionysios of Corinth (as quoted by Eusebius), Dionysios the Areopagite was ordained by St. Paul to serve as Bishop of Athens following his baptism and catechesis by the Apostle.

How many other citizens of Athens must have been influenced by the conversion of this prominent judge! How much good for the Church and the souls of men must have resulted from his judgement of the truth of these new teachings!

Dionysios was said to have had a dream in which the blessed Virgin Mary called him to come to Jerusalem, where he



arrived on August 15, in the year 55, in time to witness (along with the Apostles of our Lord) the death of the Theotokos.

Writings exist, attributed to Dionysios, which are now considered by many to be of 5th century origin. These writings, consisting of four treatises and ten letters, are now often designated as by “pseudo-Dionysios”. The subjects of these treatises include the names of God, the celestial hierarchy (a subject about which our patron, St. Gregory the Great, also wrote), the hierarchy and sacraments of the Church, and mystical union with God. The letters are addressed to monks, priests and bishops as well as to the Apostle John.



These writings have been very influential in articulating the Orthodox approach to theology, particularly as they describe the “apophatic” or “negative” way of speaking about God: while we often speak of what God *is* and what He is like, it is sometimes better and more accurate (as God is infinitely beyond our ability to describe and comprehend) to speak of what He is not.

In an age before the instant communication which is possible in our day, there were sometimes confusions between saints with similar names and similar stories. In the traditions of some parts of the Christian world, St. Dionysios became intertwined with St. Denis of Paris, the first bishop of that city who was martyred, along with the priest Rusticus and the deacon Eleutherius, around the year 250.

Whatever the historical facts of the life of St. Dionysios are, his conversion to Christianity and subsequent witness to the truth of our faith to the Athenians are certain. We give thanks for the courage and devotion of the saints of the Apostolic age and we ask for the intercessions of St. Dionysios the Areopagite especially for judges, that they may seek God’s truth and declare it fearlessly.

Sources: Catholic Encyclopedia; Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs, and other Saints by Rev. Alban Butler; Orthodox Saints by George Poulos; Orthodox Study Bible; Orthodox Wiki; Prologue from Ochrid by Bishop (St.) Nikolai Velimirovic.

Parish News

We welcome Abigail Elisabeth Caldwell into the world and the family of St. Gregory’s parish. Abigail joined her parents, Jennifer and David, and siblings Nathan, Ben and Sarah, on September 23.

Classes for those interested in learning (or refreshing your knowledge) about the faith are being held every other Sunday during Coffee Hour. All are welcome to join the class.

The third annual pilgrimage for the feast of Our Lady of Walsingham will take place on Saturday, October 17 and will be hosted this year by Holy Trinity parish in Lynchburg. This commemoration of a vision of the blessed Theotokos in 11th century England provides us with an opportunity to join with our sister Western Rite parishes in this region to celebrate our devotion to the Mother of God. The Liturgy will be celebrated at 11:00AM that day. Please see Fr. Nicholas if you would like to attend. We will not have Vespers at St. Gregory's that evening.

Other feast days to be observed in October are St. Luke's Day (October 18) which falls on a Sunday this year; the feast of Christ the King, which is always on the last Sunday of October; and the feast of Ss. Simon and Jude, which we will celebrate with Vespers on the Eve, Tuesday, October 27.

Please mark your calendars now for the two holy days which occur at the beginning of November: All Saints Day (November 1 falls on Sunday this year), and All Souls (Monday, November 2), on which we will celebrate a Requiem Mass in memory of our departed loved ones. We will also have our annual All Saints party at Coffee Hour on Sunday, November 1.

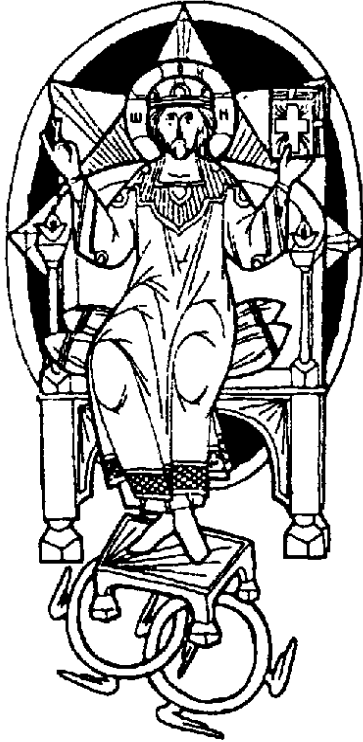
St. Gregory's is now receiving the journal "Christian Bioethics: Non-Ecumenical Studies in Medical Morality." Edited by Dr. Tristram Englehardt, who gave a presentation to area Orthodox parishes this past spring, the first two volumes of this scholarly publication for 2009 are in our parish library.

There are many "behind the scenes" tasks around the church which provide an opportunity for us to make an offering to God of our service. If you would like to consider baking holy bread, washing altar linens, taking care of the candles at the entrance, please see Fr. Nicholas or Subdeacon Jerome.

We are invited to attend the fifth annual benefit dinner for International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) at St. Katherine Greek Orthodox Church, 3149 Glen Carlyn Road in Falls Church on Sunday, October 25. The evening will include Vespers at 4:30, a reception at 5:30, and dinner at 6:00. This is an opportunity to support the important work of IOCC throughout the world. Please see Fr. Nicholas for more details.



Unceasing Prayer



Prayer is a conversation with God. There are four kinds of prayer. *Glorification*, when we glorify and hymn God for His greatness. *Thanksgiving*, when we give thanks to Him for the innumerable good things which He gives us - because He created us, nourishes us, protects us, and forgives us when we offend. Chiefly, we thank Him for the Cross which He endured for our salvation. *Repentance* is the third kind of prayer. We ask God to forgive our sins, and we confess to Him that we are sinners and unworthy ones. *Petition* is the prayer in which we ask from God a grace or help or something necessary for us or for others.

Prayer is the mother of all virtues and is the most necessary work of our life. St. John Chrysostom writes: *The man who deprives himself of prayer resembles him who cuts with a knife the tendons and nerves of the limbs of the body. He falls to earth, unable to make the smallest motion. Thus also is the soul of one who does not pray - atrophied, paralysed.*

Prayer must be the necessary habit of every Christian. Good monks pray unceasingly. They repeat incessantly the short prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." Slowly, it becomes a habit, and the mind of a man says it by itself without the mouth uttering it. Then we have unceasing mental prayer.

When much time is spent in this state and we don't lose our zeal and eagerness, but do whatever God-pleasing work we can, repeating this small prayer continuously, then our soul is purified from the covering of the passions, especially when we have tears at the hour of prayer. Tears are the laver which cleanses the soul. After all these things we have a higher state of prayer, called prayer of the heart. The progress of prayer does not stop here. It has also other higher degrees. The contemplation of the Heavenly Mysteries, and of extraordinary, indescribable light...but this is the realm only of the most perfect.

Reprinted from The Illustrated Sayings of the Holy Fathers by Monk John Vranos of Mt. Athos.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>October 2009</h1>						
<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</i>				1 St. Remigius, BC, c. 530; St. Bavo, Hermit, 659	2 Holy Guardian Angels	3 St. Dionysios the Areopagite, C, c. 96 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
4 Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost	5 St. Placid & his Companions, MM, 6th C	6	7	8	9 Ss. Denys, Rusticus, & Eleutherius, MM, 3rd C.	10 St. Paulinus of York, BC, 644 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
11 Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost; St. Kenneth, Ab, 599	12 St. Wilfred of York, BC, 709 (Columbus Day)	13 St. Edward the Confessor, KC, 1066	14 St. Callistus, BM, c. 222	15 Our Lady of Walsingham	16 St. Gall, Ab., 646	17 Vigil of St. Luke <i>OLW Pilgrimage in Lynchburg - 11AM No Vespers</i>
18 St. Luke the Evangelist, 1st c.; Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost	19 St. Frideswide of Oxford, V, 735	20	21 St. Hilarion of Gaza, Ab., c. 371	22 Ss. Ursula & Comp., VV, MM, 453	23	24 St. Raphael, Archangel <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
25 Christ the King; Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost; Ss. Crysanthus & Daria, MM	26 St. Evaristus, BM, c. 197	27 Vigil of Ss. Simon & Jude <i>Vespers at 7:30pm</i>	28 Ss. Simon & Jude, Apostles, 1st century	29	30	31 Vigil of All Saints <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>

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

Coffee Hour follows Sunday Liturgy. Sunday School for children is during Coffee Hour.