

✠ 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 of St. Caesarius of Arles

*died AD542
feast day - August 27*

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Behold, dearest brethren, through the mercy of God the season of Lent is approaching. Therefore I beseech you, beloved, with God's help let us celebrate these days, salutary for bodies and healing for the soul, in so holy and spiritual a manner that the observance of a holy Lent may lead to progress for us and not judgment. For if we lead a careless life, involving ourselves in too many occupations, refusing to observe chastity, not applying ourselves to fasting and vigils and prayers, neither reading Sacred Scripture ourselves nor willingly listening to others read it, the very remedies are changed into wounds for us. As a result of this we shall have judgment, where we could have had a remedy...

For this reason, dearest brethren, "Have no love for the world, nor the things the world affords," [I John 2:15] because "the world with its seductions is passing away." [I John 2:17] What, then remains in a man except what each one has stored up in the treasury of his conscience for the salvation of his soul by reading or prayer or the performance of good works? For miserable pleasure, still more wretched lust and dissipation, through a passing sweetness prepare eternal bitterness; but abstinence, vigils, prayer, and fasting lead to the delights of paradise through the briefest hardships. The truth does not lie when he says in the Gospel: "Straight and narrow is the road that leads to life, and how few there are who find it." [Matt. 7:14] Not for long is there rejoicing on the broad way, and not for long is there labor on the straight and narrow road. After brief sadness those who travel the latter receive eternal life, while those who travel the former, after short joy, suffer endless punishment.

For this reason, dearest brethren, by fasting, reading, and prayer in these forty days we ought to store up for our souls provisions, as it were, for the whole year. Although through the mercy of God you frequently and devoutly hear



*The Eve of the Feast
of the Presentation of
Our Lord in the Temple
February 1st
Sung Mass at 7:30PM*

the divine lessons throughout the entire year, still during these days we ought to rest from the winds and the sea of this world by taking refuge, as it were, in the haven of Lent, and in the quiet of silence to receive the divine lessons in the receptacle of our heart. Devoting ourselves to God out of love for eternal life, during these days let us with all solicitude strive to repair and compose in the little ship of our soul whatever throughout the year has been broken or destroyed or damaged or ruined by many storms, that is, by the waves of sins. And since it is necessary for us to endure the storms and tempests of this world while we are still in this frail body, as often as the enemy wills to lead us astray by means of the roughest storms or to deceive us by the most voluptuous pleasures, with God's help may he always find us prepared against him.

Therefore I beseech you again and again. During these holy days of Lent if you cannot cut off the occupations of this world, at least strive to curtail them in part. By fleeing from this world, through an expedient loss and a most glorious gain you may take away from earthly occupations a few hours in which you can devote yourselves to God.... If you both willingly heed and strive faithfully to fulfill, dearest brethren, the truths which we are suggesting for the salvation of all by presuming upon your obedience, you will celebrate Easter with joy and will happily come to eternal life. May He Himself deign to grant this, who together with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

*St. Porphyrius, Bishop of Gaza
Feast Day ~ February 26*

How often do men make plans for their lives, only to discover that God has a different plan. Even when our intentions are noble and good, God may require that we travel a different path. Such was the case with St. Porphyrius, 5th century bishop of Gaza.

Porphyrius was born in Thessalonica to a wealthy Macedonian family and in his youth enjoyed the privileges of his class. But by the age of 25, his desire to seek perfection through a quiet life of prayer and meditation led him to go to Egypt and enter the monastery of Sceté. Here he spent five happy years learning the discipline of the monastic life.

Then, filled with a desire to see the holy places where our Lord had spent his earthly life, Porphyrius traveled to Jerusalem.

Having satisfied his desire, he settled in a cave near the Jordan River where he spent another five years in fasting, prayer and meditation. But illness brought an end to this plan for his life, forcing him to return to the holy city. There, despite weakness in his limbs and great difficulty in walking, he daily made his pilgrimage to the holy sites.

In these daily visits, he met Mark, another monk who was also visiting the sacred places. Mark tried to help the very frail older monk and the two became friends. Porphyrius eventually shared with Mark the one blot upon his conscience that he wished to rectify before he died: he still owned extensive property in Thessalonica and was, therefore, a wealthy man, despite his appearance of poverty. At his request, Mark traveled to Porphyrius' birthplace and disposed of his property, bringing back enough money for them to live without concern for the necessities of life.

Upon his return to Jerusalem, Mark was astonished to see Porphyrius completely healed of his illness and even more astonished to hear the story of his healing. As Porphyrius was visiting Mount Calvary, he fainted, and while in this state, dreamed that our Lord had come down from the Cross and asked him to take the Cross into his care. In the dream, Porphyrius obediently put the Cross on his shoulders and carried it a little way. He then awoke and found himself completely healed of his paralysis.

The two monks distributed their newly-acquired money among the poor and began to work for their daily needs. Mark helped buy their food by offering his writing skills as a copyist and Porphyrius learned to make leather shoes to sell.

By this time, Porphyrius had become well known for his holy living, his humility and charity, and his insight into the Holy Scriptures. The Patriarch of Jerusalem took notice of him and in 393 ordained him to the priesthood (much against the monk's will) and gave him the responsibility for the care of the Holy Cross.

After several years, Porphyrius was called by the Metropolitan of Caesarea to make a visit to discuss the Scriptures. The humble priest was reluctant, but agreed to go, accompanied by Mark, for a brief visit. The night before their departure, God gave Porphyrius another dream which foretold what was in store for him. In the dream, our Lord Jesus Christ told Porphyrius to give up the treasure he had been caring for because he was to marry a wife who, though contemptible in appearance, he was to cherish and care for.





*The Feast of the
Chair of St. Peter
at Antioch -
February 22nd*

When the two monks arrived in Caesarea, Porphyrius - again against his will - was consecrated Bishop of Gaza. His plan for his life had once again been altered by God for his purposes. Porphyrius discovered that most of the citizens of Gaza were worshipers of idols. There were only 280 Christians in the city and they were severely slandered and persecuted by their heathen neighbors. Bishop Porphyrius now became the object of their derision and harassment. Even the road into Gaza was torn up in an attempt to prevent the new bishop from entering the city.

The area around Gaza had been suffering from a severe drought and now, the idol worshipers blamed the Christians and especially their bishop for this natural disaster. They offered their sacrifices to their idols and made their lamentations but no rain came. Bishop Porphyrius led the Christians in a procession around the church, praying to almighty God to provide what was needed, and the heavens opened and the longed-for rain came down in torrents.

Many pagans were convinced to be favorably disposed to Christianity by this apparent miracle, but others were moved to more violence toward the Christians. Bishop Porphyrius and the monk Mark had to seek help from the Emperor. They traveled to Constantinople and met first with St. John Chrysostom, the Patriarch at that time, who introduced the two to the Empress. Through her intercessions, the Emperor issued an edict for the destruction of the pagan temples in Gaza.

Bishop Porphyrius did not allow this political move to produce “political Christians,” but instead took much time to instruct the people in the Christian faith. The example of his holy and humble living provided the best instruction.

St. Porphyrius lived to see Gaza become a Christian city before he fell asleep in the Lord in 421. His plans for a quiet monastic life had not happened, but instead, God had used him for great good - both in the care of the Cross in Jerusalem and in the conversion of the people of Gaza. May we follow the example of St. Porphyrius in obedience to God’s will for our lives.

The History of Ash Wednesday

The solemn ceremony of blessing ashes made from the previous year’s burned palms and using these ashes to mark the foreheads of the faithful has become almost universally used in Western churches to begin the penitential season of Lent.

Ancient Hebrew practice, as described in the Old Testament, often included the putting on of ashes and sackcloth as a sign of penitence and mourning. Daniel's prayer (Daniel 9:3) illustrates this practice: "Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and supplication, with fastings and sackcloth and ashes." Our antiphons for Ash Wednesday remind us of these practices: "Let us change our raiment for sackcloth and ashes. Let us fast and mourn before the Lord, for our God is exceeding merciful to forgive us our sins." (Joel 2:17)

As the priest makes the sign of the Holy Cross on our foreheads with the ashes, saying "Remember, O man, that thou art dust and unto dust shalt thou return," it is made clear that not only are we following ancient penitential practice, but that we are remembering that the sin of our father Adam brought death and destruction into the world. We are subject to that death and are only saved from utter and final destruction by the death and Resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ.



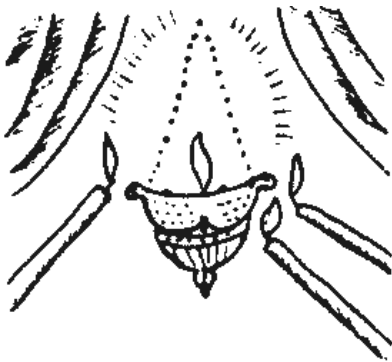
Liturgical scholars believe that the Christian use of ashes for Repentance originated when public penance was practiced. Those who had been excommunicated for serious sins would stand at the doors of the church dressed in sackcloth and be sprinkled with ashes as penitential psalms were sung. The doors were then shut and the penitents were not received back into the church until Maundy Thursday. This practice, which may have begun in Gaul in the 6th century and later spread to other parts of the West, was by the 10th century extended to include all Christians as they were called to an intense time of repentance in Lent. Some suggest that this change (which in effect combined penitence with the preparation of catechumens for baptism at the Paschal vigil) was the result of the large numbers of converts after the barbarian invasions and the fall of Rome.

In the readings at the Ash Wednesday mass we are given another admonition - we are to receive ashes, mourn our sins and begin our fast with joy and not with an outward ostentatious show. For God is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness" (Joel 2:13) And he will reward us openly for the repentance which we make secretly to him (Matt. 6:16)

"Grant, O Lord, to thy faithful people that they may enter upon the solemn observance of this fast with reverence and godly fear, and in peace and quietness may fulfil the same. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen." (Collect for Ash Wednesday).

Parish News

We begin this month with the celebration of Candlemas, which marks the presentation of Our Lord in the Temple on the 40th day following his birth and the purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary following childbirth. Candles used throughout the year are blessed at this service. At the end of Mass, we will receive the St. Blaise blessing against illnesses of the throat. A pot-luck supper will follow the Liturgy.



On Ash Wednesday, February 21, the blessing and imposition of ashes and Sung Mass will begin at 7:30PM, followed by a Lenten pot-luck supper. On the first Sunday of Lent, we will join with Orthodox parishes from all jurisdictions to celebrate the “Triumph of Orthodoxy” (the restoration of icons in 843 at the end of the iconoclastic controversy). Vespers will be held at St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral at 5PM.

We are grateful to be able to use the Parish Hall again, following December’s broken water pipe and resulting flood. Nearly all the repairs have now been made, the carpet has been replaced, and the kitchen is once again usable. Work has also begun on a new bathroom for the Parish Hall.

The visit of His Grace, Bishop THOMAS, for dedicating our church, which was postponed because of the damage to the building and other on-going repairs, will soon be rescheduled for a weekend after Pascha. We hope that all will be able to be present for this joyous occasion.

Bishop Thomas has also announced that he will come to Warrenton, Virginia on Friday, March 30th, to receive the congregation that Fr. Nicholas has been catechizing. Please plan to attend the liturgy that evening, if at all possible, to welcome our brothers and sisters into the Orthodox Church. With Holy Trinity Church in Lynchburg, we will soon have three Western Rite congregations in the Eastern Dioceses and plans have been made to have Western Rite Vespers one night at the Parish Life Conference in Baltimore this summer.

Bible Story Time for our young children has now been resumed. Each Sunday, during coffee hour, the children will go to the upstairs classroom to hear the stories of our faith. Thanks to Nathan Hollenbeck for taking responsibility for these classes.

Lenten programs will be offered, including weekly Stations of the Cross, based on the discussions held at the annual Parish Meeting (January 28, after press-time). These will be reported in the March newsletter.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>February 2007</h1>						
				1 St. Ignatius, BM, c. 107; St. Bridgid, Abs, 523 <i>7:30PM Sung Mass & pot-luck supper</i>	2 Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple (Purification) FAST	3 St. Blaise, BM, c. 316 <i>6PM Vespers</i>
4 Septuagesima (Neo-martyrs of Russia) <i>9AM Matins 9:30 Sung Mass</i>	5 St. Agatha, VM, c. 250	6 St. Photius, BCD, 891	7 St. Romuald, Ab, 1027 FAST	8 Feria	9 St. Cyril of Alexandria, BC, 444 FAST	10 St. Scholastica, V <i>6PM Vespers</i>
11 Sexagesima (Benedict of Aniane, Ab) <i>9AM Matins 9:30 Sung Mass</i>	12 Feria	13 St. Kentigern, BC, 603	14 St. Valentine, PrM, 3 rd c. FAST	15 Ss. Faustinus & Jovita, Mm, 2 nd c.	16 St. Nicholas of Japan, BC, 1912 FAST	17 St. Flavian, BM, 449 <i>6PM Vespers</i>
18 Quinquagesima <i>9AM Matins 9:30 Sung Mass</i>	19 Feria	20 Feria	21 Ash Wednesday <i>7:30 Sung Mass & pot-luck supper</i>	22 Chair of St. Peter at Antioch; St. Joseph of Arimathea	23 Friday after Ash Wednesday; Vigil of St. Matthias FAST	24 St. Matthias, Apostle <i>6PM Vespers</i>
25 1 st Sunday in Lent <i>9AM Matins 9:30 Sung Mass</i>	26 St. Ethelbert of Kent, KC, 616; St. Porphyrius of Gaza, 428	27 Tues. After Lent I (St. Alexander of Alexandria, BC, 328)	28 Ember Wednesday in Lent			

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

*Coffee Hour follows Liturgy.
Children's Story Hour is during Coffee Hour.*