

# ✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

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

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## *A Reading from a Sermon of St. Bede the Venerable*

*died AD735  
feast day - May 27*

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Simeon and Anna, a man and a woman of advanced age, greeted the Lord with the devoted services of their professions of faith. As they saw him, he was small in body, but they understood him to be great in his divinity.

It is surely with great foreboding, my brothers, that we should listen to the words which this same Simeon, prophesying about the Lord, spoke to his mother, *Behold, this child is destined for the ruin and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign that will be contradicted. And a sword will pierce your own soul, so that thoughts may be revealed from many hearts.* It is with great yearning that we hear it said that the Lord is destined for the resurrection of many, for *just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be brought to life;* and he himself says, *I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live; and everyone who lives and believes in me will not die forever.* But nonetheless, what is mentioned before this sounds frightening: *Behold, this child is destined for the ruin...* One who falls after having acknowledged the glory of the resurrection is unhappy enough, but worse is one who, having seen the light of truth, is blinded by the oppressive clouds of his sins. Hence we must take the utmost care always to remember to carry out in our works the virtuous good we have recognized, lest what the apostle Peter said might be said of us, that *it was better for them not to have acknowledged the way of truth, than after the acknowledgment of it to have turned back from what was delivered over to them, that is, the holy commandment.*

**A**nd for a sign, Simeon says, *which will be contradicted.* Many of the Jews and many of the gentiles have often contradicted the sign of the Lord's cross externally, and, what is more serious, many false brothers do so internally. They follow it superficially in what they profess, but they trample

upon it by the reality of their depraved actions, saying that they know God, but denying him in their deeds.

**A**nd a sword will pierce your own soul. Simeon uses the word ‘sword’ for the effect of the Lord’s passion and death on the cross, and this sword will pierce Mary’s soul, for she could not without painful sorrow see him crucified and dying. Although she was in no way uncertain about his rising in that he was God, nevertheless, in her fear she sorrowed that, as he was begotten from her flesh, he died.



**S**o that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. Before the Lord’s incarnation the thoughts of many were concealed, and it was not fully evident who was on fire with the love of eternal things, and who in his mind preferred temporal things to heavenly goods. But when the King of heaven was born on earth, immediately every holy person rejoiced; *Herod*, however, was upset and all Jerusalem with him. While Jesus was preaching and working miracles, all the crowds feared and glorified the God of Israel; the Pharisees and Scribes, however, with raging mouths criticized his saving words and deeds. When he suffered on the cross, the wicked were filled with foolish gladness, and the holy with righteous sorrow; when he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, the gladness of the former was changed into sadness, and the unhappiness of the latter was changed into everlasting joy. And thus, in accordance with the prophecy of blessed Simeon, when the Lord appeared in the flesh, the thoughts of many hearts were revealed.

**W**e must not believe that this revelation of the different thoughts took place only at that time in Judaea, and not also among us. Now too, with the appearance of the Lord, “the thoughts of many hearts are revealed” when the word of salvation is read or preached, and some hearers willingly give heed to it, rejoicing to accomplish in their actions what they have learned by hearing, while others turn away from what they hear, and do not exert themselves to do these things, but rather struggle against them, reviling them. Hence, brothers, whenever we perceive that the word of heavenly teaching is suffering some hostility from hardened hearers, we should imitate the sorrow of heart of those who, with sorrow befitting their compassion, sustained the Word of god when he suffered in the flesh. On the other hand, whenever we see that very same Word rise through love in the minds of his faithful hearers, and advance, through good works, to the glory of our Maker, we should rejoice with those who beheld Christ with blissful prayers when he rose from the dead and ascended to heaven.

# A Faith Worth Believing

by Fr. Stephen Freeman

I believe there has to be a steady movement and growth towards a *lone-storey world* - where our faith, our experience, and our day-to-day existence are not separated. Where God and the saints, the angels and the world to come, are themselves constantly impinging on our consciousness.

The journey to this one-storey existence - to a faith worth believing - is long and slow. It first means leaving behind the language and the false comfort (however little it is) of the *two-storey world*. I will not satisfy myself with the false reasonings of those who do not know anything about that of which they speak. I do not want to hear someone parsing the various forms of grace as if they knew what they were talking about. I do not wish to hear warmed-over medieval arguments as if they meant something to a parent who has just lost a child.

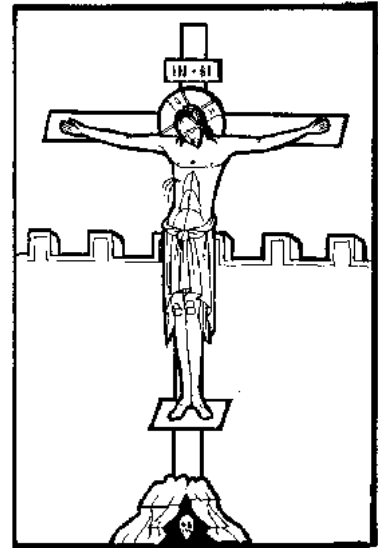
I do want to pray the prayers of those who stood in the lines of the Gulag and found the prayers to be real. I want to know God here and now where He is everywhere present and fills all things. I want to converse with my guardian angel and know that my words are heard. I want to carry my heart before God in its grief and pray for those I have lost, crying to God, "Memory eternal!"

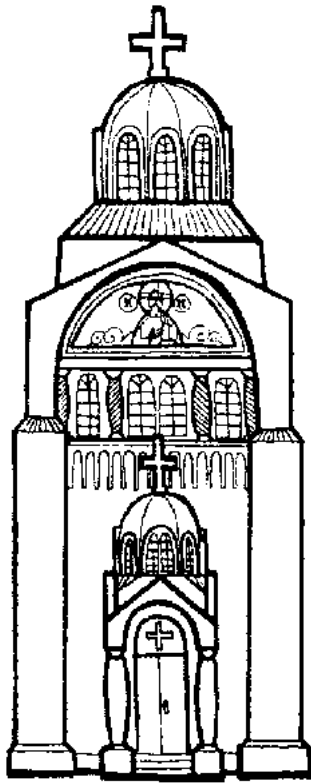
I think we make this journey to a faith worth believing in first by coming to where faith is expected to be the normative way of life - the living Orthodox Church.

Second, we make this journey to a faith worth believing by slowly, day to day, praying and pressing our heart towards the place of believing.

Pray for the departed like it matters. Pray to God in the words of the saints (and in your own), and speak to Him here and now. Give to the needy as though you were giving to God (you are). Live the sacramental life of the Church. Use everything the Church gives you for a normal, one-storey Christian existence. And be honest with God and with your priest about the struggles you have - about the assaults you experience against the faith.

The great good news is that this faith worth believing is true. It survives even into the modern world because the modern world is weak and crumbles. It cannot feed a modern man, while the faith once and for all delivered to the saints sustains human beings even through the unimaginable horrors of the modern world. God is with us.





If you wait on your modern heart to just suddenly become the heart of a desert monk - you'll have a long wait. The first floor is full of strange and wonderful things, but your heart will have to be changed in something longer than an instant (most likely). But most of us can find our hearts changed with something less than 40 years of weeping in a desert or a 20 year sentence in the cold of Siberia. Instead, you'll have to pray even when you don't feel like it and fast when you'd prefer to forget it, and attend Church like an old "Baba" in the dark years of Stalin. If the doors are open, be there - or at least try to be there - as if your life depended on it. It does. And the faith worth believing will come. Day by day it will come.

And then, in this modern world, you will see something that others don't. You may be asked to tell what you see. Or you may prefer silence. But the reality of what you see will have removed the anxiety in your heart and replaced it with true faith. It is enough."

*Fr. Stephen is the pastor of St. Anne's Orthodox Church, a mission of the Orthodox Church in America in Oak Ridge, TN. He can be heard on Ancient Faith Radio (ancientfaith.com) and the above article is an excerpt from his blog. (<http://fatherstephen.wordpress.com>).*

## *St. Agatha, Virgin and Martyr*

### *Feast Day ~ February 5*

Holy Scripture records very clearly our Lord's warning to those who would corrupt the young: "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea." [Matthew 18:6] One of the numerous Christians who gained the crown of martyrdom during the persecution of the Emperor Decius, St. Agatha endured not only condemnation and torture, but also the indignity of attacks on her virtue before giving her life for her faith.

Agatha was from a prominent wealthy family in Sicily. Her parents were devout Christians who had taught their daughter to love Christ and to be generous to the poor. Agatha was also a great beauty and there were many young men who sought her affection.

The Christians of Sicily had been relatively free from danger until Decius became Emperor in 249 and replaced the governor of Sicily with Quintianus, an immoral man who gladly carried out the Emperor's orders to persecute Christians.

When the 15-year-old Agatha was arrested and brought before the governor, he was very attracted to her good looks. He thought he could easily have her for himself by offering to drop all the charges against her in exchange for her "favors." The girl replied that her body, as well as her soul, belonged to God and that she could not do as he suggested. When Quintianus even offered to marry her, Agatha responded that, if she were inclined to marry, she could only marry one who was also a Christian.

The governor was not accustomed to having his desires rejected or his position of authority ignored, but he came to the conclusion that Agatha's youth and lack of experience were the reason for her response. So he decided to be patient and remedy the situation another way. He had the girl taken to the home of a Frontisia (called "Aphrodisia") who, with her daughters, operated a house of prostitution. These harlots were to teach Agatha how to be one of them so that Quintianus could then freely take advantage of her.

St. Agatha endured much abuse and humiliation in this place, but she survived through many prayers and tears and remained faithful to her commitment as a Christian.

The prostitutes soon complained to Quintianus that Agatha was hurting their business, so the governor, in his anger, resorted to the usual methods for attempting to get Christians to recant their beliefs.

Agatha was subjected to torture and even had her breasts cut off, but her wounds were miraculously healed as she prayed to St. Peter in prison. Through all her ordeals, Agatha never denied Christ, and the lovely young girl finally gave up her spirit on February 5, 251. Word of her courage in the face of these great trials spread quickly and many people found great comfort and inspiration in the example of St. Agatha. Her story was told by St. Jerome (5<sup>th</sup> century) and the poet Venantius Fortunatus (6<sup>th</sup> century), she was included in the calendar of Carthage (c. 530), and churches were dedicated to her in Rome and Ravenna in the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

Today, amid reports of more and greater threats to children and youth, we ask that St. Agatha intercede for the boys and girls who are forced into slavery and prostitution, that she pray for those



who are the victims of child pornography and those taught to be child soldiers. May God, through the prayers of holy Agatha, have mercy on them and save them.

## *Parish News*



**A**t our annual parish meeting on Sunday, January 27, Maria Roeber and “Skip” Mersereau were elected to the Parish Council, replacing outgoing members Brian Green and Jimmy Lang. We are grateful for the faithful service of those who are on the Council.

**M**embers of St. Gregory’s donated 85 pounds of canned and packaged food for the Food for the Hungry program. These items will now be given to Martha’s Table, the program for feeding the poor which is located on 14<sup>th</sup> Street near the church.

**T**his month, we celebrate the feast of Candlemas (the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple, also known as the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary) on Saturday, February 2. Mass will be sung at 10AM (preceded by Matins at 9:30) and candles to be used throughout the year will be blessed. We will enjoy a pot-luck brunch following the service.

**W**e will ask for the blessing of St. Blaise for protection against illnesses of the throat (always appropriate at this time of year!) following the Liturgy on his feast day, Sunday, February 3. Vespers for the Eve of the feast of the Chair of St. Peter at Antioch will be celebrated on Thursday, February 21, at 7:30PM.

**C**atechism classes are being offered on most Saturdays at 4:30PM, preceding 6PM Vespers. All are invited to come for an opportunity to receive instruction in the Orthodox faith, to refresh your memory on the important high points of Church history and theology, and to discuss questions as they arise in your day-to-day life.

**W**e rejoice to announce the ordinations of two new priests to serve two new Western Rite Congregations. In January, His Grace, Bishop BASIL, ordained Fr. Barry Thibodeaux to serve Christ the Savior Mission in Jacksonville, Texas and Fr. Mark Wallace to serve St. Andrew-the-first-called Mission in Oklahoma City. We welcome these two congregations which are composed of former members of the Charismatic Episcopal Church (which was also the previous home of the people of St. Patrick Mission in Warrenton, Virginia and St. Peter and Paul Mission in Hot Springs, Arkansas).

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>February 2008</h1>						
<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</i>					<b>1</b> St. Ignatius of Antioch, BM, c. 107; St. Bridgid, Abs, 523	<b>2</b> Presentation of Our Lord - Candlemass <i>Mass at 10am Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>3</b> Fourth Sunday after Epiphany; St. Blaise, BM, c. 316	<b>4</b> Neo-Martyrs of Russia, 1917 and following	<b>5</b> St. Agatha, VM, c. 250	<b>6</b> St. Photius, BCD, 891	<b>7</b> St. Romuald, Ab, 1027	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b> St. Cyril of Alexandria BC, 444  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>10</b> Fifth Sunday after Epiphany; St. Scholastica, V, 543	<b>11</b> St. Benedict of Aniane, Ab, 821; St. Theodora, Empress Ma, 860	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b> St. Kentigern, BC, 603	<b>14</b> St. Valentine, Priest M, 3 <sup>rd</sup> C	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b> St. Nicholas of Japan, BC, 1912  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>17</b> Sixth Sunday after Epiphany; St. Flavian, BM, 449	<b>18</b> St. Simeon of Jerusalem, BM, 1 <sup>st</sup> C.; St. Colman, BC, 675 (Presidents' Day)	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>  <i>Vespers at 7:30pm</i>	<b>22</b> Chair of St. Peter; St. Joseph of Arimethea, C, 1 <sup>st</sup> C	<b>23</b>  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>24</b> Septuagesima Sunday	<b>25</b> St. Matthias the Apostle, 1 <sup>st</sup> c.; St. Walburga, Abs of Heidenheim, 779	<b>26</b> St. Ethelbert of Kent, KC, 616	<b>27</b> St. Alexander of Alexandria, BC, 328	<b>28</b> St. Oswald of Worcester, BC, 992	<b>29</b>	

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

*Coffee Hour follows Sunday Liturgy.*