

# ✠ 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 Saint Caesarius of Arles*

*died AD542  
feast day - August 27*

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**G**od appeared to Abraham as he sat at the entrance of his tent near the holm-oak of Mamre. [Gen. 18:1, 2] Three men came to Abraham, and stood over him. Observe how it is that they come upon him, but not against him. He had subjected himself to God's will, and for this reason God is said to stand over him. They stood over him, not against him to repulse him, but over him for protection. He received the three men and served them loaves out of three measures. Why is this, brethren, unless it means the mystery of the Trinity? He also served a bullock; not a touch one, but a *good, tender one*. [Gen. 18:7] Now what is so good and tender as he who humbled Himself for us even unto death? He himself is that fatted calf which the father killed upon receiving his repentant son. *For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son*. [John 3:16] For this reason Abraham went to meet the three men and adored them as one. In the fact that he saw three, as was already said, he understood the mystery of the Trinity; but since he adored them as one, he recognized that there is one God in the three persons. He speaks to one, saying; "Turn aside to thy servant."

**M**oreover he adds, as though speaking to the men: *I will bring water, that you may wash your feet*. [Gen. 18:4] Learn from blessed Abraham, brethren, to receive strangers gladly, and to wash their feet with humility and piety. Wash, I repeat, the feet of pious strangers, lest there remain in them some dust which they will be able to shake off of their feet to your judgment. In the Gospel we read: *Whoever does not receive you - go forth and shake off the dust from your feet. Amen I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that town*. [Matt. 10:14-15] Abraham foresaw this in spirit, and for this reason wanted to anticipate it by washing their feet, lest perchance any dust remain which might be kept and shaken off on judgment day as an evidence of unbelief.

Therefore, the wise Abraham, says, *I will bring water, that you may wash your feet.*" [Gen. 18:4]



Carefully listen to this, brethren, if you are unwilling to exercise hospitality and to receive even your enemy as a guest. Behold while blessed Abraham welcomed those men warmly, he merited to receive God Himself in consideration of his hospitality. Christ further confirmed this in the Gospel when He said; *I was a stranger and you took me in.* [Matt.25:35] Therefore, do not despise strangers, lest perhaps he himself be the one you have rejected.

Now where did this happen? *Near the holm-oak of Mamre* [Gen. 18:1], which in Latin is interpreted as "vision" or 'discernment.'" Do you see what kind of a place it is in which the Lord can have a feast? The vision and discernment of Abraham delighted Him; he was clean of heart, so that he could see God. Therefore, in such a place and in such a heart the Lord can have his feast. Of this vision our Lord spoke to the Jews in the Gospel when He said: *Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day. He saw it and was glad.* [John18:56]

He saw my day, he says, because he recognized the mystery of the Trinity. He saw the Father as day, the Son as day, the Holy Ghost as day, and in these three one day. Thus, the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Ghost is God, and these three are one God. For individually each person is complete God, and all three together are one God. Moreover, because of the unity of substance, in those three measures of flour the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is not unfittingly understood.

However, this can also be taken in another way by understanding Sarah as the Church; the three measures of flour then are faith, hope, and charity. In these three virtues all the fruits of the church are contained, so that if a man merits to possess the three within himself, he can with security receive the entire Trinity at the banquet of his heart.

## *Saints of the Holy Land*

*by Kh. Rebecca Alford*

The Orthodox Church has always recognized that places and objects are made holy by their association with holy people. Thus, the relics of saints are venerated and pilgrimages are made to sacred shrines for the spiritual benefit that the faithful can receive from them.

When Fr. Nicholas, Subdeacon Jerome, and I made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land last month, we became part of a 2,000-year tradition of those who have traveled to the land made holy by the earthly life of Our Lord, seeking this spiritual benefit.

In Bethlehem, Nazareth, Cana, Capernaum, Mt. Tabor and Jerusalem, the pilgrim is at first overwhelmed by how much the Biblical stories come alive and at how small the geographic area is where the story of our salvation unfolded. We can so easily see our Lord's extended family (Mary and Joseph; Joachim and Anna; Elizabeth and Zecharia; John the Baptist; James) and his close friends (the holy Apostles; Mary and Martha and Lazarus) walking these narrow stone-paved streets, shopping in these markets, and fishing in the Lake Genessaret. These were the saints who, after witnessing Jesus' life and Resurrection, formed the Church and began the work of carrying the light of Christ to all the world.

But pilgrims soon become aware of the many layers of holiness in this holy land, of the countless other saints who, by their presence, prayers, charity and suffering through the centuries, added their sanctity to an already blessed land.

St. Nicholas was a pilgrim to the Holy Land in the years 312-15. On his way there, traveling by sea, the young priest Nicholas saved the ship and its passengers and crew through his prayers during a violent storm. After venerating the holy places (pointed out by the local Christians), Nicholas felt a strong desire to remain here and dedicate himself to a life of solitude in a cave in the nearby desert. But in his prayers, Nicholas heard the voice of God calling him back to Asia Minor where he was needed. Shortly after his return, he was made Bishop of Myra. St. Nicholas' sojourn in the Holy Land is marked at the Church of St. Nicholas in Beit Jala (near Bethlehem) where his cave cell is preserved in the crypt of the church and where some of his relics - which had been taken to Bari, Italy and returned in recent years - can be venerated. We give thanks to God for the presence of St. Nicholas, who is revered throughout the world, in this holy land.

St. Helena was one of the most important of the "second layer" saints who made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. It was she who, as mother of the newly crowned Roman Emperor, used her influence to discover and honor the holy places. Since the local Christians (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> generation descendants of those who had known Our Lord and the Apostles) had kept alive the memory of where the important events had occurred, it remained for the Empress to destroy the pagan emblems which had been used to cover some of the sites (such as the statue of Venus over the site of the Resurrection) and to build churches for Christian worship.



How fortunate for the world that St. Helena was converted to the Christian faith and that her son, St. Constantine, freed the Christians from persecution and execution. Since St. Helena's time (d. 330) - despite periodic destruction by enemies and earthquakes, rebuilding, invasions and rule by hostile people - Christians have been able to worship in the churches at the sites of the Nativity, the Shepherd's Field, the cave of the Wise Men, the Ascension, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection. St. Helena also discovered the remains of the Holy Cross, identified through a miracle. We give thanks to God for the life and work of this great saint.



Another early pilgrim to the Holy Land was St. Jerome, who came in 384 to venerate the holy places. With two of his spiritual children, Ss. Paula and her daughter, Eustochium of Rome, he formed a double monastery and lived in a cell near the birthplace of Our Lord. St. Jerome expressed his love for the place of the Nativity in these words; "All the places are holy and venerable, where Christ was born, where He was crucified, where He rose and where as victor He ascended into heaven; but this place is fittingly more venerable...Here a poor little child is born, an infant is laid in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn." Providing hospitality was a main focus of Jerome's monastery and it was here that his monumental translation of the Bible into Latin (the Vulgate) was completed. St. Jerome ended his life (in the year 420) in this holy place and was buried in the Church of the Nativity near his cell. His relics were later transferred to Rome, where he had begun his life of service to the Church.

In the next century, Theodosius came from Cappadocia to the Holy Land on pilgrimage, first visiting St. Simeon Stylites for advice on dedicating his life to God. After venerating the holy places in Jerusalem, Theodosius entered a monastery in Bethlehem, but soon removed himself to a cell in the cave revered as the place where the Magi had rested after seeing the Christ Child and where they learned in a dream not to return to Herod. In this holy place (now near Beit Sahour), Theodosius devoted himself to prayer, fasting, and holy tears. After numerous disciples gathered round him, seeking his spiritual guidance, Theodosius had to build a monastery large enough to accommodate them all. Many had come from far away and the community was made up of Christians who spoke several different languages. Theodosius built several churches where the monks could worship daily in their own language - Greek, Armenian, Georgian, or Slavic - coming together to receive communion. St. Theodosius served as a faithful guide for his monks until his earthly life ended at age 105. He was buried in his cave cell, having added his blessing to this land through his life of sanctity.

The many “layers” of holiness in the Holy Land have continued through the centuries. In 1888, the Grand Duchess Elizabeth of Russia accompanied her husband, Grand Duke Sergei to Palestine for the consecration of the golden-domed church at the Monastery of St. Mary Magdalene on the Mount of Olives. It was here that Elizabeth, who was a Protestant of German background, was moved to become Orthodox, to become a member of the Church which she had grown to love and to recognize as the continuation of the original Church. On her return to Russia, Elizabeth devoted herself more determinedly to the works of charity which were natural to her. After the Grand Duke was assassinated by a terrorist bomb in 1905, she established a monastery and, with the aid of the nuns under her direction, provided medical care and food for many people in a difficult time. Elizabeth and a companion, the nun Barbara, were murdered with the rest of the Russian royal family in 1918, and their bodies were secreted away, eventually being sent for burial in the beautiful church of St. Mary Magdalene. Today, their relics can be venerated as saints in this church.



A new chapter has begun in the Holy Land. Life for Christians in this place where the Church originated has once again become extremely difficult. Caught between Jews and Muslims amid hostilities, oppression and violence, many Christians are choosing to leave for a safer life elsewhere. May the saints of all the centuries in the Holy Land intercede for these besieged people, and may God give us wisdom and strength to help them to maintain a Christian presence in the land he made holy.

## *Parish News*

Thanks to all who helped to make our Dedication weekend on May 5 and 6 a wonderful celebration. The church and the parish hall were beautifully adorned for the occasion, the gardens were freshly planted and blooming (thanks to Lien, Stella and Scott), and we were pleased to welcome His Grace, Bishop THOMAS and our guests (from Ss. Peter & Paul, St. George’s in Washington and Altoona, and St. Patrick’s Mission) to the services and dinner for this long-awaited event. Our new challenge from Sayedna THOMAS is to make ourselves visible in the community and to let others know about the Orthodox faith which our church proclaims. [To see pictures of the Dedication weekend, go to the archdiocesan website at <http://antiochian.org/1179156378>].

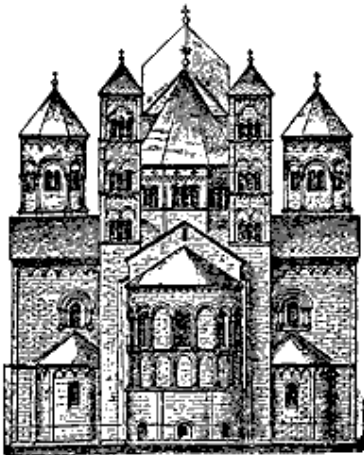
We were also pleased to celebrate the elevation of Fr. Nicholas to the dignity of Archpriest that weekend. The parish presented him with a beautiful pectoral cross (which has now been worn in the Holy Land.)

We will celebrate several major feast days during June. The month begins with the celebration of the Holy Trinity on June 3; the Feast of Corpus Christi will be celebrated on the Sunday within the Octave, June 10; and the Nativity of St. John the Baptist falls on Sunday, June 24. On Thursday, June 28, we will celebrate the Eve of Ss. Peter and Paul with Sung Mass at 7:30PM followed by a pot-luck supper.

## *The Saints of the Church*

*by Fr. Patrick Reardon*

Because the Holy Catholic Church is adorned in a robe of many colors (Psalms 44:190 LXX), it is appropriate that her various aspects are exemplified in the rich and diverse gifts of the saints, much as the whiteness of the sun's light is refracted in the range of the rainbow's colors. Hence, it is no new idea that the sundry aspects of God's one people were represented among the close friends of Christ our Lord.



For instance, if we consider the Church as an institution, a building (1 Corinthians 3:9), it seems entirely proper to say she is represented by St. Peter, whose very name signifies the "rock" on which the Church was founded (Matthew 16:18). For this reason we regularly find this saint expressing in the Gospels the Church's foundational creed with respect to the identity of Jesus (16:16; John 6:69). It is not as though the other saints fail to exemplify the faith of the Church, of course; all of us must hold the identical faith in Jesus. Nonetheless, it is very clear in the Gospels that Peter seems habitually to act as the Church's spokesman in the enunciation of this foundational faith. When Peter speaks with respect to Christ, He speaks for the confessing Church as a whole. That is to say, Peter represents the institutional faith of the Church. When we think of the foundational stability of the Church, we think of Peter.

There are other essential aspects of the Church, however, besides that of an institution, and among these we should consider the Church as a missionary venture. When we think of the Church in terms of missionary endeavor, it is natural that the character of St. Paul comes to mind. This does not mean, obviously, that Paul has nothing to do with the institutional aspect of the Church. Inasmuch as Paul founded local churches all over the Mediterranean basin and established their ministries, this would be a rash conclusion. Neither do we mean that none of the other saints exemplify this same missionary aspect of the Church. It is simply a fact that Holy Scripture says so much more of this activity in Paul's life, so when we think of the Church in terms of mission, we think of Paul.

Another aspect of the Church, surely, is that of a school of theology, inner refuge where divine truth is nourished and studied. This is what we may call the Johannine dimension of the Church, inasmuch as Christians have traditionally thought of John's Gospel as representing the true high point in theology. Indeed, John is the earliest Christian to be called a "theologian." Needless to say, this does not mean that Peter, Paul, and the other saints knew nothing of theology and left that subject entirely to John. It was John, nonetheless, who began his Gospel by ascending directly into the inner life of God and writing about the eternal generation of the Word. This is the reason John is the evangelist commonly identified with the eagle among Revelation's four living creatures. When we think of the great theological ministry of the Church, we think of John.



The Church is also a community of witness, and this aspect of ecclesiology we commonly associate with St. Stephen, the Church's first *martyr*, or witness. Once again, this emphasis takes nothing away from the martyrdoms of Peter, Paul, and many others, nor does it mean that this is the only aspect we recall about Stephen. We mean only that Stephen was the first to confront the enmity of the world at the cost of his own life. When we think of the Church in terms of witnessing unto bloodshed, then, we think of Stephen.

The Church is also a home of kindness and devoted service, and in this respect she is represented in the Myrrhbearing Women, those unselfish handmaidens who came to anoint the body of the Lord and became the first to proclaim His resurrection. When we think of the Church in terms of loving service, it is natural that we remember the Myrrhbearers.

The Church is likewise a house of repentance, an aspect of ecclesiology readily recognized in St. Mary Magdalene, out of whom Jesus had cast seven devils (Luke 8:2). When we think of the Church as the place of repentance, it is not surprising that we think of Mary Magdalene.

The Church is, moreover, a house of contemplation, and perhaps we may call this the Church's preeminently Marian aspect. This does not mean that other Christians are deprived of the gift of divine contemplation, of course. It simply indicates that Mary of Nazareth became so full of God's eternal Word that He assumed flesh in her body. Her "yes" provided God's path into human existence. Consequently, when we think of the Church in terms of contemplation, we think of that Lady who "kept all these things in her heart" (Luke 2:51).

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>June 2007</h1>						
					1 Ember Friday in Whitsun Week  FAST	2 Ember Saturday [Comm. Ss. Marcellinus, Peter, Erasmus, Mm]  6PM Vespers FAST
3 Trinity Sunday  9:AM Matins 9:30 Sung Mass	4 St. Petroc, C, 564	5 St. Boniface, BM, 754	6 Feria  FAST	7 Feast of Corpus Christi  7:30pm Vespers & Benediction	8 Within the Octave  FAST	9 St. Columba, Ab, 597  6PM Vespers
10 Sunday in the Octave of Corpus Christi  9AM Matins 9:30 Sung Mass	11 St. Barnabas, Apostle	12 Within the Octave	13 Within the Octave  FAST	14 St. Basil the Great, BCD, 379 Octave of Corpus Christi	15 Feria  FAST	16 Feria  6pm Vespers
17 Pentecost III  9AM Matins 9:30 Sung Mass	18 St. Ephrem of Syria, D, 373	19 Feria	20 Trans- lation of St. Edward, KM, 980  FAST	21 Feria	22 St. Alban, M, 209  FAST	23 St. Ethelreda, V, 679 Vigil of St. John the Baptist  6PM Vespers
24 The Nativity of St. John the Baptist  9AM Matins 9:30 Sung Mass	25 Within the Octave	26 Within the Octave	27 Within the Octave  FAST	28 St. Ire- naeus, BM, 202, Vigil of Ss. Peter & Paul 7:30 Sung Mass, pot-luck supper following	29 Ss. Peter & Paul, Apostles  FAST	30 St. Paul, Apostle  6PM Vespers

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

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