

✠ 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. Gregory the Great

*died AD604
feast day - March 12*

We must consider for ourselves, why it is this abstinence is observed for forty days? For Moses also fasted forty days, that he might receive the Law (Ex. 34:28). Elias in the desert fasted for forty days (III Kings 19:8). And He Who is the Author of all men, coming amongst men, went entirely without food for forty days and forty nights. And we, as far as we are able, must also endeavor to mortify our bodies by abstinence during this yearly time of Lent.

Why is the number forty observed if not that the excellence of the Decalogue is perfected by the Four Books of the Gospel? For as ten multiplied by four make forty, so we perfectly fulfil the precepts of the Decalogue when we faithfully observe the Four Books of the Holy Gospels. From this another thing may be learned. In this mortal body we are composed of four elements; and it is because of this same body we are made subject to God's Commandments. The Commands of the Law are given to us in the Decalogue. And since it is through the desires of the body we have despised the Commandments of the Decalogue, it is just that we chastize this same flesh four time ten times.

And if you wish there is yet another thing to be understood from these time of Lent. From this present day till the joyful solemnities of Easter there are six weeks; that is, two and forty days. From which if you subtract the six Sundays there remain six and thirty days of abstinence. And since a year continues throughout three hundred and sixty-five days, we, when we mortify ourselves for thirty-six days, give to the Lord a tithe as it were of our year; so that we who have lived for ourselves throughout the year we have received, may, during His tenth of it, die to Our Make through abstinence.

Inside:

<i>Election Day</i>	3
<i>St. John Climacus</i>	4
<i>Parish News</i>	6
<i>Calendar</i>	7



St. Gregory the Great

And so, Dearly Beloved, as it was commanded in the Law to offer tithes of all things, so let you offer Him a tithe of your das. Let each one mortify his own body, as far as his strength allows, and let him weaken its desires, and lower the pride of its evil lusts, so that he may become, in the words of Paul, a “living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1). A man is both living and a sacrifice when he has died to the desires of his body, though he has not departed from this life. It is the pleasure-loving body that leads us into sin; mortification leads us back to forgiveness. The parent of our death sinned against the commandments of our life, because of the fruit of the forbidden tree. We therefore, who because of eating have fallen from the joy of paradise may, as far as we are able, return to it once more through fasting.

But let no one believe that fasting alone is sufficient; for the Lord tells us by the mouth of the prophet: “Is not this rather the fast that I have chosen?” And then continues: “Deal thy bread to the hungry, and bring the needy and the harborless into thy house: when thou shalt see one naked, cover him, and despise not thy own flesh.” (Is. 58:6,7) The Lord therefore blesses that fast which uplifts our hands in almsgiving before His eyes, which is joined to the love of our neighbor, and founded on compassion. That which you deny yourself let you therefore give to another; so that that by which your body is weakened, may refresh the body of your hungry neighbor.

Because of this the Lord says to us through his prophet: “When you fasted and mourned, did you keep a fast unto me? And when you did eat and drink, did you not eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?” (Zach. 7:5, 6). He eats and drinks for himself who enjoys the food of the body which is the common gift of the Creator without a thought for those in need. And each one fasts for himself if that which he denies himself for a time he gives, not to the needy, but saves that he may later offer it to his own stomach. Hence was it said by the prophet Joel: Sanctify ye a fast (Joel 1:14; 2:15). To sanctify a fast is to offer to God a worthy mortification of the body, provided we are worthy in other respects also. Let anger cease, and quarreling end. In vain do you deny the flesh when the soul is unchecked in its evil delights; for the Lord has warned us by the prophet: “Behold in the day of your fast your own will is found; behold you fast for debates and strife, and strike wickedly with your fist, and you exact from all your debtors” (Is. 58:3).

Though he who demands back from his neighbors what he gave them commits no injustice, yet it is fitting that whoever mortifies himself in penance should deny himself even what is justly his due. And so by doing penance ourselves, and humbled by others, we shall obtain from God pardon for what we have done

unjustly, if for love of Him we let go our hold of what is rightly ours; by the grace and aid of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who reigns with the Father and the Holy Ghost for ever. Amen.

A Homiletical Meditation for the Sunday in the Octave of the Primary Election Day

by Fr. Nicholas Alford

Do we manifest Christ by the way we live. Most of us probably do live generally decent lives, Christian lives that include concern for truth and for the ways of God. But problems arise in those areas where we fall short - and we all *do* fall short in differing ways. To manifest Christ in our lives we must constantly work to make things right. This takes real work - work to look carefully at our lives in order to discern what does not belong - work to overcome whatever does not belong - and work to nourish what is good and right and healthy - so that, in our own lives, we may show the beauty of Christ to others.

To look at one example - how do we treat our brothers and sisters in Christ when we do not agree with them? We all have political opinions. They tend to be well thought out and dearly held. So recently I was very surprised, in speaking with a brother priest, to hear who he had voted for in the primary election. We have been good friends for many years, we know each other very well and respect each other. I was very surprised at his choice, but it does not make him a bad person in my eyes, and I hope he felt the same about me when I told him who I had voted for. We do have an obligation to strive to live out our faith, and we know that, in terms of the political process, some Orthodox Christians choose to be Democrats, some Republicans, and some Independent. Good, honest, hardworking people have served on both sides of the aisle - and not so good people have served on both sides of the aisle. Orthodox Christians continue to serve throughout the political spectrum, but I do not think that God really sees us as Republicans or Democrats. He sees us first as His children whom he loves - and if we walk in His ways, we too will strive to see our brothers and sisters in the same way, even when we disagree with them. Patriarch Ignatius has reminded us that even truth itself loses its power when it is separated from love. I pray that we all can remember this, especially as we draw closer and closer to the election in November. If we forget to be charitable towards our brothers and sisters for something like a difference of opinion, be it concerning politics, or anything else - then we run the risk of displaying the fruit of strife and discord, rather than manifesting Christ.



Back in the early fourth century, Saint Aphraates, a Bishop living near present day Mosul in Iraq, warned against the dangers of allowing discord and strife to rule in our lives (to any degree): He said, *“Dearly beloved, it is not enough to read and to study the sacred Scriptures, we must fulfill them also. For to me it seems that if anyone is involved in contentions and in quarrels, his prayers are not acceptable, his supplications are not answered, his gift rises not upwards from the earth... And wheresoever there is no peace and tranquillity, the door is left open to the Evil One... the ordinary things of life are thrown into confusion, and there is peace neither for the one coming, nor for the one going. Such are the fruits of discord.”*

We could offer similar warnings about other behaviors as well, against any harmful thing that threatens to control our lives. If we allow strife, or anger, or envy, or lust or any other bad thing to rule and direct our lives, our thoughts, our words, our deeds - then we are no longer able to manifest Christ, no longer able to show God in our lives. Let us pray that we never obscure the beauty of God’s message by the way we live.

St. John Climacus

Feast Day ~ March 30



We commemorate the return of the icons to the Churches on the Sunday of Orthodoxy

According to the ways of the world, in order to have great influence, one must be a prominent statesmen, a talented actor or athlete, a wealthy merchant, or a technological genius. But according to the ways of God, it is often the quiet saint, the reclusive monk, who has the greatest influence for good. St. John Climacus is an example of one whose life is still affecting others 1400 years after the end of his earthly sojourn.

When he was only sixteen years old, John left his home and family in Palestine and entered the monastery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai in the Egyptian desert. Already in the 6th century, this monastery (the first to be established) was renowned as a holy place of prayer and spiritual struggle. The mountain had been the place where Moses heard God in the burning bush and received the commandments; St. Helena had come here 200 years earlier on her pilgrimage to the Holy Land; and men from all over the Christian world came here to devote themselves to prayer and meditation.

John was given spiritual direction from the monk Martyrius and, after four years, he received the monastic tonsure. When Martyrius died, the then 35-year-old John moved to a hermitage at the foot of the mountain to live in greater solitude and quiet.

A church, dedicated to the Theotokos, had been built on the mountain on the order of the Emperor Justinian, and all the monks living in the area came to this church on Saturdays and Sundays to sing the Office and to celebrate the Divine Liturgy.

During the next forty years, John drew closer to God through prayer and contemplation, fasting, and reading scripture and the lives of the saints. John's ability to see into the heart and offer spiritual counsel became widely known and many pilgrims came to his cell seeking his prayers and advice. The petitioners became so numerous that one day in church, John overheard another monk remark that he could hardly call his cell a "hermitage" for all the visitors he entertained and all the talking he did! In humility, John vowed to remain silent and he did so for a year until the entreaties of his fellow monks convinced him to resume his practice of spiritual guidance.

John corresponded with another John, who was the abbot of the monastery at Raithu near the Red Sea. Abbot John asked the monk John to make a written record of his insights and advice so that future generations would be able to benefit from it. And so the monk prepared what has become one of the most famous writings from a monastic father, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. Using Jacob's vision of a ladder reaching up into heaven for its inspiration, the book consists of thirty homilies (representing the thirty years of Christ's life before his earthly ministry began) which present Christian virtues as steps to heaven. The reader is called to the spiritual life, ascending from righteous actions to divine vision. Although the book was written for monks, all of us can find words of wisdom in it for our lives.

When he was 75 years of age, John was unanimously chosen to be the abbot of St. Catherine's. Reluctantly leaving the solitude of his cell, John returned to the top of the mountain where his responsibilities spread to all the other monks and his influence was felt even further. Not only did individuals continue to seek his counsel, but groups of people requested his prayers (as when the people of Palestine appealed to him in a time of severe drought). Our patron, St. Gregory the Great, while serving as the Pope of Rome (590 - 604), wrote to St. John asking for his prayers and sending him a monetary contribution for the hospital which the monks operated for pilgrims.

At the age of 79, John asked to be relieved of his duties as Abbot in order to prepare for his death. He appointed his brother, George, to be his successor, but both brothers died in the same year (c. 603) ten months apart.



St. John Climacus

The effects of St. John's wisdom did not diminish with his death. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* continued to be read and studied, translated into numerous languages, and passed on to many parts of the world. Even today, all Orthodox monks hear this work read during the daily meal on the days of Great Lent. St. John is remembered as the originator of hesychasm, or the practice of constant, inner prayer (the "Jesus" prayer).

May we, following the ways of God and not of the world, be imbued with the spiritual counsel of St. John Climacus, as we strive to take our steps toward heaven:

Ascend, my brothers, ascend eagerly. Let your hearts' resolve be to climb. Listen to the voice of the one who says, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of our God" [Is. 2:3], Who makes our feet to be like the feet of the deer, "Who sets us on the high places, that we may be triumphant on His road." [Hab. 3:19] Run, I beg you, run with him who said, "let us hurry until we all arrive at the unity of faith and of the knowledge of God, at mature manhood, at the measure of the stature of christ's fullness." [Eph. 4:13]

Parish News



We are observing the Sundays of Pre-Lent (the "gesimas"), with their more penitential characteristics (we do not sing the "Gloria in excelsis" or the Te Deum and the vestment color is already purple) in anticipation of the season of Lent, which begins on Ash Wednesday, March 12. (St. Gregory's feast day will not be celebrated at this time but we will observe his feast day in September). The Liturgy with Imposition of Ashes will be at 7:30 that evening, followed by a light (pot-luck) Lenten meal.

On the First Sunday of Lent, March 16, we will join with our fellow Orthodox Christians in observing the Sunday of Orthodoxy, celebrating the triumph of Orthodoxy over the iconoclasts. Vespers will be held at St. Sophia Cathedral at 5:30 pm.

On the Fridays in Lent, beginning March 21, we will have Lenten suppers at 6:30 pm, followed by Stations of the Cross and Benediction, and a class giving an exposition of the Mass. During Lent, we will also continue our classes on the Orthodox faith on Saturdays at 4:30 preceding Vespers.

The Feast of the Annunciation will be celebrated with Sung Mass on Monday, March 24, at 7:30.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>March 2008</h1>					<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</i>	1 St. David of Wales, BC, 544 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
2 Sexagesima; St. Chad, BC, 672	3	4	5	6 Ss. Perpetua & Felicitas, MM, 203	7	8 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
9 Quinquagesima; St. Gregory of Nyssa, BCD, 394	10 ⁴⁰ Martyrs of Sebaste, MM, 320	11 St. Sophronius of Jerusalem, BC, c. 369	12 Ash Wednesday <i>Liturgy at 7:30pm</i>	13 St. Gregory the Great, BCD, 604 (tr.)	14	15 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
16 First Sunday in Lent: Sunday of Orthodoxy <i>Vespers at St. Sophia at 5:30</i>	17 St. Patrick, BC, 461	18 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, BC, 386; St. Edward, KM, 979	19 St. Joseph; Ember Wednesday	20 St. Cuthbert of Lindis-farne, BC, 687	21 St. Benedict, Ab, 550; Ember Friday;	22 Ember Saturday <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
23 Second Sunday in Lent; (Western Easter)	24 St. Gabriel <i>Liturgy at 7:30pm</i>	25 Annunciation	26	27 St. John of Damascus, CD, c. 760	28	29 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
30 Third Sunday in Lent; St. John of the Ladder, Ab, 649	31 St. Innocent, BC, 1879					

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

Coffee Hour follows Sunday Liturgy.