

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

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

From a sermon of Saint Ceasarius of Arles

*died 542AD
feast day - August 27*

I cannot express in words the joy the Lord has granted me because of your holy and faithful devotion. For many years my mind had yearned for this, and I had longed with all the intensity of my heart for the good Lord to inspire you with this practice of chanting the psalms. Therefore, I bless God and thank Him as well as I can because He has deigned to fulfill my desire... What, then, should I do in the midst of this joy, except beg the Lord with all my might to deign to bestow a completion of this as he has granted the beginning. In His goodness may He grant happy perseverance to those who have adopted the holy practice of singing the psalms. Moreover, because not he who begins but “He who has persevered will be saved” [Matt. 10:22], enkindle in yourselves by continual prayer and compunction of heart the fire of divine love as much as you can. Let not the flame of charity which has begun to burn devoutly in your hearts grow cold through some negligence.

Above all, strive by holy thoughts, as well as by prayers, to fulfill in daily life what you chant orally; and may the Holy Spirit who speaks to you through your lips also deign to dwell in your hearts. It is truly good and pleasing enough to God when the tongue devoutly chants the psalms, but it will be still better if your life is in harmony with the words on your tongue.

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Our words and our lives should be in agreement. Let not our words bear testimony against our evil habits, and let not our tongue refute our lives. If one thing is uttered with our mouth and something else appears in our actions, what the tongue seems to build up our evil life immediately destroys. For your part, brethren, may the sense of the passage hold your attention as well as the pleasantness of the sound. Just as the sound of the words pleases your ears, so may the meaning of the selection become sweet to your heart, just as it is written: “How sweet are the words to my palate, O Lord!” [Ps.



119:103] and further: “The words of the Lord are more to be desired than gold and many precious stones: and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb.” [Ps. 19:10] If, when a person chants the psalms, he only pays attention to the sweetness of the sounds and the arrangement of the words, but does not heed what should be understood in them, his ears receive passing nourishment, but the word of God does not reach his heart. In a certain sense he chews on pure wax, but does not taste the sweetness of the honey at all.

Brethren, heed especially the inner meaning of the psalms. When any one of you chants the line of the psalm, “Let the proud be ashamed, because they have done unjustly towards me,” [Ps. 119:78] he should try to avoid pride, in order to merit escaping eternal confusion. As we chant: “Thou wilt destroy all them that are disloyal to thee,” [Ps. 73:27] we should endeavor to avoid all evil concupiscence. When we sing: “Blessed is the man that shall meditate on the law of the Lord day and night,” [Ps. 1:2] let us reject useless occupations, stinging jests, idle and wicked conversations, as the poison of the devil. ..

As often as sinners are condemned in the psalms let us strive to avoid sin, so that we will not seem to be condemning ourselves with our own lips. Moreover, whenever the just, the merciful, the good, the chaste, or the humble are praised in the psalms, let us with God’s help endeavor to be such. Then the blessing which is addressed to them will also be conferred on us through the divine mercy.

The Story Continues

St. Joseph of Arimathea ~ Feast Day, February 22

St. Matthias ~ Feast Day, February 24

How often have we come to the end of a good novel and wished that there was more to the story? The characters presented in the book remain alive in our minds and we want to know what would have happened next. Greater than any novels we could ever read are the stories presented to us in Holy Scripture. Here we read the unfolding story of our salvation, of the earthly life of our Savior, of the founding of the Church and of the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are fortunate that Holy Tradition provides us with more about some of the holy men and women who make “cameo appearances” in the Bible. In the month of February, we venerate two such saints whose further witness to Christ is given to us by the Church.

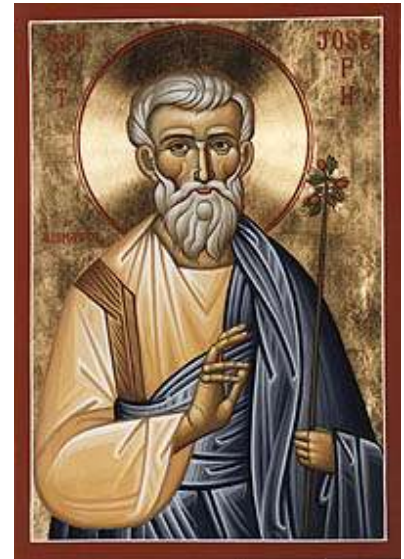
All four Gospels relate the story of Joseph of Arimathea, who provided a tomb for the body of Christ following the Crucifixion. Joseph is variously described as a rich man, a counsellor, and as a follower of Christ. The picture we get is of one who was highly regarded in the Jewish community (some say that a “counsellor” was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish court of justice which had condemned Jesus and brought Him to Pilate). He was no doubt a successful merchant who had achieved prosperity.

St. Mark describes Joseph as one who was searching for the Kingdom of God. He had obviously been observing Jesus, hearing His teachings and pondering whether He was the longed-for Messiah. Like Nicodemus, the other Jewish leader described in the Gospels as a secret follower of Christ and the one who aided Joseph in caring for the body of Jesus, Joseph was finally moved to commit himself openly as a follower of Christ.

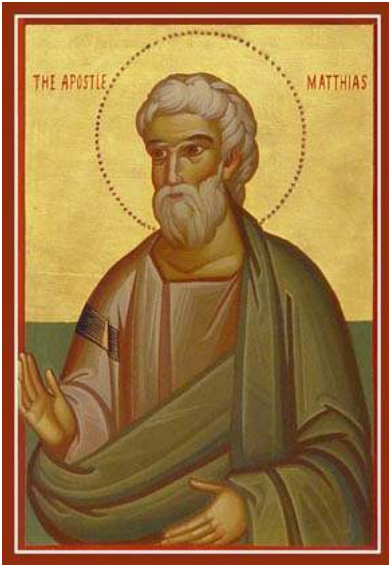
Even though he was not a relative of Jesus, as would have been the custom, Joseph courageously went to Pilate and asked permission to take the body of Jesus for burial. He and Nicodemus took the crucified Lord to Joseph’s own family tomb, which was carved into the rock in a garden on his property. Just as the newborn Jesus had been laid in a manger in a cave in Bethlehem, now at the end of His earthly life, Jesus was laid on a stone slab in a cave outside Jerusalem.

The Biblical story of Joseph ends here, but many of the Fathers of the Church such as St. Irenaeus (125-189) and St. Hilary of Poitiers (300-367) tell us that Joseph continued to bear witness to the truth that Jesus Christ was the Messiah of the Jewish prophecies after the death and Resurrection of the Lord. St. John Chrysostom (347-407) said that he was one of the Seventy Apostles who were sent out on missionary journeys to spread the Gospel further. It is believed that he helped to found the Church in the city of Lydda.

The *Gospel of Nicodemus*, an apocryphal writing of the first century, tells of Joseph confronting the Jewish leaders, being imprisoned by them and escaping miraculously after a vision of Christ. Legends about St. Joseph of Arimathea in Britain began early and continue to this day. The story that he took the child Jesus and his mother to England, made famous by the poet William Blake and set to music by Sir Hubert Parry, stirs the heart of any Anglophile! Orthodox lives of the saints agree that Joseph may very well have traveled to England to preach Christianity and early historians such as Hippolytus (170-236), Tertullian (155-222), and Eusebius (260-340), wrote that Christianity had reached the shores of that far-away island in their time.



The Church honors the memory of the courageous Joseph of Arimathea on February 22 (July 31 on the Eastern rite calendar). May we, like St. Joseph, be courageous in declaring that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Savior of the world.



The Apostles knew that Christ intended for them to be the leaders (bishops) of His Church and that he had purposely chosen twelve. After the Resurrection, the eleven knew that another man must be chosen to replace the traitor, Judas. The qualifications for one who would be a bishop as the Church expanded are outlined in the Epistle of St. Paul to Titus: “...if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”

But there were even more requirements for this first new bishop as given in the Acts of the Apostles [1:21, 22]: “Of those men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” Two of the many followers of Jesus were found to meet all the qualifications - Joseph, called Barsabas, and Matthias. After praying for God to make the choice, the eleven cast lots and Matthias became the twelfth Apostle.

Matthias was present when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles on the day of Pentecost and then his work of spreading the Gospel began. According to Tradition, Matthias preached first in Judea. He had been born in Bethlehem and had been a pupil of St. Simeon in Jerusalem, so this was his “home territory.” He then traveled to Ethiopia (preaching to “cannibals” as described in some accounts) to Macedonia (where he was imprisoned but miraculously escaped) and the modern-day country of Georgia.

Some accounts place Matthias’ death in Georgia (which claims a burial place), but others report that he returned to Judea where he was condemned by Ananias, the high Priest who had already put the Apostle James to death. Matthias was stoned to death and then his accusers beheaded him in the style of the Romans (to imply that he opposed the Emperor). Matthias faithfully completed the intended work of Judas, who had fallen into the hands of the devil. Like all the other Apostles except St. John, St. Matthias gave his life in witness to Christ. We venerate this saint on February 24 (August 9 on the eastern calendar). Blessed Matthias, pray for us.

The story of Christ and His Church is an unending one. The main characters in the story may come and go, the plot may take many turns here and there, but the story will continue to the end of time. Our Lord Jesus Christ has promised that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against His Church and that He will return at the last day to raise the faithful to new life.

Parish News

We begin and end the month of February with special services and we make the transition from the Christmas cycle of celebrations to that which is determined by the date of Pascha. Candlemas - also known as the Presentation of Christ in the Temple and the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary - will be observed on the eve, Wednesday, February 1. The blessing of the candles to be used during the year (hence the name “Candlemas”) will begin at 7:00 pm. The Liturgy will be at 7:30 and at the end, we will anticipate the feast of St. Blaise (February 3 - the patron saint for illnesses of the throat) with the blessing of throats. As usual, we will enjoy a pot-luck supper afterward.

The season of Epiphany ends on Sunday, February 5, followed by three transitional Sundays - the “gesimas”: Septuagesima, Sexagesima and Quinquagesima - before Ash Wednesday begins the Lenten season. On February 29, we will have the blessing and imposition of ashes at 7:00 pm followed by Liturgy and a Lenten pot-luck supper.

We are in the process of a major, professional rebuild of our parish website (stgregoryoc.org) and the new site should be available for use very soon. The work is being done by Fr. Hans Jacobse, a priest of our archdiocese, whose secular profession is web design. The new site should be much more “up-to-date” in appearance and will include a slide show of photos of parish life, audio files of our choir singing and many more articles and information.

Through generous gifts from parishioners and a friend of the parish, we have recently acquired a new set of red vestments for High Mass. These will be used on Palm Sunday, during Pentecost and on all feasts of martyrs.

Despite the predictions of winter ice, we were hosts to about a dozen guests from Pennsylvania and Ohio at the Mass and breakfast before the March for Life. Having this Mass each year reminds us that the issue of reverence for life from conception is not a political issue but a basic truth of our Christian faith.



Love for God and One's Neighbor

by Monk John Vranos of Mt. Athos



Love is the queen of virtues. One who strives after love will be enriched with an incomparable treasure. More than anything else, we must love God. Let us love all men without exception as we love ourselves.

Many think they have love, but how can this be confirmed? By your works and your conduct, O man, it will be made obvious. If being injured and slandered you don't hold hostility within you against those who offend you; if you cannot endure seeing a poor man, but give him the most choice of your goods; if you deny yourself various necessities so as to be able to give them to one in need, then, in truth, you have love for your neighbor.

If you desire to glorify God by praying or giving thanks to Him for the good things he has given you, and this time of prayer is for you not an obligation and duty, but rather a deep yearning of your heart; and if you grieve over your sins and struggle to correct your behavior, then take courage - truly you love God.

If we don't love our fellow men, then it is impossible that we love God. Impossible. Many there are who run to churches, travel to the Holy Land, and make many prayers, but at the same time have quarrels with their neighbors, and years have passed since they have said "good day" to them, or they are embittered against them for various causes. Or they deal unjustly with others and are a heavy burden to their fellow men. Let us not deceive ourselves, however. St. John the Evangelist writes:

If anyone says, "I love God," but hates his fellow man, his love for God is even a lie. Because inasmuch as he does not love his fellow man, who is an icon of God, even seeing him daily, how is it possible for him to love God, Whom he has never seen?

Love of God is the second step; on the first, the lower one, is the love of one's neighbor. No one is able to achieve love of God if he doesn't gain love for his neighbor first of all. A certain saint writes: *The key that opens the door to the Kingdom of God is your neighbor.*

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>February 2012</h1>						
<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</i>			1 St. Ignatius of Antioch, BM, c. 107; St. Bridgid, V, 523 <i>Blessing of Candles & Mass at 7pm</i> <i>W</i>	2 Presentation of Our Lord: Candlemas	3 St. Blaise, BM, c. 316; St. Anskar of Hamburg, BC, 865	4 New Martyrs of Russia, 1917 and following; St. Joseph of Aleppo, M, 1686 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
5 Fifth Sunday after Epiphany; St. Agatha, VM, c. 250 <i>G</i>	6 St. Photius, BCD, 891; St. Dorothy, VM c. 313	7 St. Romuald, Ab, 1027	8	9 St. Cyril of Alexandria, BCD, 444; St. Apollonia, VM, c. 248	10 St. Scholastica, V, 543	11 St. Gregory II, PM; St. Benedict of Aniane, Ab, 821; St. Theodora, Empress Ma, 860 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
12 Septuagesima <i>V</i>	13	14 St. Valentine, PrM, 3rd C	15 Ss. Faustinus & Jovita, Mm, 120	16 St. Nicholas of Japan, BC, 1912	17	18 St. Simon of Jerusalem, BM, 1st C.; St. Colman, BC, 675 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
19 Sexagesima <i>V</i>	20	21	22 Chair of St. Peter at Antioch; St. Joseph of Arimathea, C, 1st c.	23	24 Vigil of St. Matthias <i>(Note that in Leap-Years, the observances from this point to the end of the month are one day later than usual)</i>	25 St. Matthias, Apostle, 1st c. <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
26 Quinquagesima; St. Walburga, of Heidenheim, V, 779 <i>V</i>	27 St. Porphyrius of Gaza, BC, 420; St. Ethelbert, KC, 616	28 St. Raphael of Brooklyn, BC, 1915; St. Alexander, BC, 326; St. Leander, BC, 600	29 Ash Wednesday (omit St. Oswald of Worcester, BC, 992) <i>Blessing of Ashes and Mass at 7:30pm</i> <i>V</i>	1 St. David of Wales, BC, c. 589	2 St. Chad, BC, 672	3 St. Lucius, PM, 254 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>

Confessions may be made following Vespers, during the Psalms at Matins, and by appointment.

Coffee Hour follows Sunday Liturgy