

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

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

From a homily of Saint Gregory the Great

*died 604AD
feast day - March 12*

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And after the Lord Jesus had spoken to them he was taken up into heaven, and took his seat at the right hand of God. We know from the Old Testament that Elijah was taken up into heaven. But the aerial heaven is one thing, and the aetherial heaven another. The aerial heaven is near the earth and so we speak of the birds of heaven because we see them flying about in the air. Elijah was raised up to the aerial heaven, so that he could be led suddenly to a certain hidden region of the earth, where he could live in great tranquillity of body and spirit, until his return at the end of the world to pay the debt of death. He only postponed death, he did not avoid it. Our Redeemer, since he did not postpone his death, overcame it; by rising he destroyed it, and he declared the glory of his resurrection by his ascension. We note too that we read of Elijah's ascending in a chariot, so that it is made clear that he was only a human being and needed help from outside. We are shown that it was done with the help of angels, since one who has weighed down the weakness of his nature could not ascend to the aerial heaven by himself. But we don't read of our Redeemer that he was raised up by a chariot or by angels. He who made all things was borne about all things by his own power. For he was returning to his own place, going back to a place he had never left, since when he ascended into heaven through his human nature he bound together heaven and earth through his divine nature.

Just as Joseph, who was sold by his brothers, prefigured our Redeemer's betrayal for money, so Enoch who was transported, and Elijah, who was raised to the aerial heaven, symbolize the Lord's ascension. The Lord had forerunners and witnesses of his ascension, the one before the law, the other under the law, so that when he came, he was able truly to penetrate the heavens. The order of the raising up of these two is also distinguished by certain degrees. Enoch is remembered as having been transported and Elijah as having been carried

up to heaven; he who came after them was neither transported nor carried up to the aerial heaven, but he penetrated it by his own power.



On this festive day we must particularly consider this, dearly beloved, that our decree of condemnation has been cancelled today, our sentence to corruption has been changed. The nature which was told, *you are dust and into dust you shall go*, today went to heaven.

Of this festival the psalmist said: *Your splendor has been raised above the heavens*; and again: *God has ascended with a shout of joy, and the Lord with the sound of a trumpet*; and again: *Ascending on high he led captivity captive, he gave gifts to men*. Ascending on high, he led captivity captive since he swallowed up our perishable nature by the power of his imperishable one. He gave gifts to men, because after sending the Spirit from above he gave to one the utterance of wisdom, to another the utterance of knowledge, to another the gift of virtue, to another the gift of healing, to another various tongues, to another the interpretation of utterances. He gave gifts to men.

By coming for our redemption the Lord gave some leaps, if I may say so. Dearly beloved, do you want to recognize those leaps of his? From heaven to the womb, from the womb to the manger, from the manger to the cross, from the cross to the sepulchre; and from the sepulchre he returned into heaven. You see how Truth, having made himself known in the flesh, gave some leaps for us to make us run after him.

Dearly beloved, it is fitting that we should follow him in our hearts to where we believe he has ascended in his body. Let us flee earthly desires. Let nothing here below delight us who have a father in heaven... The disturbance of things may still be driving your hearts to and fro, but fix the anchor of your hope now in your eternal home. Establish your mind's attention in the true light. We have heard that the Lord has ascended into heaven. Let our belief be the subject of our meditation. If the weakness of our body still holds us here, let us follow him by the footsteps of our love. He who gave us our desire will not fail us, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

St. Gregory Nazianzen, the Theologian

Feast Day ~ May 9

In holy Scripture, we are told many times that we cannot sit back and relax; we should never let down our guard; we should ever be watchful and attentive if we wish to properly prepare for eternal life. We are reminded that the battle against sin is a never-ending one while we are still in this life: *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith.* [I Peter 5:8]. *Watch, therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.* [Matthew 24:42].

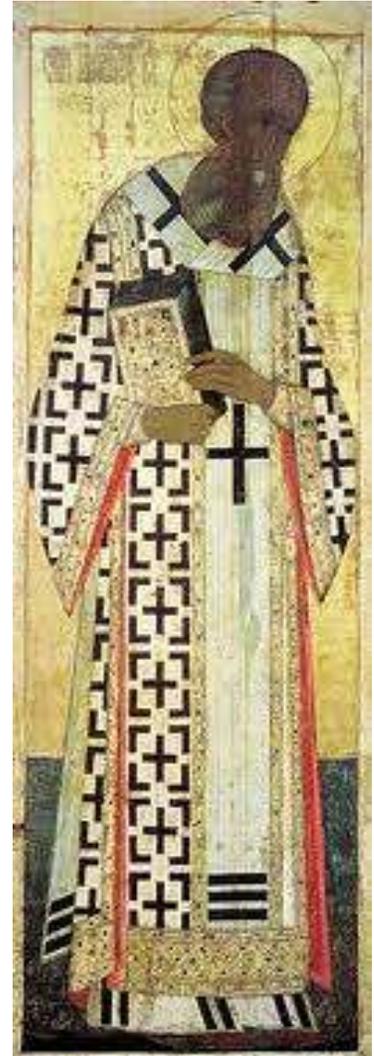
This battle and the necessary watchfulness are true not only for individual Christians but also for the Church. Even though Christ has assured us that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church which is founded upon the faith expressed by St. Peter (“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God”), those who are entrusted with the preservation of this faith must be careful to protect its purity from the errors of the world.

The fourth century was a time when it appeared that Christians could celebrate and be content. A Christian Emperor, St. Constantine, had come to the throne of the Roman Empire in 306. He had given Christianity legal protection in 313 and it soon became the preferred religion of the Empire. After intense persecution, it seemed as if Christians could now settle down to comfortable respectability.

But the roaring lion was waiting in the wings to threaten the peace of the Church. He burst forth in the form of heresies - Donatism, Appolinarianism, and above all, Arianism. These heresies were distortions of Christian beliefs which challenged the meaning of basic Christian teachings. Among the saints of the Church who came forward to lead the battle against these adversaries was St. Gregory of Nazianzus, called “the Theologian”.

Gregory was born in 329 in Cappadocia to a Christian mother (St. Nonna) and a father (also named Gregory) who was baptized after the birth of his children. While the young Gregory and his siblings were being brought up in the faith, their father also grew in Christian understanding and commitment and was eventually ordained to the priesthood and then consecrated bishop to oversee the church in Nazianzus.

As one who showed academic promise, Gregory went to Athens to complete his education, there meeting among his fellow



students, (St.) Basil and Julian, who would later become Emperor. Basil and Gregory became close friends and together came to the decision to devote their lives to Christ through monastic solitude, first at a monastery in Pontus.



Julian became Emperor in 361. He is known as the “Apostate” because he disavowed his Christian baptism and attempted to renew the old pagan religions in Rome. In contrast to this, Gregory and Basil promoted Orthodox Christianity in Cappadocia in a series of public debates with the followers of Arius. The convincing arguments of these two gifted orators helped to keep the local Christians from falling into error.

Julian the Apostate attempted to remove Christians and Christian literature from academic study, so Gregory and others used classical literary methods to introduce Christian themes in acceptable ways. The Arians were also composing hymns and poems to expound their heresy, so the writings of Gregory and others helped to combat those ideas. An example of this kind of writing is an autobiographical poem which Gregory wrote in a style similar to St. Augustine’s *Confessions* in which he laments some of the events of his life and his spiritual struggles. It is entitled “Concerning His Own Affairs” and ends with this prayer:

Thou art my strength, the Lord of all, the Unbegotten, the Beginning and the Father of the Beginning, who is the Immortal Son. Thou art the Great Light sprung from similar light, circling in a manner that is ineffable from One to One. O Son of God, Wisdom, King, Word, Truth, Image of the Archetype, Nature equal to the Begetter, Shepherd, Lamb, Victim, God, Man, High priest; and Spirit proceeding from the Father, light of my mind, who comest to the pure and makest God of man, look down in mercy. As the years run their course, grant that I may here and hereafter be mingled with the whole divinity. With hymns unending may I celebrate Thee in joy.

Gregory was called back to Nazianzus to assist his father with the care of the Christians in that city and was ordained to the priesthood by him. Gregory was so unhappy about what he considered to be a tyrannical act, against his will, on the part of his father that he fled back to the monastic peace of Pontus. When after some time, he realized that he must return and do his duty, Gregory wrote an oration on his return to Pontus as a way of explaining his actions, but also as an outline of the duties of the priesthood. This treatise has served for centuries as guidance for those who would be priests. When Basil became bishop of Caesarea Mazaca, he consecrated his friend Gregory as bishop of the small city of Zansima. However, Gregory remained in Nazianzus to continue helping his father, who died in 374.

Gregory received permission to return to the life of a hermit monk after his father's death, but his solitude did not last. Upon the death of the Arian emperor Valens, Gregory was called to assist in the revitalization of the church in Constantinople which had been besieged by Arians from within and pagans from without for many years. Since the Arians had taken over all the church buildings, Gregory began his work from a small house chapel. Here he preached a series of sermons on the Trinity, expounding Orthodox theology, and soon all the churches of Constantinople returned to the fold of Orthodoxy.

When the Second Ecumenical Council met in Constantinople in 381, Gregory was elected to be the Archbishop, replacing the heretical Macedonius, but the following year, he requested, once again, to return to the simple life of a monk. His request was granted and he returned to Nazianzus where he lived until he fell asleep in the Lord in 391.

St. Gregory left us many writings which proclaim theological truth, particularly regarding the Holy Trinity. Because of this, he has been given the name "Theologian" by the Church. He is venerated with Ss. Basil and John Chrysostom as one of the "Three Holy Hierarchs" and with Ss. Basil and Gregory of Nyssa as one of the "Cappadocian Fathers".

The twenty-first century is not unlike the fourth century. Christian truth is challenged by heresies and innovations and by the constant resurgence of paganism. We must be vigilant and watchful in order to preserve the purity of the faith. We give thanks to Almighty God for his saints who show us the way to Truth, particularly for St. Gregory the Theologian, and ask that he intercede for us.



After the Resurrection

An excerpt from a homily of St. Bede the Venerable

By the frequent occurrence of his bodily manifestations our Lord wished to show that he is present by his divinity in every place to the desires of those who are good. He appeared at the tomb to those who were grieving; he will also be present to us when we are salutarily saddened at recalling his absence. He came to meet those who were returning from the tomb so that, having learned of the joy of his resurrection, they might proclaim it; he will also be present to us when we rejoice in faithfully announcing the good things that we know to our neighbors. He appeared in the breaking of bread to those who, supposing that he was a stranger, invited him to share

their table; he will also be present to us when we willingly bestow whatever goods we can on strangers and poor people; and he will be present to us in the breaking of bread, when we partake with a chaste and simple conscience of the sacrament of his body, namely, the living bread.



He appeared in secret to those who were speaking of his resurrection; he is also present to us now, whenever we do this same thing by his gift; he will always be present to us when, free for a time from outside works, we come together in order to speak of his grace. He appeared when they were staying inside, with the doors closed out of fear of the Jews; he appeared when this same fear abated and they sought him with steps unconcealed on the top of the mountain. Formerly he was present in order to comfort his Church with his Spirit when it was oppressed by unbelievers, and was being prevented from coming out in public and being spread abroad; he is present to this same Church even now when royal personages in political power are well-disposed toward the faith, the terror of persecution had died away, and the whole superior portion of the world is predisposed to following in the apostles' footsteps.

He appeared to those who were fishing, and by appearing to them aided them by his divine goodness; he will also be present to us when we are taking care of the necessities of our lives here on earth with an upright intention, and he adds his benevolent help to our righteous labors. He appeared to those who were reclining at table; he will also be present to us when, in accordance with the Apostle's suggestions, whether we eat or drink, or whatever else we do, we do all for the glory of God.

Parish News

Thanks to all who helped make our Holy Week and Easter celebrations so beautiful: to those who served at the altar and prepared bread and vestments for the services; to those who sang, who prayed, and to those who brought food to share. Christ is Risen! Indeed he is risen!

During this month of continuing Paschal celebration, we will observe the anniversary of the dedication of our church at the Liturgy on May 6. On May 20, the Sunday before the Rogation days, we will (weather permitting) process outside to bless the parish gardens at the end of Mass. On Wednesday, May 23, we will celebrate our Lord's Ascension on the Eve with Vespers at 7PM, Mass at 7:30 and a pot-luck supper following.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>May 2012</h1>						
<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</i>		1 Ss. Philip & James, Apostles, 1 st c.	2 St. Athanasius, BCD, 373	3 Finding of the Holy Cross; Ss. Alexander, Eventius, Theodulus, Mm, c. 115 & Juvenalis, BC, 4 th c	4 St. Monica, Ma, 387	5 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
6 Dedication of St. Gregory's; Third Sunday after Easter; St. John before the Latin Gate, 95 <i>W</i>	7 of the Octave of Dedication; St. Alexis Toth, PrC, 1909; St. John of Beverly, BC, 721	8 Apparition of St. Michael of the Archangel; of the Octave of the Dedication	9 of the Octave of Dedication; St. Gregory Nazianzen, BCD, 389	10 of the Octave of Dedication; Ss. Gordian, 362 & Epimachus, 250, Mm	11 of the Octave of Dedication	12 of the Octave of Dedication; St. Epiphanius, BC, c. 403; SS. Nereus & Achilles, MM, c. 2 nd c. <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
13 Fourth Sunday after Easter; Octave Day of the Dedication <i>W</i>	14 St. Boniface of Tarsus, M, 290	15 St. Pachomius, Ab, 346	16 St. Brendan the Navigator, 577, Ab	17	18 St. Venantius, M, 250; St. Theodotus & comp., Mm, c. 303	19 St. Pudenciana, V, c. 160; St. Dunstan of Canterbury, BC, 988 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
20 Fifth Sunday after Easter <i>W</i>	21 Rogation Monday	22 Rogation Tuesday	23 Vigil of the Ascension <i>Mass at 7:30pm</i> <i>W</i>	24 Ascension Day; St. Vincent of Lerins, C, 450	25 of the Octave of Ascension; St. Urban, PM, 230; St. Aldhelm, BC, 709	26 St. Urban, PM, 230; St. Aldhelm, BC, 709; of the Octave of Ascension <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
27 Sunday after the Ascension; St. Bede, CD, 735; St. John I, PM, 526 <i>W</i>	28 of the Octave of Ascension; St. Germanus of Paris, BC, 576 <i>(Memorial Day)</i>	29 of the Octave of Ascension	30 of the Octave of Ascension; St. Felix I, PM, 274	31 Octave Day of the Ascension; St. Petronilla, VM, c. 100		

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

Coffee Hour follows Sunday Liturgy.