

✠ 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 John of Damascus

*died AD 760AD
feast day - March 27*

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No human being can worthily praise the holy passing of the Mother of God - not if he had ten thousand tongues and as many mouths! Even if all the tongues of the world's scattered inhabitants came together, they could not approach a praise that was fitting. It simply lies beyond the realm of oratory. But since God loves what we offer, out of longing and eagerness and good intentions, as best we know how, and since what pleases her Son is also dear and delightful to God's mother, come, let us again grope for words of praise...

Let the heavens rejoice now, and the angels applaud; let the earth be glad now [Ps. 96:911; 97:1], and all men and women leap for joy! Let the air ring out now with happy song, and let the black night lay aside its gloomy, unbecoming cloak of darkness, to imitate the bright radiance of day in sparkles of flame. For the living city of the Lord God of hosts is lifted up, and kings bring a priceless gift from the temple of the Lord, the wonder of Sion to the Jerusalem on high who is free and is their mother [Gal. 4:26]; those who were appointed by Christ as rulers of all the earth - the Apostles - escort to heaven the ever-virgin Mother of God!

The Apostles were scattered everywhere on this earth, fishing for men and women with the varied and sonorous tongues of the Spirit, seeking to capture people in the net of their preaching and to save them from the pit of error by bringing them in to the spiritual, heavenly table at that mystic feast, that sacred banquet, that spiritual wedding of the heavenly Bridegroom - the banquet which the Father has spread, most royally and splendidly, for the Son who is his equal in power and who shares his nature. But by a command, a cloud swept the Apostles to Jerusalem from the ends of the earth as if it were itself a net, gathering eagles and drawing them in... the eye-witnesses, then, the servants of the Word, were there, ministering also to his Mother as they were bound

to do and hoping to claim from her a blessing, as something valuable beyond price...



It was fitting that she, who preserved her virginity undamaged by childbirth, should have her body preserved from corruption even in death. It was fitting that she, who held the creator in her lap as a baby, should rest in the tabernacle of God. It was fitting that the bride, whom the Father took for his own, should dwell in the bridal-chamber of heaven. It was fitting that she, who gazed at her own son on the cross, and who received in her heart the sword of pain that she escaped at childbirth, should look on him enthroned with this Father. It was fitting that the Mother of God should receive the blessing of her son, and be revered by all creation as Mother and servant of God...

We, for whom God is the object of worship - God, who has not come from non-existence into being, but who always and from all eternity is, beyond cause and explanation, beyond any notion of time or nature - we honor and venerate the Mother of God! We do not mean to suggest that the timeless birth of his divinity was from her - for the begetting of God's Word lies outside time, of equal eternity with the Father - but we confess his second birth, a freely-chosen birth in the flesh, and we know and proclaim the cause of this birth. For he who without beginning exists without a body became flesh "for us and for our salvation" that like might be wholly saved by its like; and taking flesh from her, the holy virgin, without the union of human parenting, he was born, while remaining wholly God. Becoming wholly human, he is himself the whole God with his flesh, and a whole human being with his supremely transcendent divinity. So we, who recognize this virgin as Mother of God, now celebrate the feast of her dormition. We do not call her a goddess - we will have none of such pedantic classical fabling - for we proclaim her death. But we recognize her as Mother of the God who became flesh.

Let us praise her, then, today with sacred songs, we who are privileged to be called and to be the people of Christ. Let us delight in her holiness of soul and body; after all, she is truly, after God, the holiest of all beings, for like always delights in like! Through her, our age-old war against our creator has come to an end. Through her, our reconciliation with him has been forged, peace and grace have been bestowed on us, human beings join with the chorus of angels, and we who were once without honor have now been made children of God. From her, we have plucked the grape of life; from her we have harvested the flower of incorruptibility. She has become the mediator of all good things for us. In her, God has become human and the human being God!

St. Joseph of Damascus Feast Day ~ July 10

Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I shall keep it unto the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall keep it with my whole heart. [Ps. 119:33, 34]

The thirst for knowledge is often very great, and when that thirst is directed toward the Holy Scriptures, the writings of the Fathers of the Church, and the liturgical documents of the Church, it can only be satisfied when accompanied by living in accordance with what is read in those pages. One of the saints of the Church who shows us this is St. Joseph of Damascus, whose feast we celebrate on July 10.

Born in 1793 into a poor merchant family, Joseph longed to learn and took every opportunity to further his knowledge. He received some education, in Arabic and Greek, as a young boy, but the tuition for classes was too great for his family to manage, having used their resources to educate an older son, Moses. So Joseph had to work in the family business, weaving silk fabric; at night, he read as much as he could.

Tragedy struck the family when Moses died at the young age of 25 and the parents blamed his untimely death on the extreme exertion he spent on his studies. Thereafter, they were not inclined to encourage their younger son in his desire to learn. But nothing could stop Joseph; he began to read the collection of books which his brother had accumulated, but with little understanding. For a while he managed the tuition cost to study with a Muslim scholar, Mouhamad Al-Attar, and from him gained some greater knowledge of Arabic, logic, and debate. But poverty forced Joseph back into the pattern of working during the day and studying at night.

Joseph's primary textbook was the Bible, as he compared the Greek Septuagint with Arabic translations. He had the opportunity to study church history and then began teaching others, continuing to increase his own knowledge even to learning Hebrew from a Jewish student. Always, Joseph's manner of life reflected what he had learned from his studies of the Scriptures.

Joseph's parents became alarmed at the intensity of their son's pursuit of knowledge, fearing that they would lose him as they had his brother. In an attempt to steer Joseph into a more "normal" life, they arranged a marriage for him (at the age of 19) with Mariam Al-Kourshi, a young Christian woman of the city. The story is told that even on his wedding night, Joseph stayed up late reading!



As the couple began to raise a family, were active in church affairs in Damascus, and Joseph continued to teach and study, the Patriarch saw in him great potential as a leader for the Church. He ordained Joseph to the diaconate and then the priesthood when he was 24 years of age. Joseph was soon elevated to the honor of archpriest and was given the privilege of preaching frequently at the Cathedral. Fr. Joseph became well-known as a persuasive and eloquent preacher.



There was a school attached to the cathedral in Damascus and in 1836, Fr. Joseph took charge of its administration. He managed to obtain good teachers who were paid good salaries and the school began to attract bright students from throughout Syria and Lebanon. Fr. Joseph established a department of Orthodox theological studies which he hoped would match the level of that in Orthodox seminaries in other parts of the world in preparing men for the priesthood. Students from this school became patriarchs, bishops and priests for the Church in Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, the U.S. and Brazil and the school nurtured at least one saint of the Church, St. Raphael Hawaweeny (of Brooklyn).

The archpriest Joseph was also known for his pastoral care. In the epidemic of yellow fever which struck Damascus in 1848, Fr. Joseph did not fear to minister to the sick, bury the dead, and comfort the living even though one of his own sons died of this horrible disease.

In May of 1860, a rebellion in Lebanon began which rapidly spread throughout the entire region. Members of the Druze sect, an offshoot of Islam, began to revolt against the government and made Christians the main target of their violence. Soon, Muslims in Syria joined in this “revolution” and killed Christians and destroyed Christian property. On July 9 and 10, Damascus was the scene of terrible violence. It is said that as many as 11,000 Christians were martyred in this city alone. Many Christians fled to the cathedral for safety where Fr. Joseph prayed with them. When the cathedral was attacked, he and others ran out into the streets to try to escape, but one of the Muslim religious scholars recognized Fr. Joseph and cried out to the attackers to kill him. As was his custom, Fr. Joseph was carrying on his person the Blessed Sacrament which he usually took to the sick. As he was being hacked with hatchets, he partook of the Body and Blood of Christ and gave up his spirit to God.

The memory of this good man, whose zeal for learning the ways of God had touched so many people, remained as a sign of hope for the Christians who survived this massacre. In 1993, the Church glorified St. Joseph and now we venerate him as one who can help to show us the way. *Holy Joseph of Damascus, pray for us.*

Aid for the Patriarchate

The land which gave us St. John of Damascus and St. Joseph of Damascus and many other saints is perhaps the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world. From Egyptian hieroglyphic tablets of the 15th century BC, to the pages of the Old Testament, and the miraculous story of St. Paul's conversion in the New Testament, there is evidence of an ancient and venerable civilization. Damascus has been the see city for our Patriarchate of Antioch since the 14th century.

Greater Syria (which includes the modern countries of Jordan and Lebanon) has been invaded and conquered by Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Turks, Crusaders, and governed by England and France. Although the people of this land are noted for their hospitality, the area has seen much violence and bloodshed through the centuries. Today's situation is the latest in a long history of rebellion and political and religious tensions.

The Orthodox Church has been active in helping to alleviate the sufferings of the people during this difficult time. Working with IOCC and other non-governmental aid agencies as well as with the Red Crescent, the Church is providing food; medical and hygiene kits; bedding for displaced people; recreational, psychological and educational help for displaced children, among many other forms of assistance. Patriarch IGNATIUS IV has asked for our help in this time of need and for our prayers for the people of this ancient land.



Patriarchate IGNATIUS IV

Parish News

Summer is a time for conferences. The annual Parish Life Conference for the Dioceses of New York and Washington and Charleston will be held in New Brunswick, New Jersey July 4-8. Western Rite Vespers will be offered on Thursday evening of the conference. Fr. Nicholas will also attend the Clergy Symposium at Antiochian Village July 16 - 20 and the Western Rite Conference in Shawnee, Oklahoma from August 7-10.

We will celebrate two important feast days during August: The Feast of the Transfiguration on Monday, August 6, with Vespers at 7PM, Mass at 7:30 and pot-luck supper following. The Eve of the Dormition (Assumption) of the Theotokos will be celebrated on Tuesday, August 14. Saturday Vespers will be discontinued during the month of August and will resume on Saturday, September 1, at 6PM.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>July 2012</h1>					<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</i>	<i>Parish Life conference in Bergenfield, NJ: July 4th - July 9th</i>
1 Fourth Sunday after Pentecost; Oct. Day of St. John Baptist; of the Oct. of Ss. Peter & Paul <i>G</i>	2 Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary; St. John Maximovitch BC, 1966	3 of the Octave of Ss. Peter & Paul; St. Leo II, PC, 683	4 of the Octave of Ss. Peter & Paul (Independence Day)	5 of the Octave of Ss. Peter & Paul	6 Octave Day of Ss. Peter & Paul	7 Ss. Cyril & Methodius, Bb CC, 9th c.; St. Palladius, BC, c. 450 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
8 Fifth Sunday after Pentecost; St. Kilian of Wurzburg, BM, 689 <i>G</i>	9	10 Seven Holy Brothers, Mm, c. 165; St. Joseph of Damascus, 1860	11 Solemnity of St. Benedict, Ab, c. 540; St. Pius I, PM, c. 154	12 Ss. Nabor & Felix, Mm, 303	13 St. Anacleto s, PM, 1st c.	14 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
15 Sixth Sunday after Pentecost; St. Vladimir of Kiev, KC, 1015; St. Henry, C, 1024 <i>G</i>	16 Our Lady of Einsiedeln	17 St. Alexis, C, 5th c.	18 St. Sergius, Ab, 1392; Ss. Symphorosa & her Seven Sons, Mm, c. 138	19 St. Seraphim of Sarov, PrC, 1833	20 St. Elias the Prophet, 9 th c. BC; St. Margaret of Antioch, VM, 304	21 St. Praxedes of Rome, V, 2 nd c. <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
22 Seventh Sunday after Pentecost; St. Mary Magdalene, Penitent Ma, 1st c. <i>G</i>	23 St. John Cassian, Ab, 433; St. Appollinaris, BM, 1st c.; St. Liborius, BC, 397	24 St. Christina VM; St. Romanus & David, Mm, 1015	25 St. James the Greater, Apostle, 44; St. Christopher, C, 251	26 Ss. Joachim & Anne, Parents of the BVM, 1st c.; St. Jacob Netsvetov, PrC, 1864	27 St. Pan-teleimon, c. 305	28 Ss. Nazarius, Celsus Mm, St. Victor, PM & Innocent PC, 5 th c.; St. Samson of Dol, BC, c. 565 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
29 Eighth Sunday after Pentecost St. Martha of Bethany, V, 1st c. <i>G</i>	30 Ss. Abdon & Sennen, Mm, c. 303	31 St. Germanus of Auxerre, BC, 448				

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

Coffee Hour follows Sunday Mass.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>August 2012</h1>						
<p><i>Sunday Services:</i> <i>Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</i></p>			<p>1 St. Peter's Chains; Holy Maccabees, Mm, c. 160 BC; St. Ethelwold, BC, 984</p>	<p>2 St. Stephen I, PM, 257</p>	<p>3 Finding of St. Stephen the Proto-martyr, 415; St. Nicodemus, M, 1st. c.</p>	<p>4</p> <p><i>No Vespers today</i></p>
<p>5 Ninth Sunday after Pentecost; Our Lady of the Snows (435); St. Oswald, KM, 642</p> <p style="text-align: right;">G</p>	<p>6 Transfiguration of Our Lord; Ss. Sixtus II PM, Felicissimus, 285</p> <p><i>Mass at 7:30pm</i> W</p>	<p>7 St. Donatus of Arezzo, BM, 362</p> <p><i>Western Rite Conference (through August 10)</i></p>	<p>8 Ss. Cyriacus, Largus & Smaragdus, Mm, 304</p>	<p>9 Vigil of St. Laurence; St. Romanus, M, 258</p>	<p>10 St. Laurence Deacon M, 258</p>	<p>11 Ss. Tiburtius & Susanna, Mm, 3rd c.; St. Philomena, VM, c. 304</p> <p><i>No Vespers today</i></p>
<p>12 Tenth Sunday after Pentecost</p> <p style="text-align: right;">G</p>	<p>13 St. Maximus the Confessor, CD, 662; Ss. Hippolytus & comp., Mm, 235</p>	<p>14 St. Eusebius, PrC, c. 300</p> <p><i>Mass at 7:30pm</i> W</p>	<p>15 Assumption (Dormition) of the Blessed Virgin Mary</p>	<p>16 of the Octave of the Assumption</p>	<p>17 of the Octave of the Assumption; Octave Day of St. Laurence</p>	<p>18 St. Helena, 330; of the Octave of the Assumption; St. Agapitus, M, 272</p> <p><i>No Vespers today</i></p>
<p>19 Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost of the Oct. of the Assumption; St. Constantine, C, 337</p> <p style="text-align: right;">G</p>	<p>20 of the Octave of the Assumption</p>	<p>21 of the Octave of the Assumption</p>	<p>22 Octave Day Assumption; Ss. Timothy, M, Hippolytus, BM& Symphorian, M, 3rd c.</p>	<p>23 Vigil of St. Bartholomew</p>	<p>24 St. Bartholomew, Apostle, 1st c.</p>	<p>25 St. Hilda, V, 680</p> <p><i>No Vespers today</i></p>
<p>26 Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost; St. Zephyrinus, PM, 219</p> <p style="text-align: right;">G</p>	<p>27 St. Caesarius of Arles, BC, 542</p>	<p>28 St. Augustine of Hippo, BCD, 430; St. Moses the Black, C, 405</p>	<p>29 Beheading of St. John the Baptist; St. Sabina, M, c. 125</p>	<p>30 Ss. Felix & Adauctus, Mm, 304; St. Fiacre the Hermit, C, 670</p>	<p>31 St. Aidan of Lindisfarne, BC, 651</p>	

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