

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

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

From the Writings of Saint Nectarios

*died 1920AD
feast day - November 9*

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I am the way, the truth, and the life. - John 14:6

What joyful words! What authority is contained within them! How wonderful and laudable a message! What desirable good tidings for men!

These words are replete with life and fully satisfy the desires of the human heart. What a delightful sound! What gleeful news! Truly, how beautiful are the lips that preach the Gospel of peace, that bring glad tidings of good things! [cf. Rom. 10:15]. How cheerful are the words of Him who announces to mankind the arrival of the expectation of the nations! What expressive words! How lofty and divine! *I am the way, the truth, and the life.* These words contain an entire treasure, a treasure that enriches all of humanity. These words contain the summation of all humanity's desires for all times.

Their beauty is heavenly, while the joy they contain is ineffable. Their resonance charms the ears of the listeners as a heavenly melody. As a ray of sunlight, they disperse the dark clouds of ignorance, they enlighten humanity (which sat in "darkness and...the shadow of death" [Mt. 4:16]), they awaken it from the sleep of indolence, and they lead it through the contest of life. They radiate the noetic eyes of the soul and render them powerful; they enable them to gaze upon the light of truth and to come to know the incarnate God, the expectation of the nations, the Son of Man: Him Who confesses that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

So the, the eternal desires of the human race have been fulfilled, the salvific grace has appeared, the light has dawned, the mind has been illumined, darkness has been driven away, the shadow has come to pass, and he who was sleeping has awoken. Man is now able to walk the straight path leading to salvation. He who was ignorant of the truth is now



capable of knowing its ineffable beauty and casting away the burden of ignorance that had weighed upon his chest for entire centuries and disturbed his thoughts. Ignorance of the truth was darkness and the shadow of death. Ignorance had diverted humanity from the road of truth, and, consequently, it became surrounded by gloom and darkness. This is why the prophet likens the revealed truth to a great light: *the people who sat in darkness saw a great Light* [Mt. 4:16, Isa. 9:2]. Truly, a great light appeared. As the light of righteousness, it enlightened humanity, which beheld the expectation of the nations, the Savior of the world, the awaited Son of Man: the Way, the Truth and the Life.

People sought the Way, the Truth, and the Life. God fulfilled this burning desire of humanity by sending His only-begotten Son - Whom He announced to humanity when the first-created people fell. Man sought the road of truth leading to eternal life because he realized that he had strayed away from it. He sought the truth because falsehood had inundated the earth. He sought life because spiritual death had prevailed.

Humanity yearned for the advent of the announced Savior, Teacher, and Redeemer. The prophets and god-inspired men had pre-announced and presaged his coming, and they consoled humanity by exhorting it to expect the forthcoming Teacher Who would teach the entire truth. The Savior's statement: *I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life* is a declaration of His arrival. It was a response to humanity who was awaiting Him. It testifies to the completion and fulfillment of the prophets' predictions. It was an appearance to them who sought his arrival. It fulfilled the desires and quenched the thirst of thirsting humanity. It alleviated the burdened souls, and it enlightened them in darkness. It was the hope of them in despair, the joy of the bereaved, the jubilation of the world, and the delight of the nations. It was the beloved sound that humanity had awaited for many centuries. It was the voice of the anticipated Redeemer. It was the voice of the expectation of the nations, the voice of the Son of Man.

St. John of Kronstadt *Feast Day ~ December 21*

Those of us who live and work in the Washington DC area know what it is to have busy schedules - to work 10 and 12 hour days and commute 2 and 3 hours, to work week-ends and holidays and give up any hope of seeing family or enjoying "free" time! What if this kind of "busyness" were devoted to the salvation of man - to

fervent prayer, to confession, to the life-giving sacraments of the Church? We have an example of this in one of the saints, and the results of his busy life have been far greater than that which comes from political “workaholics” here.

Fr. John Sergiev was the vehicle for a religious revival among the Russians living in Kronstadt and St. Petersburg in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He worked from the early hours of the morning until late at night and was met by throngs of people seeking his blessing and pastoral advice wherever he went. By the end of his life, he had given up all personal time and was already considered a saint by those who knew him.

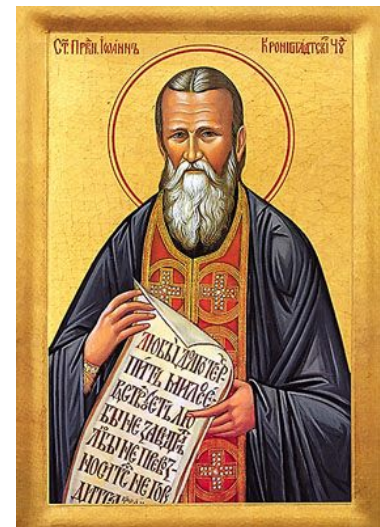
The son of extremely poor but devout parents, John followed their example of piety as a young child. But he was a slow student and had difficulty learning to read. When he pleaded with God in prayer to help with this problem, he suddenly felt as if darkness had fallen away and he could perceive the light. After this, he could easily comprehend what he read and his studies improved greatly.

As a student in the Petersburg Religious Academy, John had hopes of becoming a missionary to China or to the native Americans. But he soon realized that he was surrounded by people in his own country who were ignorant of the faith and in need of spiritual renewal. Graduating in 1855, he was soon ordained to the priesthood. In a recurring childhood dream, he had seen himself serving in a large cathedral, and when he entered St. Andrew’s Cathedral in Kronstadt, where he had been assigned, he was amazed to see that it was the church in his dreams.

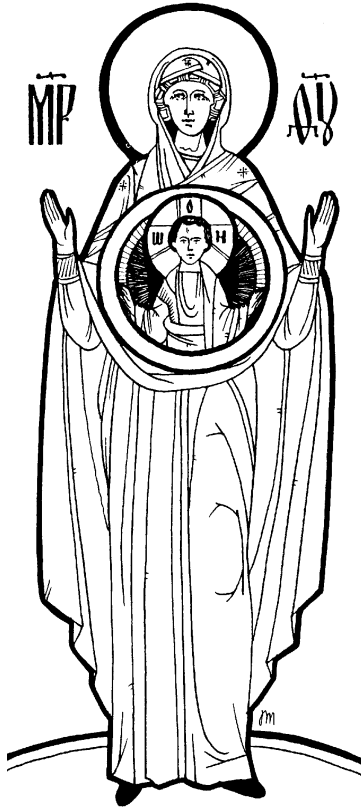
Kronstadt was not a prestigious assignment. The city was located on an island in the Gulf of Finland. There was a naval base here and the city was also home to beggars and criminals who had been banished by the authorities from St. Petersburg. But it was to all these people that God had called the priest John and he began his ministry among them with joy and enthusiasm.

Fr. John was always concerned about the welfare of the poor. He visited them in their filthy huts and tried to alleviate their suffering - spiritually through prayer and materially, by often giving them his own clothing, food and money. Eventually he was able to help with the sources of poverty by founding the Home for Constructive Labour, where training was given in several skills, free dinners were offered, a library was formed, and some medical care was provided.

However helpful this endeavor was to the poor people of Kronstadt, Fr. John did not limit his ministry to social welfare.



He knew that the people needed to turn to God, so he showed them the love of God through his love for them. He listened to their troubles, comforted them in their sorrows and urged them to avail themselves of the Sacraments.



Contrary to the custom in the Orthodox Church at this time (and in most churches throughout the world), which was that people only received Communion once or twice a year, Fr. John instituted daily Divine Liturgies in the cathedral and encouraged people to receive the Body and Blood of Christ frequently. This required frequent confession and the overwhelming response which the people gave meant that the priest was unable to manage the hours which this would have taken. So he had to institute a form of general confession in which he led the people through the preparatory prayers collectively and they all spoke their confessions at once and received a group absolution. This was a controversial innovation, but it was the only way that Fr. John could offer the healing balm of confession and Communion to his people.

Miracles - primarily of healing - were attributed to Fr. John. There were many cases of extreme illness which came to a happy end through his fervent prayers. He maintained an extremely ascetic life of fasting and continual prayer and this resulted in an intensity of prayer for healing that had a miraculous effect.

As his fame grew and requests for his help spread from the city of Kronstadt to St. Petersburg and further, Fr. John's time became even more restricted. Eventually, his schedule was such that he rose at 3:00 am to begin his preparatory prayers, then met and talked with the numerous people who were lined up at the door of the cathedral when he arrived. Then he began Matins and Divine Liturgy (preceded by the group confessions). Services took many hours because of the number of communicants and because notes, letters and telegrams were brought to the priest with requests for prayer which were met during the Liturgy. Afternoons and evenings were spent traveling to those who were sick or otherwise in need and his day ended around midnight when he could finally get a few hours' rest before rising again at 3:00 am!

It is hard to imagine this kind of life but even harder to imagine it as a married man! Another somewhat controversial aspect of Fr. John's life was that he convinced his wife Elizabeth that they should live virginally as brother and sister (like some of the early saints of the church). She did not agree at first and complained to church authorities, but eventually gave way, and her acquiescence allowed Fr. John to lead a life of complete devotion to his ministry among the people. But the presence of a wife was a sort of protection for this generous priest. All of his salary and all the many donations which came his way were immediately given away to the poor.

When it became apparent that money was needed for his own and Elizabeth's food and clothing, the church authorities began sending his salary to her to manage!

All during this exhausting amount of work, Fr. John kept a spiritual diary. Excerpts from these reflections have been published as *My Life in Christ*, giving others the benefit of this holy saint's aid long after his death. Fr. John fell asleep in the Lord on December 20, 1908 and his body was buried at the St. John of Rita Women's Monastery which he had founded in St. Petersburg. All through the Communist era, when the monastery was closed, flowers were placed by the faithful as near this place as possible. St. John of Kronstadt was formally glorified by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad in 1964, which was recognized by the Patriarchate of Moscow in 1988.

In St. John's own words: *The best moments on earth are those during which we meditate upon heavenly things in general, when we recognize or defend the truth, that heavenly dweller and denizen. Only then do we truly live. Therefore, the essential interests of the soul require that we should oftener rise above the earth, upwards to heaven, where is our true life, our true country, which shall have no end.* Holy John of Kronstadt, pray for us.

Parish News

We end the calendar year and begin the Western Rite liturgical year preparing for the festival in which we celebrate the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ. On Saturday, December 8, we will observe the feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary with Matins at 9:30AM, Mass at 10:00 and a pot-luck brunch following. In place of Vespers on Saturday, December 15, we will prepare for Christmas with our annual service of Advent Lessons and Carols. This quiet service of Scripture readings and hymns offers a respite from the frenzy of the world's activities at this time of year.

On Christmas Eve, confessions will be heard by Fr. Nicholas and Fr. Raphael beginning at 8:30PM. A time for carols and other musical offerings will begin at 9:30 and the first Mass of Christmas will be celebrated at 10:00. *Christ is born! Glorify Him!*

We bid farewell to Brian David Green this month, as he leaves for Marine Corps basic training. We will miss him at St. Gregory's (particularly in the choir) and we will continue to pray for him as he serves our country.



We are taking the concept of recycling to greater lengths at St. Gregory's. In addition to recycling the usual plastic, glass and metal, and paper, we are also recycling the stubs of altar candles. We have acquired the equipment (and skills) to make new candles from these stubs. The pillar candles at the lectern, the pulpit and the icon stand at the entrance have been made from these remnants, and the candles in the Advent wreath were made from the old used Advent candles.

On the Glorious Child

by St. Nikolai of Ochrid

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulders, and His name shall be called: angel of mighty counsel, wonderful counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace.” [Isaiah 9:6]



Is there a mortal man in the whole of human history to whom it is possible to apply all these titles, this power and this glory? There is no one. Therefore St. John Chrysostom says: “This cannot be held to apply to any other than Christ”. The prophet here clearly expresses the two natures of the Savior of the world: the human and the divine. “A Child is born” - this speaks to human nature. “A Son is given” - this united the two natures in the one Person; the Son of God who is Son of the Virgin in the Person of the incarnate Lord. The other titles refer to the divine nature of the Lord Jesus. “His government is upon His shoulders”: that is, the government is His, His own, and is not delegated to others. “Mighty counsel” - the Holy Trinity, what else? The angel, or messenger or herald, of this triune counsel is the Son of God, the pre-eternal Word. “Wonderful counselor” - for all that is wonderful, all that is new, comes to the human race from him and through Him. “The mighty God” - what would Arius say to that, and his modern followers, who deny the divinity of the Lord Jesus? “The Prince of peace” - for He is an enduring peace; outside Him is war without and within. “The everlasting Father” - He is the Lord of the future as He is of the past; and He is, further, the Father of the Church, the Creator of the new world, the Founder of the Kingdom of God. This wonderful and true vision was seen by Isaiah the son of Amoz himself, seven hundred years before it was revealed to the whole cosmos.

O Lord Jesus, Thou art to Thy prophets the most glorious prophecy, and the most glorious revelation to the faithful. Open our minds, that the wonderful glory of Thy majesty may enter into them, and open our hearts, that they may be filled with Thy life-giving love. To thee be glory and praise for ever. Amen.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>December 2012</h1>					<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</i>	1 St. Eligius of Tournai, BC, 660 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
2 First Sunday of Advent; St. Peter Chrysologus, BCD, c. 450 <i>V</i>	3 St. Bibiana of Rome, VM, 363	4 St. Barbara, VM, c. 306; St. Clement of Alexandria, CD, c. 210	5 St. Sabbas of Palestine, Ab, 532	6 St. Nicholas of Myra, BC, c. 342	7 St. Ambrose of Milan, BCD, 397	8 Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary <i>Mass at 10am W</i> <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
9 Second Sunday of Advent; of the Octave of the Conception <i>V</i>	10 of the Octave of the Conception; St. Melchiades, PM, 314	11 St. Damasus, PC, 384; of the Octave of the Conception	12 of the Octave of the Conception; St. Spiridon, BC, 348	13 St. Lucy, VM, 304; St. Herman of Alaska, C, 1837; of the Octave of the Conception	14 of the Octave of the Conception	15 Octave Day of the Conception; St. Maurus, Ab, 6th c. <i>Lessons & Carols at 6pm</i>
16 Third Sunday of Advent; St. Eusebius of Vercelli, BM, 371 <i>O Sapientia</i> <i>V</i>	17 St. Lazarus of Bethany, BC, 1st c. <i>O Adonny</i>	18 <i>O Radix Jesse</i>	19 Ember Wednesday <i>O Clavis David</i>	20 St. John of Kronstadt, C, 1908 <i>O Oriens</i>	21 St. Thomas, Apostle, 1st c.; Ember Friday <i>O Rex gentium</i>	22 Ember Saturday <i>Vespers at 6pm</i> <i>O Emmanuel</i>
23 Fourth Sunday of Advent <i>O Virgo virginum</i> <i>V</i>	24 Vigil of the Nativity <i>Mass at 10pm W</i>	25 The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ; St. Anastasia, VM., c. 304	26 St. Stephen, Proto-martyr, 1st c.; of the Octave of the Nativity	27 St. John, Apostle & Evangelist, 1st c.; of the Octave of the Nativity	28 Holy Innocents Mm, 1st c.; of the Octave of the Nativity	29 of the Octave of the Nativity <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
30 Sunday within the Octave of the Nativity <i>W</i>	31 St. Sylvester, PC, 335; of the Octave of the Nativity	1 The Circumcision of Our Lord and Octave of the Nativity; the Sunday after Christmas <i>Mass at 10am W</i>	2 Octave Day of St. Stephen; St. Fulgentius, BC, 533	3 Octave Day of St. John, Ap. Ev.; St. Genevieve, V, 512	4 Octave Day of the Holy Innocents, Mm; St. Titus, BC, c. 96	5 Vigil of the Epiphany; St. Telesphorus, PM, 136 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>

Confessions are heard after Vespers and by appointment. Coffee Hour and Sunday School follow the Liturgy.