

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

April, 2013 - Volume XVIII, Issue 4

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

From a homily of St. Leo the Great

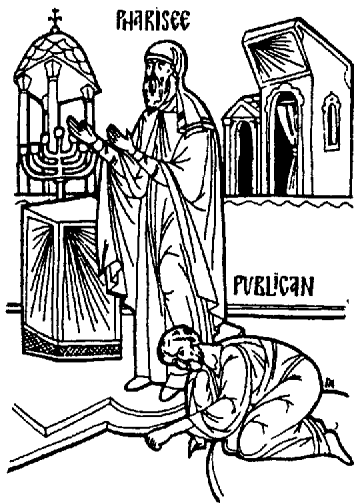
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Feast Day ~ April 10*

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Apostolic teaching, Beloved, exhorts us that we put off the old man with his deeds [Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9], and renew ourselves from day to day by a holy manner of life. For if we are the temple of God, and if the Holy Spirit is a Dweller in our souls, as the Apostle says; Ye are the temple of the living God [II Cor. 6:16]; we must then strive with all vigilance that the dwelling of our heart be not unworthy of so great a Guest. and just as in houses made with hands, we see to it with praise-worthy diligence that whatever may be damaged, either through the rain coming in, or by the wind in storms, or by age itself, is promptly and carefully repaired, so must we with unceasing concern take care that nothing disordered be found in our souls, that nothing unclean be found there. For though this dwelling of ours does not endure without the support of its Maker, nor would the structure be safe without the watchful care of the builder, nevertheless, since we are rational stones, and living material, the Hand of our maker has so fashioned us, that even he who is being repaired may cooperate with His Maker...

When, Dearly Beloved, should we more fittingly have recourse to the divine remedies than when, by the very law of time, we are once again reminded of the mysteries of our redemption? And that we may the more worthily commemorate them, let us earnestly prepare ourselves by this forty days of abstinence. And not alone do they, necessarily and profitably, take to themselves this safeguard of charity who are by the regeneration of baptism to enter into newness of life by means of the mystery of Christ's death and Resurrection, but also all who are reborn: the first that they may receive what they do not yet possess, the latter, to protect what they received. For as the Apostle says: he that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall [I Cor. 10:11]; no one is sustained by such strength of mind that he can be certain of his own constancy in virtue.



Let us then, Dearly Beloved, observe these venerable practices of this most acceptable time, and with anxious care clean the windows of our soul. For however chastely and soberly we live in this mortal life, we shall yet be soiled by some dust in the course of our earthly journey, and the brightness of our soul, formed to God's image and likeness, is not so remote from the smoke of every vanity, that it will be unclouded by any stain, and need never to be polished...

Let us then take refuge in the ever present mercy of God, and, so that we may with becoming reverence celebrate the holy Pasch of the Lord, let all the faithful seek to make holy their own hearts. Let harshness give place to mildness, let wrath grow gentle, forgive one another your offences, and let him who seeks to be forgiven be not himself a seeker of vengeance. For when we say: Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors [Matt. 6:12], we bind ourselves in the most enduring bonds unless we fulfill what we profess. And if the most sacred contract of this prayer has not in every respect been fulfilled, let every man now at least examine his conscience, and gain the pardon of his own sins by forgiving those of others... For the Just and Merciful Receiver of the prayers of men has laid it down, that our own generosity is the measure of His fairness to ourselves; so that He will not treat with strict justness those whom He finds not eager for revenge. And generosity is becoming to kind and gentle souls. Nothing is more fitting than that a man imitate his Maker, and that as best he can he is a doer of the works of God. For when the hungry are fed, the naked clothed, the sick assisted, are not the hands that minister but completing the help God gives, and is not the generosity of the giver also a gift from God?

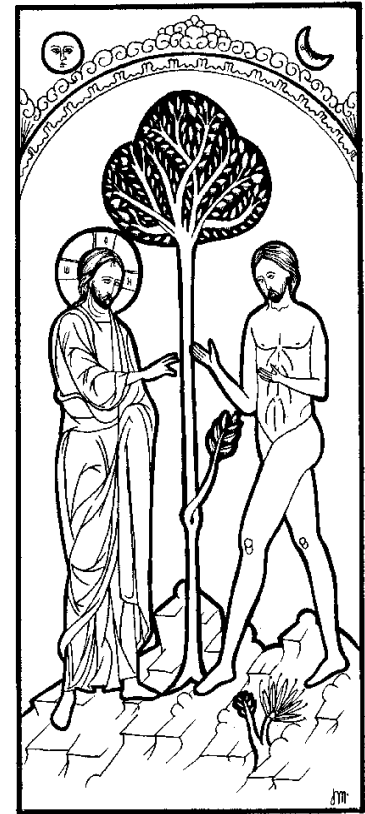
On the Lenten Fast by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

There is not Lent without fasting. It seems, however, that many people today either do not take fasting seriously or, if they do, misunderstand its real spiritual goals. For some people, fasting consists in a symbolic 'giving up' of something; for some others, it is a scrupulous observance of dietary regulations. But in both cases, seldom is fasting referred to the total Lenten effort. Here as elsewhere, therefore, we must first try to understand the Church's teaching about fasting and then ask ourselves: how can we apply this teaching to our life?

Fasting or abstinence from food is not exclusively a Christian practice. It existed and still exists in other religions and even

outside religion, as for example in some specific therapies. Today people fast (or abstain) for all kinds of reasons, including sometimes political reasons. It is important, therefore, to discern the uniquely Christian content of fasting. It is first of all revealed to us in the interdependence between two events which we find in the Bible: one at the beginning of the Old Testament and the other at the beginning of the New Testament. The first event is the “breaking of the fast” by Adam in Paradise. He ate of the forbidden fruit. This is how man’s original sin is revealed to us. Christ, the new Adam - and this is the second event - begins by fasting. Adam was tempted and he succumbed to temptation; Christ was tempted and He overcame that temptation. The results of Adam’s failure are expulsion from Paradise and death. The fruits of Christ’s victory are the destruction of death and our return to Paradise...

Christ is the New Adam. He comes to repair the damage inflicted on life by Adam, to restore man to true life, and thus He also begins with fasting...What then is fasting for us Christians? It is our entrance and participation in that experience of Christ himself by which he liberates us from the total dependence on food, matter, and the world. By no means is our liberation a full one. Living still in the fallen world, in the world of the Old Adam, being part of it, we still depend on food. But just as our death - through which we still must pass - has become by virtue of Christ’s Death a passage into life, the food we eat and the life it sustains can be life in God and for God. Part of our food has already become “food of immortality” - the body and Blood of Christ Himself. But even the daily bread we receive from God can be in this life and in this world that which strengthens us, our communion with God, rather than that which separates us from God. Yet it is only fasting that can perform that transformation, giving us the existential proof that our dependence on food and matter is not total, not absolute, that united to prayer, grace, and adoration, it can itself be spiritual.



An excerpt from Great Lent: Journey to Pascha

St. Vitalis, Martyr Feast Day ~ April 28

In the early days of the Church, when Christians were being persecuted and put to death for their religious beliefs, information about those who were martyred passed quickly through the Christian community. Sometimes, eyewitnesses were able to record the words spoken at the trial and execution, but in other cases, exact information was difficult to establish and only the most basic facts of the event were passed on by word of mouth.



Through the years of turmoil before Christianity was made legal by the Emperor St. Constantine, many stories became enlarged or were mixed with other stories so that it is tempting for us - who, in the 21st century, are accustomed to “checking the facts” - to dismiss these stories as untrue. But the devotion and veneration of many generations of Christians should cause us to realize that this saint did exist and that his life and martyrdom - even without verifiable facts - should be honored by the Church. St. Vitalis is such a saint.

We can work our way backward in learning about this saint. Several early calendars include St. Vitalis in their lists, such as that of St. Bede in his 8th century calendar of saints for the monastery at Jarrow in northern England. The city of Ravenna, where Vitalis’ martyrdom took place, considers him its patron saint and he was so revered there in the 6th century that the Emperor Justinian built a beautiful octagonal basilica in 547 over the supposed place of his martyrdom.

Although there are variations in the events and relationships in different versions of the story, all agree that Vitalis was a prominent citizen (probably from Milan) who traveled to Ravenna with a judge, Paulinus. There the two witnessed the public execution of a Christian physician named Ursicinus. The doctor was in such fear and dread, knowing what sort of death he was facing, that he was on the verge of apostasy. Vitalis, who was himself a Christian, cried out to Ursicinus, urging him to be brave and not lose the crown of martyrdom by denying Christ. This was all that was needed for Ursicinus to face his execution courageously and Vitalis made certain that he received a Christian burial.

Paulinus was shocked to find out that his friend Vitalis was also an adherent of this illegal religion. He ordered that Vitalis be put on trial and when he refused to recant, he decreed that the man should be bound and buried alive. Thus, having just helped another to die for Christ, St. Vitalis also became a martyr for his faith. This was around the year 52 during the reign of Emperor Nero. An addendum to this story is often told regarding Valeria, the wife of Vitalis. When she left Ravenna to return to Milan, she came upon a group of revelers who were sacrificing to idols and then having a banquet with the food that had been offered to the idols. They invited Valeria to join them, but she refused, declaring herself a Christian. The people became so enraged that they beat Valeria severely. She died shortly after arriving in Milan, joining her husband in suffering for Christ’s sake.

Is the story true? Was there a real person named Vitalis? Did these events actually happen? Where does history end and

legend begin? After almost 2,000 years, we will probably never find an authenticated record of his life and death. But we do know that his memory has been revered by Christians during those almost 2,000 years. We can rightfully add our veneration to theirs and ask for the prayers of St. Vitalis, that he would aid us in our weakness and encourage us to persevere in the Christian life.

Sources: *Lives of the Fathers and Other Saints* by Rev. Alban Butler; *Catholic Encyclopedia* online; *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* by David Farmer; *The Golden Legend* by Jacobus de Voragine.

Everyday Saints

The wonderful book, *Everyday Saints and Other Stories* by Archimandrite Tikhon (Shevkunov) has recently been added to our lending library. The book was published in Russia in 2011 and became an immediate - surprising - best-seller. It has now been translated into English as well as many other languages. Proceeds from the sale of the book will be used to build a memorial cathedral in Moscow dedicated to the victims of communist repression in Russia. This book is a sign of hope for all of us who despair of how we can live as Christians in this “post-Christian” world.

While a few of the people described in the book may one day become glorified as official saints of the Orthodox Church, the majority of those whose stories are so lovingly told are (or were) ordinary people whose strong faith helped them to survive some of the most difficult challenges that a Christian can face. While the main purpose of the book is not to give details about imprisonment, torture, repression and harassment, the reader learns much about these things in these pages. Rather, the main purpose is to give a beautiful picture of how so many people of God - particularly monastics and clergy - continued to discern the will of God for their lives, to minister to others, to pray fervently, to offer the Sacraments in difficult circumstances, and especially, to forgive the enemies of the Church.

The author, Fr. Tikhon, begins with his own story when he was baptized in 1982 at the age of 24. Having just graduated from university with a degree in screen writing, he came to faith through discussions with fellow students about the great questions of life and through the contrast between the lectures in classes such as “scientific atheism” and reading the works of great Russian writers such as Dostoyevsky. At the suggestion of his godmother (the church cleaning lady), he spent ten days at the Monastery of the Pskov Caves just after baptism and that visit changed the course of his life. He gave up marriage with his



fiancée and the possibility of an interesting career to become a monk and to give his life totally to God.



Through the eyes of this excellent storyteller, we are introduced to cantankerous old monks and severe abbots, many of whom had been decorated soldiers during World War II and some who had been imprisoned for their faith; we read about eccentric priests living in near poverty in remote villages where they are restoring churches that had been destroyed and also helping to restore the faith of the local people; and we hear of numerous instances of clairvoyance and answered prayer. Humor is shown to be a big part of the lives of these “everyday saints” and many follow our Lord’s admonition to be “wise as serpents and harmless as doves” - good lessons for those who would be peace-makers in a violent world.

Several chapters are devoted to the story (told first-hand into a recorder and then transcribed) of Mother Frosya who became a nun at the age of 15 two years before the Revolution. When her monastery was destroyed she and many of the others became “secret nuns”, continuing to live the life of prayer while outwardly living in the world.

We are given the amusing tale of old Fr. Avvakum who, while serving as the monastery gate-keeper, began demanding that everyone who sought entrance would have to first recite the Symbol of Faith, the Nicene Creed. When the Soviet “Commissioner for Religious Affairs” came to see the abbot, he was forced to repeat after Fr. Avvakum each phrase of this statement of faith which he had spent his life denying and suppressing as just so much superstition.

Anyone who reads *Everyday Saints* will be uplifted. Orthodox Christians will find much to inspire hope for the future of Orthodox Christianity in Russia and many examples of how to live the Christian life in hostile times.

Parish News

Each Friday evening during this Lenten season, we will meet at 6:30 for a pot-luck supper, followed by a class and discussion on our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. We end with the service of Stations of the Cross and the Litany of the Holy Name of Jesus.

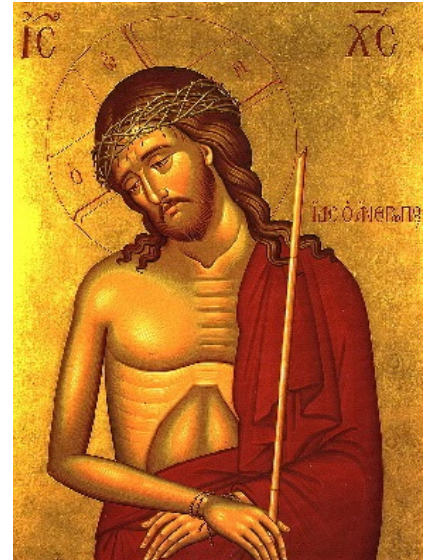
Coin boxes are available for your offerings to help the hungry. During Advent, we collect canned goods to be given locally; the Lenten collection is designated for helping the needy

throughout the Archdiocese. Grants from this offering are given to parishes or individuals who sponsor programs for helping others.

On Passion Sunday, April 21, we prepare to draw closer to the remembrance of our Lord's last days on the earth before his Crucifixion. The crosses in the church are veiled and the Gloria Patri is absent from the canticles we sing.

Please prepare to be present for as many of the Holy Week services as possible. Parking for week night services is certainly difficult. Some may wish to travel via Metro, and we will work on obtaining 'Visitor' passes to allow for parking on Euclid Street.

Confessions may be made after Vespers, during the Psalms at Matins and by appointment with Fr. Nicholas or Fr. Raphael.



Holy Week at St. Gregory's

Palm Sunday, April 28 - Matins at 9AM; blessing of Palms, Procession and High Mass with the Passion Gospel of St. Matthew at 9:30AM.

Monday and Tuesday, April 28 and 29 - Vespers at 7PM; Mass at 7:30 with the Passion Gospels of St. Mark and St. Luke.

Wednesday, May 1 - Vespers at 7PM; Mass with the blessing of Oils and Unction at 7:30PM.

Maundy Thursday, May 2 - Vespers at 7PM; Mass with Foot Washing, Procession to the Altar of Repose and Stripping of the Altar at 7:30PM. Tenebrae following Mass.

Good Friday, May 3 - Liturgy with the Passion according to St. John, Veneration of the Cross, Solemn Collects and Mass of the Pre-sanctified beginning at 12 noon.

Holy Saturday, May 4 - Confessions 7:30-8:30PM; Paschal Vigil with the lighting of the Paschal Fire and Blessing of the Paschal Candle, reading of the Prophecies, Litany of the Saints, Blessing of the font and the First Mass of Easter beginning at 9PM. Paschal feast following the Liturgy.

Easter Day, May 5 - Mass at 11AM.

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen! Christos anesti! Alethos anesti! Al Massiah qam! Haqqan qam!

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>April 2013</h1>						
<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</i>	1 St. Melito of Sardis, BC, 177	2 St. Mary of Egypt, Penitent	3 St. Sixtus I, PM, 127	4 St. Isidore of Seville, BCD, 636	5 <i>Lenten Supper & Stations of the Cross at 6:30pm</i>	6 St. Notker, C, 912 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
7 Third Sunday in Lent; St. Tikhon of Moscow, BC, Patron of the Western Rite, 1925 <i>V</i>	8	9	10	11 St. Leo the Great, PCD, 461	12 <i>Lenten Supper & Stations of the Cross at 6:30pm</i>	13 St. Hermenegild M, 583 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
14 Fourth Sunday in Lent; St. Justin, M, 167; Ss. Tiburtius, Valerian & Maximus, Mm, 3 rd c. <i>V</i>	15	16	17 St. Anicetus, PM, 168	18	19 St. Alphege, BM, 1012 <i>Lenten Supper & Stations of the Cross at 6:30pm</i>	20 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
21 Passion Sunday <i>V</i>	22 Ss. Soter, 174 & Caius, 296, Bb, Mm	23 St. George, M, 303	24	25 St. Mark the Evangelist, 1 st c.	26 Seven Sorrows of the BVM; Ss. Cletus, BM, 89 & Marcellinus, BM, 304 <i>Lenten Supper & Stations at 6:30pm</i>	27 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
28 Palm Sunday <i>R/V</i>	29 Monday in Holy Week <i>Mass at 7:30pm V</i>	30 Tuesday in Holy Week <i>Mass at 7:30pm V</i>	1 Wednesday in Holy Week <i>Mass at 7:30pm W</i>	2 Maundy Thursday <i>Mass at 7:30pm W</i>	3 Good Friday <i>Liturgy at Noon B</i>	4 Holy Saturday <i>Mass at 9pm</i>

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

Coffee Hour follows Sunday Liturgy.
Sunday School for children is during Coffee Hour.