

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

April, 2014- Volume XIX, Issue 4

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

From a Homily of Saint Maximus of Turin

*died 465AD
Feast Day ~ June 25*

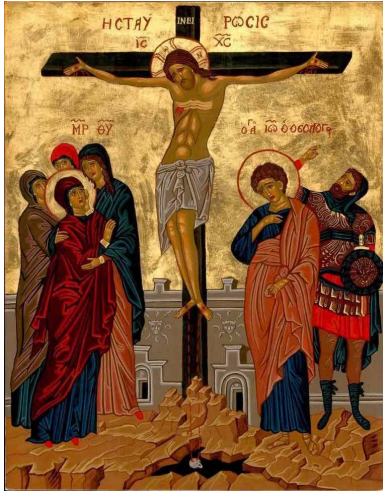
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Most fittingly does the world rejoice, with great gladness, upon this day; for with Christ returning from the dead the hope of resurrection has everywhere been awakened in the hearts of men. For it is but right that when the Lord of creation triumphs, the creatures He has made should also rejoice. This day the heavens rejoice, for now at length they see the earth, defiled by sin, made clean in the Blood of the Lord. The multitudes of the hosts of heaven rejoice, for their king has overthrown in battle the hosts of the prince of evil. The sun rejoices, and now with unceasing thankfulness holds back by its joyful beams that woeful darkness that overshadowed it as Christ was dying. And together with them we too above all others must rejoice, for whom the Only-Begotten Son of God, Who also is True God, clothes Himself in our flesh, that through that flesh He might come to the Cross, by the Cross suffer death, and through death despoil the kingdom of hell. Should we not rejoice: we whose sins the mystery of this new sacrament has taken away, to whom heaven is given, paradise restored?

And as He drew near his end, the Lord himself says to the Thief then hanging on his cross: he whose faith, neither Christ's torment, nor his own, had weakened: *Amen, I say to you, this day thou shalt be with me in paradise.* For the Thief had said to Him: *Lord, remember me when thou shalt come into thy kingdom* [Luke 23]. How admirable this faith, Brethren: that a thief who had been judged unworthy of this life, should amid his torments nourish the hope of life eternal, and believe, that this could be given to him by One Who also was being crucified? And how justly does the believing Thief receive the favor of such a promise: he who, in that hour when the Apostles scattered in fear, had confessed the Kingdom of God? And the merit of this one confession wipes away all his past sins; in that brief moment

whatever crimes he had committed, throughout all the years of his life, were now forgiven.



Nor did the blood he shed in his robberies condemn him before God, for he believed that the Blood of Christ was shed for a Kingdom, not for a punishment. And that this death was a gain for all men, there can, Beloved Brethren, be no possible doubt. For who can despair of God's grace, when the Thief was forgiven; should he unite the faith of the Thief with his own humble prayer for pardon?

Brethren, let us rejoice in Christ, now risen from the dead. Let us hold firmly, that He has recalled this Flesh from the sepulcher that we may merit to have part in that wondrous common heritage: namely, the grace of the Apostles, and the Resurrection of the Lord, by the help of this Same Lord who with the Father and the Holy Ghost lives and reigns world without end. Amen.

Memory Eternal

Upon the repose of our beloved Metropolitan Philip, St. Gregory's joined with parishes around the archdiocese in honoring his memory with services. We celebrated a Requiem Mass on the third day following his death and will continue to remember him in prayers for forty days and on the one-year anniversary of his death.

Metropolitan Philip had been the archbishop for New York and all North America since 1966 and in those almost forty-eight years, he worked to accomplish his vision of an American expression of the Orthodox faith. He often said that he was grateful that our patriarchate was not named for a country, with the nationalism and ethnicity that would entail, but rather for the ancient city where the followers of Christ first received the name "Christian". Although he was proud of his Middle Eastern heritage, he encouraged the use of English in our services as more appropriate for this country. He showed the spirit of Christian charity - combined with Middle Eastern hospitality - in giving a place to converts from other religious traditions and in supporting the presence of the Western Rite in our archdiocese.

Metropolitan Philip was especially concerned for Orthodox unity in this country and, due to his leadership, our archdiocese experienced tremendous growth.

In the months ahead, as our archdiocese prepares to nominate a new metropolitan (the election will be by the Holy Synod of Antioch), Patriarch JOHN X has appointed Metropolitan Silouan of Buenos Aires and All Argentina (a frequent visitor to this country and friend of the archdiocese) as the Patriarchal Vicar and Archbishop Joseph of the Diocese of Los Angeles and the West as the *locum tenens*.

We pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit for our Archdiocese and we remember that Christ has promised to be with us to the end of the age [Matt.28:20] and that the gates of hell shall not prevail against His Church [Matt.16:18]



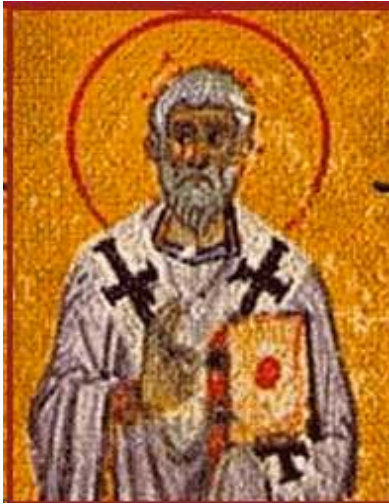
St. Melito of Sardis *Feast Day ~ April 1*

Just as the images from a powerful telescope or from a spacecraft orbiting the earth can give us fleeting glimpses of God's creation that exists beyond our planet, when we look back in history, we have fleeting glimpses of what life was like for Christians in the first several centuries and of those courageous leaders who guided others to faith in Christ during that time. We have only a small "glimpse" at one who was a saint of the Church - St. Melito, Bishop of Sardis - but the few facts we have are enough to give us an intriguing view of the issues which were of importance to Christians in that age.

Only one work of St. Melito's has been pieced together in modern times from several fragments: his *On Pascha*, a work which scholars believe is a liturgical document for the combined observance of Good Friday and Easter.

The *Ecclesiastical History* of the Church historian, Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, who lived from around 260 to 340 is another source of information about Melito. Eusebius mentions numerous writings of Melito which are now lost, and he quotes a letter from Bishop Polycrates of Ephesus to Bishop Victor of Rome which reveals some facts. Eusebius also quotes a letter which Bishop Melito himself wrote to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Melito is also mentioned in the writings of Hippolytus (170-235) and of St. Jerome (347-420). All these glimpses of St. Melito help us to form a picture of a man of God who led his people faithfully in the formative years of the Christian Church.

St. Melito lived in the latter half of the second century (he died around 190) and he was bishop of the city of Sardis, in modern-day Turkey. With other Church leaders in that part of Asia (such as St. Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna from c. 69-155), Melito claimed to follow the practice of St. John the Evangelist in dating the celebration of Pascha according to the Jewish celebration of Passover on the fourteenth day of the Hebrew month Nissan. Because of this practice, they were called “*quortodecimans*”.



It is believed that St. Melito was Jewish by birth. It would have been natural for Jewish Christians to adapt their new rituals to those of the Jewish tradition, particularly those surrounding the Passion and Resurrection of Christ as described in the Gospel of St. John. Unlike the other Gospels, the fourth Gospel places the Crucifixion on the preparation day for Passover, the day when the lambs were sacrificed, as Christ was the “Lamb of God.”

This difference in the Gospel stories led to a divergence of practice among Christian communities. Those congregations which were made up of Gentile converts would have had no reason to adopt Jewish practices. In fact, the first council of bishops, the Council in Jerusalem held by the Apostles to decide this very issue, came to the decision that Gentiles did not have to become Jews (particularly through circumcision) to be Christians. The report of the Resurrection on Sunday was of greater importance to most Christians, and this day of the Resurrection became the norm for celebrating not only Pascha but the primary day of worship every week. This practice was attributed to the Apostles Peter and Paul.

For many years, the divergence in practice did not appear to be a problem. St. Irenaeus of Lyon (130-202) wrote that St. Polycarp visited St. Anicetus, who was the bishop (Pope) of Rome from around 153-168. Much of their discussion centered on the two different datings of Easter. Neither could persuade the other to change their position on this issue but their different practices did not cause a break in communion. In fact, Polycarp celebrated the Liturgy with the pope and they parted as brother bishops of the Church who simply observed different customs.

But by the end of the 2nd century, the desire for unity of practice regarding this most important celebration in the Christian calendar was growing. There were local synods which condemned the practice of keeping the connection with the Jewish Passover and the issue was finally resolved at the first Ecumenical Council, the Council of Nicaea, in 325. The decision of that Council was that Pascha would be celebrated by all Christians on the Sunday following the fourteenth day of Nissan. Discussion also centered

on the desire to compute which month would properly be Nissan for Christians - one in which Pascha would always fall after the Spring equinox - rather than to rely on Jewish computations.

This controversy was still alive in some fashion in the north of England, when the Synod of Whitby was convened in 664 to reconcile two divergent practices regarding the date of Easter. Although the Celtic Christians celebrated Pascha on Sunday, they claimed that their tradition came from St. John the Evangelist, but the decision of the Synod was to follow the practice of Orthodox Christianity and date Pascha by the rules set down at Nicaea.

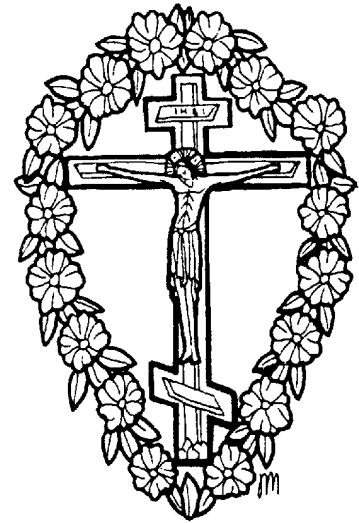
Although St. Melito and his fellow bishops were condemned for some time because of this controversy, his holiness was eventually recognized and he is now revered as a saint. He is remembered for being the first to establish the canon of Hebrew scriptures for Christians, giving it the name “Old Testament”. St. Melito was concerned with showing parallels between the Old Covenant and the New, showing how the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in Christ, and showing the “typology” of events in the Old Testament which prefigure those of the New Testament.

St. Melito described himself as a “eunuch” but this is understood not in the sense of physical castration but as one who was living a celibate life in order to give his whole attention to caring for his flock. This celibate life would eventually become the norm for all bishops.

In *On Pascha*, St. Melito appears to be very hostile to the Jews. As a Jew himself, he may have felt great frustration and disappointment that so many other Jews had not believed that Jesus was the Messiah. He also places much blame on the Jews for Christ’s crucifixion. Now, when we hear the story of the Passion sung in Holy Week, we identify with the Jews. It is us who turn on Christ and betray Him.

In writing a plea on behalf of the Christians to the Emperor, St. Melito followed in the footsteps of St. Justin, the Martyr (100-165) who wrote to the Emperor Antonius with an “apology” for the Christian life. According to Melito, Christians were suffering “lawless plundering by the mob” and the bishop had hoped for imperial protection which, of course, was not granted.

In these glimpses of a bishop who lived in the early years of the Church, we are given a picture of one who was faithful to the apostolic tradition which he had inherited. We see a bishop who was intent on protecting his people from persecution and who cared for his flock through his teaching, writing, and liturgical



celebrations. We see one who gave his whole life to serving the Messiah who had come to save the world through his death and Resurrection. May St. Melito of Sardis pray for us.



***Christ is Risen!
Indeed He is Risen!***

From the conclusion of *On Pascha*:

This is the alpha and omega, this is the beginning and the end, the ineffable beginning and the incomprehensible end. This is the Christ, this is the king, this is Jesus, this is the commander, this is the Lord, this is he who rose from the dead, this is he who sits at the right hand of the father, he bears the father and is borne by him, to him be the glory and the might forever. Amen.

Ed. note: another excerpt from *On Pascha* can be found this month on St. Gregory's website [stgregoryoc.org]

Sources: On Pascha by Melito of Sardis - translated, introduced, and annotated by Alistair Stewart-Sykes; The Prologue From Ochrid by St. Nikolai of Ochrid; on line articles from The Catholic Encyclopedia and Wikipedia.

HOLY WEEK AT ST. GREGORY'S

Palm Sunday, April 13 - Matins at 9:00AM; Blessing of Palms, Procession and High Mass with the singing of the Passion Gospel of St. Matthew at 9:30.

Monday and Tuesday, April 14 and 15 - Vespers at 7:00PM; Mass at 7:30 with the Passion Gospels of St. Mark and St. Luke.

Wednesday, April 16 - Vespers at 7:00PM; Mass with the Blessing of Oils and Unction at 7:30.

Maundy Thursday, April 17 - Vespers at 7:00PM; Mass with Foot Washing, Procession to the Altar of Repose and Stripping of the Altar at 7:30. Tenebrae following Mass.

Good Friday, April 18 - Liturgy with the singing of the Passion according to St. John, Veneration of the Cross, Solemn Collects and Mass of the Pre-sanctified beginning at 12 noon.

Holy Saturday, April 19 - Confessions from 7:30-8:30; 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 9:00PM. Paschal feast following the Liturgy.

Easter Day, April 20 - Mass at 11:00AM.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>April 2014</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 <i>Lenten Supper & Stations of the Cross at 6:30pm</i>	5 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
6 Passion Sunday; St. Notker, C, 912 <i>V</i>	7 St. Tikhon of Moscow, BC, Patron of the Western Rite, 1925	8	9	10	11 Seven Sorrows of the BVM; St. Leo the Great, PCD, 461 <i>Lenten Supper & Stations of the Cross at 6:30pm</i>	12 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
13 Palm Sunday <i>R/V</i>	14 Monday in Holy Week <i>Mass at 7:30pm V</i>	15 Tuesday in Holy Week <i>Mass at 7:30pm V</i>	16 Wednesday in Holy Week <i>Mass at 7:30pm W</i>	17 Maundy Thursday <i>Mass at 7:30pm W</i>	18 Good Friday <i>Liturgy at Noon B</i>	19 Holy Saturday <i>Mass at 9pm V/W</i>
20 Pascha: The Resurrection of Our Lord <i>Mass at 11am W</i>	21 Monday in the Octave of Easter	22 Tuesday in the Octave of Easter	23 Wednesday in the Octave of Easter	24 Thursday in the Octave of Easter	25 Friday in the Octave of Easter	26 Saturday in the Octave of Easter <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
27 Low Sunday: First Sunday after Easter <i>W</i>	28 St. George, M, 303 (<i>transferred</i>); St. Vitalis of Milan, M, 3 rd c.	29 St. Mark the Evangelist, 1 st c. (<i>transferred</i>)	30 Vigil of Ss. Philip & James	1 Ss. Philip & James, Apostles, 1 st c.	2 St. Athanasius, BCD, 373	3 Finding of the Holy Cross <i>Vespers at 6pm</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.