

✚ 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 Palamas

*died AD1359
Feast Day ~ November
14*

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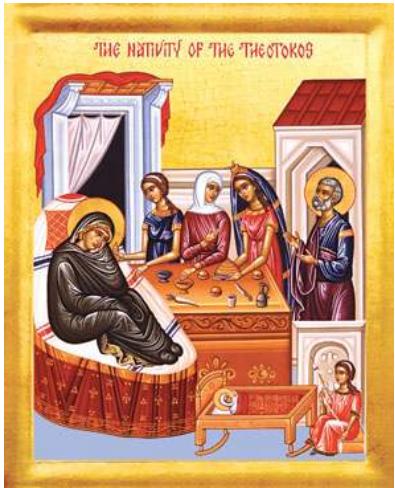
The time is always right to make a beginning of a way of life that will lead to salvation. To prove this, the great Paul says, ‘Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation’ [2 Cor. 6:2] “Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us do the works of light. Let us walk honestly as in the day”. He does not mean that one particular hour or day is the acceptable time, but the whole period after the manifestation of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ...

If, however, it were necessary to name the most appropriate season of all,... a season especially suited for beginning a good work, then it is autumn, particularly this month...when our salvation had its origin, as we celebrate today. This sacred feast and holiday that we are keeping is the first to commemorate our recall and re-creation according to grace, for on it all things began to be made new, enduring precepts began to be bought in instead of temporary ones, the spirit instead of the letter, the truth instead of shadows.

Today, a new world and a mysterious paradise have been revealed, in which and from which a new Adam came into being, re-making the old Adam and renewing the universe. He is not led astray by the deceiver, but deceives him, and bestows freedom on those enslaved to sin through his treachery. Today a paradoxical book has been made ready on earth, which in an indescribable way can hold, not the imprint of words, but the living Word himself; not a word consisting of air, but the heavenly Word; not a word that perishes as soon as it is formed, but the Word who snatches those who draw near Him from perdition; not a word made by the movement of a man’s tongue, but the Word begotten of God the Father before all ages. Today the living tabernacle of God not made with hands appears, the inspired human ark of the true bread of life sent down from heaven for us.

Today, according to the Psalms, “Truth has sprung up from the earth”, the true image of human nobility which comes from above, “and righteousness has looked down from heaven” [Ps. 85:11 LXX]. This righteousness has deposed the unrighteous ruler from his unjust dominion, after being wrongfully condemned by him and rightly condemning him, and having bound the strong and evil one, plundered his goods [Matt. 12:29], and transformed them, rendering them receptive to divine righteousness...

Today, as prophesied, out of the “stem of Jesse” a rod has come forth [Isa. 11:1], from which a flower has grown which knows no wilting. This rod recalls our human nature, which had withered and fallen away from the unfading garden of delight, makes it bloom again, grants it to flourish for ever, bring it up to heaven, and leads it into paradise. With this rod the great Shepherd moves his human flock to eternal pastures, and supported by this rod, our nature lays aside its old age and feeble senility, and easily strides towards heaven, leaving the earth below for those who, devoid of support, are plunging downwards.



But who is the new world, the mysterious paradise, the paradoxical book, the inspired tabernacle and ark of God, the truth sprung from the earth, the much-extolled rod of Jesse? It is the Maiden who before and after childbearing is eternally virgin, whose birth from a barren mother we celebrate today. Joachim and Anna lived together blamelessly before God, but seemed to the Israelites to be at fault according to the law because they remained childless. Since there was not yet any hope of immortality, the continuance of the race was seen as an absolute necessity. Now that this Virgin born today has bestowed eternity upon us by bearing a child in virginity, having children to succeed us is no longer necessary, but in those days having many children was regarded as superior to virtue, and childlessness was such a great evil, that these just people were rebuked for their lack of children, rather than praised for their virtue.

Deeply saddened by these reproaches, the righteous couple called to mind Abraham and Sarah, and the others who had suffered grief because of their childlessness. They then considered th healing remedy for that sorrow, which some had found, and decided that they too would resort to beseeching God... Now He has granted them a daughter more wonderful than all the wonders down through the ages, the Mother of the Creator of the universe, who made the human race divine, turned earth into heaven, made God into the Son of man, and men into the sons of God. For she conceived within herself without seed, and brought forth in a way past telling, the one who brought everything that exists out of non-being, and transformed it into something good, who will never let it cease to exist.

St. Silouan of Mt. Athos

Feast Day ~ September 11

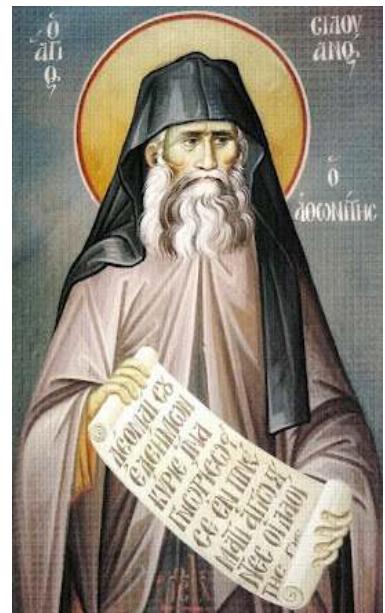
This is the fourth in our series of modern-day saints - those holy men and women whose spiritual journeys took place in the 20th and 21st centuries, reminding us that we are all called to strive for theosis and that it is possible even in our own time.

There are hundreds of thousands of people who have lived holy lives known only to their closest friends and family. These saints are not the ones who were heroically martyred or who were famous for excellent preaching or who were great teachers or evangelists. They lived their lives in humble submission to God's will, suffering the same temptations and spiritual struggles that we all have. But in their quiet way they achieved victory over the world and now intercede for all of us in our journeys. St. Silouan of Mt. Athos is one of these quiet, spiritual "giants".

St. Silouan's story would be known only to God if it were not for his disciple, Archimandrite Sophrony, who wrote down the stories of his life that St. Silouan had told him and who found some of the saint's thoughts written on scraps of paper in his cell after his repose. He published these in two works: *A Monk of Mt. Athos* and *Wisdom From Mt. Athos*.

St. Silouan began life in 1866 in a typical Russian peasant family of nine living in a small village. His father was illiterate but very devout, and it was from him that young Simeon (as his parents named him) first learned of God and his ways. However, his first crisis of faith was also brought about inadvertently by his father. A traveling book salesman was invited to spend time in their home. The salesman loudly expressed his conviction that God did not exist. When this man left their home, Simeon asked his father why he was made to say his prayers if there was no God. His father responded that the man had been a fool and that Simeon should pay no attention to what he had heard.

But the seed of doubt had been sown and for many years afterward, Simeon was skeptical of the teachings of the Church. These doubts were later put to rest by the simple witness of an unsuspecting woman. By this time, teenaged Simeon was working as a carpenter in the construction business with his brother. The cook who prepared the midday meal for the workers told of her pilgrimage to visit the tomb of a holy hermit and of the many miracles that had occurred at the tomb. This was confirmed by many of the older workers and Simeon suddenly realized that, if such things really happened, then it must mean that God did



indeed exist and that he was present in this world. It was with this realization that Simeon first felt called to the monastic life.

The young man knew that he needed first to complete his mandatory military service before he could enter a monastery. He also had to experience many more battles in this world before he was ready to pursue spiritual warfare. The worst of his experiences happened in an altercation with a group of rowdy young men. Simeon was walking down the street with friends, playing his concertina, when one of the other men tried to steal it from him. In the fight that ensued, Simeon struck the man with such force that he was unconscious for some time. Simeon felt great remorse at having nearly killed a man, but he nevertheless continued to live a life incompatible with Christian purity and especially with a monastic calling.

Finally, it was the Mother of God who brought Simeon to his senses. He had a dream of a snake crawling down his throat and he reacted with revulsion. As he awoke, he heard a voice say to him: “Just as you found it loathsome to swallow a snake, so I find your ways ugly to look upon.” Simeon knew that this was the voice of the blessed Theotokos and he was immediately acutely aware of his sinful ways and the need to repent.

From then on, Simeon’s life changed. Prayer and repentance made him less talkative, less boisterous. His quick anger was subdued and he was able to counsel others to do good things. Near the end of his military duty, he and a friend traveled to see St. John of Kronstadt whose blessing they sought. Simeon left a message saying that he wanted to be a monk and asking for prayers that the world would not hold him back. Shortly thereafter, he was aware of a mighty force like the “flames of hell” all about him. He knew that St. John was praying fervently for him.

As soon as his duties as a soldier were over, Simeon departed from his village for Mt. Athos. There, he was received at the Monastery of St. Pantaleimon and began his life as a monk. At first, he was overjoyed at the peace he received after making his first confession there and being assured of God’s forgiveness. But soon, his mind began to be assaulted by devils. On the one hand, he was tempted to pride by being told how holy he was; on the other, he was thrown into despair by being told that he would never be saved. This spiritual torture went on for many months.

Brother Simeon had been given work in the monastery’s mill as an obedience. There he lifted and carried heavy sacks of flour, all the while praying the Jesus Prayer to counter the attacks of the demons. He slept no more than two hours at night, but prayed



Αγιορειτική Φωτοθήκη

Photograph of St. Silouan with Elder Sophrony in 1933

constantly to try to overcome the temptations and despair that he was experiencing. Finally, when he was at the lowest point of hopelessness, he was granted a vision of the Risen Christ. As he stood in the chapel adjoining the mill, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and surrounded by a divine Light. He knew that he was in the presence of Christ and experienced His love and forgiveness. In the words of his disciple, Sophrony: "...in the person of Staretz Silouan God was giving the world a fresh example, a fresh statement, of the boundlessness of His love, in order that through him, too, men paralyzed by despair should find new courage..."

In another intense battle with demons, which continued periodically, the monk heard God's voice in his heart telling him that the proud always suffer from devils and that he should keep his mind in hell and not despair. This seems like strange advice, but the monk - now Father Silouan - recognized the truth in these words. He needed to rid himself of pride and by keeping his mind on the fires of hell, he could more easily raise himself above the temptations that lead to that condition.

Fr. Silouan spent the remainder of his forty-six years in the monastery struggling against pride, struggling to repent of sin, which is separation from the will of God. He continued to spend very little time in sleep and to pray constantly. Even though he had only attended school briefly, he spent much time in the monastery reading and studying holy Scripture and the writings of the Fathers of the Church. In his later years, he was given the job of steward for the monastery and he built a little cell for himself near the storehouse where provisions were kept. Here he could spend most of his time in solitary prayer. Elder Sophrony tells us that he continued in all the outward routine of the monastery - attending all the services, receiving Communion two or three times a week - but that he followed the admonition of St. Paul to "pray without ceasing". In the early hours of the morning of September 11, 1938, as Matins was being prayed by the other monks, Father Silouan passed from this life of ascetic struggle. He was glorified by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1988 in commemoration of the Millennium of Russian Christianity.

Some of St. Silouan's spiritual wisdom which Elder Sophrony has passed on have to do with discovering the will of God. "The quest to know God's will is the most important thing in a man's life, since when he happens on the path of the will of God he becomes incorporate with divine, eternal life... The man who has the love of God in his heart, prompted by this love, acts in accordance with dictates which approximate to the will of God."

On distinguishing good from evil, the saint taught that "the certain sign by which to recognize good from evil is not so



*The Feast of the Exaltation
of the Holy Cross is
September 14th*

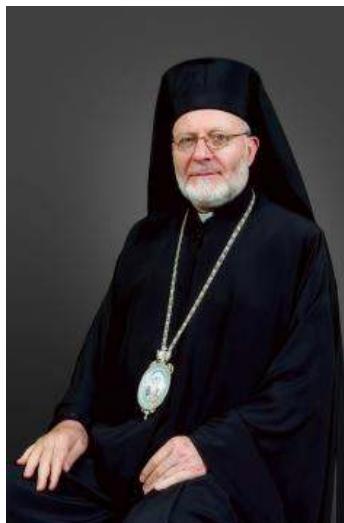
much the end, which may appear to be holy and sublime, as the means selected to achieve the end...Evil always and inevitably contains an element appearing to have a positive value, and it is this which seduces man...[but] good not obtained by good means is not good.”

We may wonder what importance the life of this monk - who spent his life in spiritual warfare against the devil's interior assaults - could have for us. We must first remember that a monk living in the solitude of a mountaintop monastery is not completely separate from the world. In all his constant prayers, St. Silouan was praying for the world, for the living and the dead and we believe that God hears such fervent prayers. Because of the witness of Elder Sophrony, we can be inspired and instructed by the wisdom of his spiritual father, St. Silouan. Fr. Sophrony has passed this wisdom and that which he has acquired on to his disciple, Dr. Christopher Veniamin (professor of patristics at St. Tikhon's Seminary). This is the way that Holy Tradition has been passed on in every age from the Apostles until now.

As he prayed for this world while he was in it, we can be assured of the continuing prayers for us by this holy monk who is now closer to the throne of God. Holy Silouan, pray for us.

[Sources: Recently Canonized Orthodox Saints; their Lives and Icons by Dr. Jane M. DeVyver; The Monk of Mount Athos by Archimandrite Sophrony.]

Parish News



On Sunday, September 7, students and teachers in the parish will be given a blessing at the end of the Liturgy that their minds may be set on learning the ways of God as well as their other studies. We will also continue our parish custom of taking home-baked cookies to the Howard University students living in our neighborhood. Sunday School classes will resume this month as well as Fr. Nicholas' "Ask Abouna" sessions at Coffee Hour.

Two great feast days will be celebrated on Sundays this month : The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (moved from September 8 to September 7 by permission of the Metropolitan) and on September 14, The Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

Metropolitan JOSEPH, the auxiliary bishop of Los Angeles and the West was elected as our new metropolitan by the Holy Synod of Antioch in July. We pray for God's guidance for him as he leads our archdiocese. His Enthronement will be at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Brooklyn on St. Nicholas' Day. Axios!

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
September 2014						
<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</i> W	1 St. Giles, Ab, 708; Twelve Holy Brothers, Mm, c. 303 (Labor Day)	2 St. Stephen of Hungary, KC, 1038	3 Consecration of St. Gregory the Great, 590	4 St. Gorazde of Prague, BM, 1942	5	6 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
7 Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (tr. From 9/8); Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost; St. Sergius I, PC, 701 R	8	9 St. Gorgonius, M, 304	10	11 Ss. Protus & Hyacinth, Mm, c. 257; St. Paphnu-tius, BC, 4th c.	12	13 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
14 Exaltation of the Holy Cross; Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost R	15 St. Nicomedes, M, 4th c.	16 Ss. Cornelius, PM, 254 & Cyprian, BM 258; St. Ninian, BC, 5 th c.	17 Ember Wednesday; St. Lambert, BM, 705	18	19 Ember Friday; St. Theodore of Canterbury, BC, 690; Ss. Januarius & comp., Mm	20 Ember Saturday; Ss. Eustace & comp., Mm, c. 118 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
21 St. Matthew, Evangelist & Apostle, 1st c.; Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost R	22 St. Maurice & Comp., Mm, 3rd c.; St. Lioba of Mainz, V, 781	23 St. Thecla of Icomium, VM, 1st c.; St. Linus, PM, c. 80	24 Conception St. John Baptist; SS. Juvenaly, 1796 & Peter the Aleut, 1815, MM	25	26 Ss. Cyprian, BM & Justina, VM, c. 303	27 Ss. Cosmas & Damian, Mm, c. 303 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
28 Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost; St. Wenceslas, M, 938 G	29 Dedication of St. Michael the Archangel	30 St. Jerome PrCD, 420; St. Gregory the Illuminator, BC, c. 323				

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

Coffee Hour follows Mass; Sunday School is during Coffee Hour.