

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

February, 2015 - Volume XX, Issue 2

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

From the Writings of Saint Nektarios of Pentapolis

*died AD1920
Feast Day ~ November 9*

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The brilliance of the Christian faith is witnessed by the love that develops within a Christian for the content of his faith. The faithful person feels his heart burning with the love of Christ. From where has such love originated? How can someone love the unknown? Love for the unknown is impossible since the unknown has no effect upon the heart. In order for the heart to love something, it requires a moral influence; without this, the heart remains indifferent. Love is a desire of the heart that has been influenced and set ablaze by the beauty and charm of a loved one. It is necessary for a beloved person to exist in order to touch the heart. Love is the spark resulting from the collision of two elements. How then has the faithful Christian come to love Christ, Who is the content of his faith, if he has not come into contact with Him?

How has his heart been wounded by the love of Christ if He has no knowledge of him, if he has not heard His voice, if he has not been enchanted by His beauty and grace? How can man love Christ to such a degree that he denies himself on His behalf, so that on account of love - and only love - his soul clings to Him and follows Him with zeal and joy? How can man love Him so much, that he even gives up his life joyfully on His behalf? How has the unknown conquered man's heart in such a manner that he endures everything in order to please Him?

It is impossible to love something unknown. Hence, he who loves is familiar with the object that he loves, and his heart has been wounded on account of this knowledge. Therefore, the love for Christ indicates that knowledge of Christ exists. Knowledge, in turn, indicates that a revelation exists. Hence, Christ has revealed Himself to the person who believes in Him, and, as the God of love, He has filled this person's heart with love.

We have countless examples of the extreme divine eros for the Savior that results from His epiphany within the hearts of the faithful. One of the most brilliant instances, though, is that of the Apostle Paul, whose heart was wounded by the love of the Savior to such a degree that he exclaimed with divine zeal:



Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As is written: 'For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creation, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. [Rom. 8:35-3]

Therefore, the Savior truly revealed Himself to the Apostle Paul and spoke to his heart. In turn, the Apostle's heart experienced the love of Him who loved it and Who dwelled within it. Thenceforth he mutually loved Him according to the strength given to his heart. Accordingly, he who loves has knowledge. Since he who believes also loves, it follows that he who believes has knowledge. He believes because Christ reveals Himself to them who believe in Him. Consequently, the Christian faith is brilliant because it results in the true knowledge of God.

St. Paul, having acquired this information through personal experience, defines faith as evidence concerning things that can not be seen: *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* [Heb. 11:1] St. Clement calls faith "knowledge": *Faith is concise knowledge of very urgent things.* St. Basil the Great considers faith to be acceptance accompanied by assurance: *faith is indiscriminate acceptance of the things heard, and assurance of the things preached with God's grace.*

The faithful Christian has truly come to know God. He acknowledges Him and worships Him from the depths of his heart. The faithful Christian sees God in all his works. He perceives His wisdom, His justice, His benevolence, and he proclaims His Divine Providence. Faith has become a fountain of knowledge and enlightenment for him.

St. Simon of Jerusalem

Feast Day ~ February 18

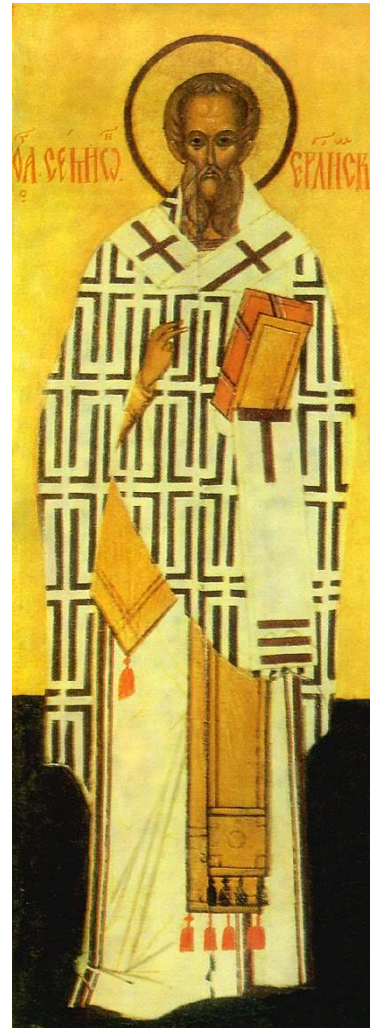
In our time, old age is not considered a good thing. We do everything we can to minimize its effects (wearing youthful clothes, dying our hair, even having plastic surgery) and, when the effects of old age have become a burden, some would even advocate euthanasia or assisted suicide.

But those of us who are Orthodox sing “God grant you many years” and we know that throughout history and in most of the world, a long life has been considered a blessing from God. We sing in the Psalms, “So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” [Ps. 90:12] and we understand that the years God gives us are for learning his ways and striving to become holy. St. Simon of Jerusalem is the perfect example of one who was given many years and who used those years to help spread the Gospel to the world (we remember the life of the Apostle, St. Simon the Zealot, together with St. Jude the Apostle, on October 28th).

We learn from Holy Tradition that Simon (sometimes given as Simeon) was the son of Clopas, who was the brother of St. Joseph, the Betrothed of the Blessed Virgin Mary; therefore, Simon was a first cousin of Our Lord Jesus Christ, believed to have been eight or nine years older than Christ. He had first-hand knowledge of the Incarnate Lord; he heard in family settings the words of Christ; he witnessed closely the miracles. And when Jesus had chosen his twelve Apostles - his “inner circle” of followers - and appointed seventy others to help spread the Good News, Simon was among that number.

After the Resurrection, when the Apostles began the task of organizing the Church, St. James, the “brother” (step-brother) of the Lord was made the first Bishop of Jerusalem. According to Acts 12, James was executed on orders from King Herod. James was thrown from the walls of the Temple and then beaten to death around the year 62. A successor was needed immediately for this important leadership position and Simon was chosen by the remaining Apostles as the most worthy.

According to some historians, Bishop Simon led his Christian flock out of the city of Jerusalem to the city of Pella as the Jewish revolt against Roman rule and the siege of Jerusalem under Emperor Vespasian began in the year 66; the



Temple built by Herod was destroyed in 70. The Christians returned to a Jerusalem in ruins but rebuilt their lives, and the Church grew and flourished under the able leadership of the saintly Bishop.



When Trajan became the Roman Emperor in 98, he began a double persecution: first, of the Jews who were in the royal line of succession - of the House of David - and secondly, of those who were Christian. Bishop Simon qualified on both counts. He was already a very old man, loved and revered by his people, but the Governor of Palestine, Atticus, was extremely zealous in following imperial orders, so St. Simon was arrested and crucified just as his Savior had been, around the year 107.

God had given Simon many years - over 100 - and he had used those years well. He had been a faithful follower of Christ, a loving pastor of his people, an ardent missionary, and now he had to be a courageous martyr. Holy Simon, pray for us that we may follow your example and use the years we are given for the glory of God.

Sources: A Cloud of Witnesses by Bishop Demetri; Prologue From Ochrid by St. Nikolai of Ochrid; Orthodox Saints, Volume Two by George Poulos; The Orthodox Study Bible; Wikipedia article.

Persecution of the Godly

by St. Nikolai of Ochrid

True faith will be persecuted in this world,. The Savior Himself said this to his apostles clearly and publicly [Jn. 16:32]... It is true faith that will be persecuted in this world. Heresies are usually closer to the worldly and demonic spirit and therefore the world and the demons do not persecute their own. To be constantly under persecution - with short breathing-spaces - is a distinguishing mark of the Faith and of the Orthodox Church. This persecution has existed throughout the whole of history, whether externally or internally; externally from unbelievers and internally from heretics.

The Lord Jesus both foretold this and showed it by his own example. And the apostles said it, and showed it by their own example. And all the God-bearing Fathers of the Church, the confessors and martyrs, said this, and showed it by their own example. Can we have any further doubt that it is by the

narrow gate that one enters into the kingdom of God? No; in this there is not foundation or justification for doubt. Can sheep live among wolves and not be molested by them? Can a candle burn among cross-drafts and not be bent to and fro? Can a fruit-tree grow on a high road and be left alone by passers-by? And so, can the Church of devout souls not be persecuted again and again - by pagans, by idol-worshippers, by heretics, by schismatics, by passions and vices, by sin and lawlessness, by the world and by demons? Thus, not one godly soul can remain without persecution, either external or internal, until it is parted from the body and from this world. Maybe someone will challenge this, and expound something different, according to his assessment and logic. But that would not help either the understanding or the logic of a single man. Thousands of those crucified have spoken otherwise; thousands of those burned by fire have cried otherwise; thousands of those beheaded have proved otherwise, and thousands of those drowned have testified otherwise.

Oh, my brethren, the Christian faith is strong, not only when it is in accord with secular understanding and logic, but when (and even especially when) it is opposed to them. All that will live godly shall be persecuted. This the apostles foretold at the beginning of the Christian era, and twenty Christian centuries give a many-voiced echo, confirming the truth of this prophecy.

O risen Lord, give us light that we may be godly to the end and strength that we may endure persecution likewise to the end. To Thee be glory and praise for ever. Amen.



Parish News

We begin the month of February with another feast day which falls on Monday. With the permission of Metropolitan JOSEPH, we will transfer this feast to the day before and so will celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple (also known as the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Candlemas and the Meeting of the Lord) on Sunday, February 1. Matins will, as usual, be at 9AM and at 9:30, the ceremonies particular to this feast day will be observed: the blessing of the candles to be used throughout the year and a procession around the church as the Nunc Dimittis (the Song of Simeon - “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace”) is sung.

The strain
of joy and
praise,

Alleluia.

To the glory
of their
King shall
the ransomed
people sing

Alleluia,
alleluia!

And the choirs
that dwell
on high shall
re-echo through
the sky

Alleluia,
alleluia!

As is the custom in the Western Rite, we will put away the joyful exclamation of the Church, “Alleluia”, before the three pre-Lenten Sundays Septuagesima, Sexagesima, and Quinquagesima. In this 3-week period, we also begin using purple as the liturgical color, we do not sing the Gloria in excelsis, and the dismissal is sung in a simpler manner than that used during the rest of the year. All these things are external preparations for the very serious season of repentance and fasting which begins on Ash Wednesday, February 25.

The ashes which are used to mark the faithful with the sign of the Cross on Ash Wednesday are made from palms from the previous Palm Sunday. Please remember to bring the ones that you may have placed behind icons or crosses in your homes by Sunday, February 22 so that they can be burned for use on Ash Wednesday.

At our Annual Parish Meeting on January 18, Stella Green was elected to the Parish Council and Doug Byrum was re-elected for another term. Council officers will be chosen at the first meeting in February.

Our Food for the Hungry collection of canned and packaged food weighed 134 pounds - a record for us! This food was donated to Martha’s Table for use in their programs to feed the poor. Thank you to all who helped in this effort.

Thanks also to all who helped with the breakfast after the Mass on the day of the annual March for Life. We were joined by our friends from St. Patrick’s Church in Warrenton, VA for the service and breakfast before participating in the March.

Please mark your calendars now for the Sunday of Orthodoxy Vespers on March 1. At this yearly observance, the clergy and faithful of all the Orthodox jurisdictions represented in the Washington area come together to celebrate the end of the iconoclastic controversy and the restoration of icons through the decisions of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787. This year’s Vespers service will be held at Ss. Peter & Paul Church in Potomac, Maryland at 5:30PM. The speaker will be our Antiochian Bishop ANTHONY of the Diocese of Toledo and the Midwest (Antiochian Archdiocese) and the three Antiochian parishes will provide refreshments for the reception following the service. It is expected that the installation of the new icons at Ss. Peter and Paul will be complete in time for this celebration.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>February 2015</h1>						<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</i>
1 Presentation of Our Lord: Candlemas (trans.); comm. Fourth Sunday after Epiphany <i>W</i>	2 (Presentation of Our Lord: Candlemas)	3 St. Blaise, BM, c. 316; St. Anskar of Hamburg, BC, 865	4 New Martyrs of Russia, 1917 and following; St. Joseph of Aleppo, M, 1686	5 St. Agatha, VM, c. 250	6 St. Photius, BCD, 891; St. Dorothy, VM c. 313	7 St. Romuald, Ab, 1027 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
8 Septuagesima <i>V</i>	9 St. Cyril of Alexandria, BCD, 444; St. Apollonia, VM, c. 248	10 St. Scholastica, V, 543	11 St. Gregory II, PC, 731; St. Benedict of Aniane, Ab, 821; St. Theodora, Empress Ma, 860	12	13	14 St. Valentine, PrM, 3rd C <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
15 Sexagesima; Ss. Faustinus & Jovita, Mm, 120 <i>V</i>	16 St. Nicholas of Japan, BC, 1912	17	18 St. Simeon of Jerusalem, BM, 1st c.; St. Colman, BC, 675	19	20	21 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
22 Quinquagesima; Chair of St. Peter at Antioch; St. Joseph of Arimethea, C, 1st c. <i>V</i>	23	24 St. Matthias, Apostle, 1st c.	25 Ash Wednesday; St. Walburga of Heidenheim, V, 779 <i>Blessing of Ashes and Mass at 7:30pm</i> <i>V</i>	26 St. Porphyrius of Gaza, BC, 420; St. Ethelbert, KC, 616	27 St. Raphael of Brooklyn, BC, 1915; St. Alexander, BC, 326; St. Leander, BC, 600	28 St. Oswald of Worcester, BC, 992 <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.