

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

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St. Gregory the Great Orthodox Church - Washington, DC

A Western Rite Congregation of the Antiochian Archdiocese

**From a Homily of
Saint Proclus
Patriarch of Constantinople
died AD 446
Feast Day ~ November 20**

Glorious is our
Paschal Festival;
and truly splendid
this great assembly of the
Christian people. And
within this holy mystery are
contained things both old

and new. The celebration of this week, or rather its joyfulness, is shared by such a multitude, that not alone does man rejoice on earth, but even the powers of heaven are united with us in joyful celebration of Christ's Resurrection. For now the Angels, and the hosts of the Archangels, also keep holiday this day, and stand waiting for the triumphant return from this earth of Christ our Lord, Who is King of heaven. And the multitude of the Blessed likewise rejoice, proclaiming the Christ Who was begotten before the day star rose. The earth rejoices, now washed by divine blood. The sea rejoices, honored as it was by his Feet upon its waters. And ever more let each soul rejoice, who is born again of water and the Holy Ghost; and at last set free from the ancient curse!

Inside:

<i>St. Gregory of Sinai</i>	3
<i>Winning the Battle</i>	5
<i>Parish News</i>	8
<i>Holy Week at St. Gregory's</i>	9
<i>Calendar</i>	11

With such great joy does Christ fill our hearts this day by his Resurrection, not alone because He gives us the gladness of this day, but because He has also given us salvation through His Passion, immortality through His Death, healing for our wounds, and resurrection from our fall! And long ago, Beloved, this Paschal Mystery, begun in Egypt, was symbolically pointed out to us in the Old Law, in the sacrifice of the lamb. And now, in the Gospel, let us celebrate the Resurrection of the Lamb: our Pasch.

Then a lamb of the flock was slain, as the Law laid down [Ex. 12]; now Christ, the Lamb of God, is offered up. There a sheep from the sheepfold; here, in place of the sheep, the Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. There the sprinkled blood upon the doorposts was a sign of deliverance for the people of God; here the precious Blood of Christ was poured out for the deliverance of the whole world: that we might be forgiven our sins. There the firstborn of Egypt were slain; here the manifold children of sinners are made clean confessing the Lamb. There Pharaoh and his fearful host were drowned in the sea; here the spiritual Pharaoh with all his people are immersed in the deep of baptism. There the children of the Hebrews, crossing over the Red Sea, sang their song of victory to their Deliverer, singing; *let us sing to the Lord for he is gloriously magnified* [Ex. 15:1]; here those found worthy of baptism sing their song of victory, singing: *One Holy, One Lord Jesus Christ, in the glory of God the Father.*'

The prophet also sings: *the Lord hath reigned, he is clothed with beauty* [Ps. 93:1]. The Hebrews, after the crossing of the Red Sea, ate manna in the desert; now, those who have come forth from the waters of baptism eat bread that came down from heaven. For His is the voice that says: *I am the living bread, which cometh down from heaven*" [John 6:51].

Then let us feast; *but not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.* [I Cor.5:8], so that after our departure from this

life, we may together with the Angels give praise to the Lord of glory, singing with them: *the Lord hath reigned: he is clothed with beauty*” [Ps.93:1]. To him be Glory and Honor and Adoration for ever. Amen.

St. Gregory of Sinai

Feast Day ~ April 6



Life was dangerous for Christians living in parts of Asia Minor in the 13th century. St. Gregory of Sinai and his family found out just how dangerous when they were suddenly dragged from their home near the city of Smyrna by a gang of Arab Muslims (called “Hagarenes” in that day and place) intent on making slaves of the Christians. The members of this family were heartbroken as they were forced to leave everything behind and travel with the band of raiders.

When they entered the town of Laodicea, a predominantly Christian village, the father of the family begged their masters to allow them one more opportunity to worship as Christians, a request which was surprisingly granted. As they entered the church where the Liturgy was in progress, the captives lifted up their voices to join in the singing. They poured out all their sorrow in their chanting and the people of this congregation were amazed to hear such singing. When the service ended, they surrounded their visitors to find out who they were and where they were from. When they heard the story of their capture and the permission that

had been granted for a brief visit to the church, the parishioners decided to pool their money and see if they could buy back freedom for these people. The priest took the money which had been collected and haggled with the leader of the band of raiders until an acceptable price for the captives had been settled upon.

This incident happened when Gregory was a young man and it made such an impression on him that it affected the rest of his life. As soon as it was possible, he left his family and traveled to Cyprus, where he entered the first stage of monastic life. Soon he traveled to St. Catherine’s Monastery on Mt. Sinai, where Moses had received the Commandments. Gregory learned more of the monastic ascetic practices here and also performed expected manual duties as cook, baker, and copyist.

Gregory’s next travels were to Jerusalem where he could walk in the footsteps of Our Lord. He then moved to Crete and met the monk Arsenios who taught him the Jesus Prayer and introduced him to the practice of stillness and quiet in prayer called *hesychism*. To engage more fully in this practice, Gregory moved to Mt. Athos where he remained for about twenty-five years.

Now the monk dedicated his life fully to fasting, to singing through the Psalter, to developing the practice of inner prayer in silence. Like St. Gregory Palamas, his contemporary also living on Mt. Athos, Gregory of Sinai was influential in establishing Mt. Athos as a center for hesychism. He founded several monastic cells on Mt. Athos and several monasteries in Thrace. Many of St. Gregory’s teachings are recorded in the *Philokalia*, a collection of writings on the spiritual life. Perhaps remembering his fervor in singing that had saved him from slavery as a young man, St. Gregory also wrote hymns for the church.

It is sad that, after so many years of peace and solitude in a life of prayer, St. Gregory had to leave Mt. Athos near the end of his life. Turkish raiders began to attack the monasteries on Mt. Athos

and it may be that the memory of his early experience led St. Gregory to leave and seek refuge in Bulgaria. He founded another monastery there in the mountains on the coast of the Black Sea, and that is where he fell asleep in the Lord around the year 1346.

It is still dangerous for Christians living in many areas of the world. May the intercessions of St. Gregory of Sinai protect those who are in danger and may the songs of the Church bring comfort to them in times of distress. Holy Gregory, pray for us.

Sources: A Cloud of Witnesses by Bishop Demetri Khoury; on-line articles from Orthodox Wiki, The Orthodox Church in America, and Wikipedia.

Winning the Battle

by Kh. Rebecca Alford

We hear much about weapons today - from the sword as a weapon for beheading to nuclear weapons as a means of mass destruction. In this atmosphere, it is hard to imagine something as benign as using a song as a weapon. But that is just what has happened at times in the history of the Church.

The first examples we have of this are efforts at combating heresy. In the fourth century, with many independent thinkers developing their own versions of Christianity, Bardesanes, a Syrian teacher, began writing hymns - songs expressing the faith in poetic form in the Syrian language with music that could easily be sung. These songs became very popular with many people. But Bardesanes had fallen into the heresy of Gnosticism and his hymns reflected that departure from Orthodox Christian thought.

Bardesanes died around 222 but his hymns were still being sung 140 years later. St. Ephrem the Syrian, living in the city of

Edessa in the 360's, heard these songs and determined to combat the false teachings with hymns of his own composition. St. Ephrem composed numerous hymns (over 400 are known to us today) and it is said that he trained young girls to sing them in the marketplace. These verses with repeated refrains caught the attention not only of the followers of Bardesanes but also of the Arians, Marcionites, Manichees, and members of other Gnostic sects. Eventually, all other beliefs fell by the wayside, leaving Christianity triumphant - thanks to a great "weapon" in Christianity's arsenal: hymns.

A few years later, in another part of the Roman Empire, St. Ambrose was elected Bishop of the Diocese of Milan. He also had to contend with heresy, as the beliefs of Arius, which denied the divinity of Christ, had continued to hold sway with many people, including Emperors and clergy. In 385, Emperor Valentinian II demanded that the bishop hand over one of the churches for the use of Arian soldiers. The bishop refused. Again the next year, the demand was made, and this time Bishop Ambrose and his people barricaded themselves inside the church. As the soldiers surrounded the building, St. Ambrose led the people in the singing of Psalms, teaching them how to sing antiphonally - one side alternating with the other, verse by verse - in a style popular in the East, as St. Augustine has related. The Emperor rescinded the order and the soldiers left the people and the church unharmed. St. Ambrose wrote many hymns and is known as the "Father of Western Hymnody". The teachings of Arius were eventually defeated and Orthodox Christianity once again triumphed through the simplest of weapons: Psalms.

In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, St. Bede the Venerable tells us of an unusual victory for Orthodox Christianity over heresy and paganism in the 430's in Britain. The heresy was Pelagianism - the belief that man has been unaffected by Adam's fall and can exercise his free will apart from the grace of God - and it was infecting the health of the Church in that far

corner of the Christian world. The British bishops were having difficulty eradicating this heresy while at the same time working to convert those who were still pagans, and so they appealed to the Church in Gaul for help. Soon, Bishops (Saints) Germanus of Auxerre and Lupus of Troyes arrived to give aid to their British brothers. Many pagans were influenced by the teachings of these two saintly bishops to become Christians, and many Christians who had been swayed by the Pelagian heresy were brought back into the Orthodox fold.

As the visiting bishops were preparing to celebrate the Paschal Vigil and baptize a number of converts who were soldiers in the army of the Britons, it became apparent that the pagan Saxons and Picts had joined forces and were about to attack the Britons. Just after their baptisms, the soldiers had to prepare for battle. St. Germanus offered to take charge of the battle plan and the soldiers agreed. The bishop had studied the terrain in the surrounding hills and he now sent soldiers to station themselves in the valley beneath these hills, telling them to respond appropriately to his cry when he would make it. Then, just as the enemy was approaching, St. Germanus sang out with the jubilant exclamation which we make at every Paschal Vigil. The soldiers loudly responded in the same way and this was done three times. The echo which resounded through that valley, bouncing off every hill, made the army sound many times its size and the Saxon and Pictish soldiers fled in terror. Thus, a battle of Christians was won without bloodshed and through the greatest and simplest song of the Church: Alleluia!

We may think “if only the battles that are raging in our world today were that simple and we could win them with a song!” We should realize that all battles are skirmishes in the ultimate war between good and evil. Sometimes the battle is within ourselves when we must make a choice about our actions or words. And sometimes the battle is between nationalities, ethnic groups, or belief systems. But always, the ultimate battle that is being fought is between good and evil.

St. Paul admonishes us that in this spiritual warfare - which is the source of all earthly warfare - we are to put on the *whole armor of God*: the *breastplate of righteousness*, the *shield of faith*, the *helmet of salvation*, and the *sword of the Spirit* [Ephesians 6:13-17]. What better weapons to add to these than the psalms and hymns and spiritual songs [Colossians 3:16] - and joyful exclamations of the Church. Armed with such weapons and by the grace of God, we cannot help but win the battle.

Parish News

We share in the joy of Sister Michele Green, as she has now been clothed and received as a member of the religious community of nuns at the Monastery of the Transfiguration in Ellwood City, Pennsylvania. Thanks to the monastery’s on-line streaming of all their services, we were able to witness the ceremony. We will continue to offer mutual prayers of support.

His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH has requested that we support the March for Marriage, which will take place in Washington on Saturday, April 25, in advance of the Supreme Court’s decision regarding the ability of states to maintain legal marriage as between a man and a woman. This is a teaching of our Church and it is important that Orthodox Christians witness to our secular world by making known historic Christian beliefs.

Our Lenten classes will conclude on April 3 with a discussion of several modern “classic” writings on the spiritual life, including *The Lenten Spring* by the recently reposed Fr. Thomas Hopko. We begin with a Lenten pot-luck supper at 6:30 and end with Stations of the Cross.

Holy Week at St. Gregory's

Palm Sunday, April 5 - Matins at 9AM, Blessing of Palms, Procession and Solemn Mass with the Passion according to Matthew at 9:30 AM.

Monday & Tuesday, April 6 & 7 - Vespers at 7PM. Mass at 7:30PM
with the Passions according to St. Mark and St. Luke.

Wednesday, April 8 - Vespers at 7PM. Mass with the Blessing of Oils and Unction at 7:30PM

Maundy Thursday, April 9 - 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, April 10 - 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, April 11 - 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 and Lauds of Easter beginning at 9PM. Paschal feast following the Liturgy.

Easter Day, April 12 - Mass at 11AM.



*St. Gregory the Great Orthodox Church is located at
1443 Euclid St. NW, Washington DC
(202) 299-0479*

E-mail: FrNicholas@AOL.COM Web page: www.stgregoryoc.org

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>April 2015</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 Seven Sorrows of the BVM; St. Sixtus I, PM, 127 <i>Lenten Supper & Stations of the Cross at 6:30pm</i>	4 St. Isidore of Seville, BCD, 636 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
5 Palm Sunday <i>R/V</i>	6 Monday in Holy Week; St. Notker, C, 912 <i>Mass at 7:30pm V</i>	7 Tuesday in Holy Week (trans. St. Tikhon of Moscow, BC, Patron of the Western Rite, 1925) <i>Mass at 7:30pm V</i>	8 Wednesday in Holy Week <i>Mass at 7:30pm W</i>	9 Maundy Thursday <i>Mass at 7:30pm W</i>	10 Good Friday <i>Liturgy at noon B</i>	11 Holy Saturday (trans. St. Leo the Great, PCD, 461) <i>Mass at 9pm V/W</i>
12 Pascha: The Resurrection of Our Lord <i>W</i>	13 Monday in the Octave of Easter (omit St. Hermenegild, C, 583)	14 Tuesday in the Octave of Easter (omit St. Justin, M, 167)	15 Wednesday in the Octave of Easter	16 Thursday in the Octave of Easter	17 Friday in the Octave of Easter (omit St. Anicetus, PM, c. 168)	18 Saturday in the Octave of Easter <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
19 Low Sunday: First Sunday after Easter <i>W</i>	20 St. Tikhon of Moscow, BC, Patron of the Western Rite, 1925 (trans.)	21 St. Leo the Great, PCD, 461 (trans.)	22 Ss. Soter, 174 & Caius, 296, Bb, Mm	23 St. George, M, 303	24	25 St. Mark the Evangelist, 1st c. <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
26 Second Sunday after Easter; Ss. Cletus, BM, 89 & Marcellinus, BM,304) <i>W</i>	27	28 St. Vitalis of Milan, M, 3rd c.	29	30 Vigil of Ss. Philip & James		

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.