

# ✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

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*St. Gregory the Great Orthodox Church  
1443 Euclid Street, NW, Washington, DC - stgregoryoc.org  
A Western Rite Congregation of the Antiochian Archdiocese*

## From a Homily of Saint Augustine Bishop of Hippo died AD 430 Feast Day ~ August 28

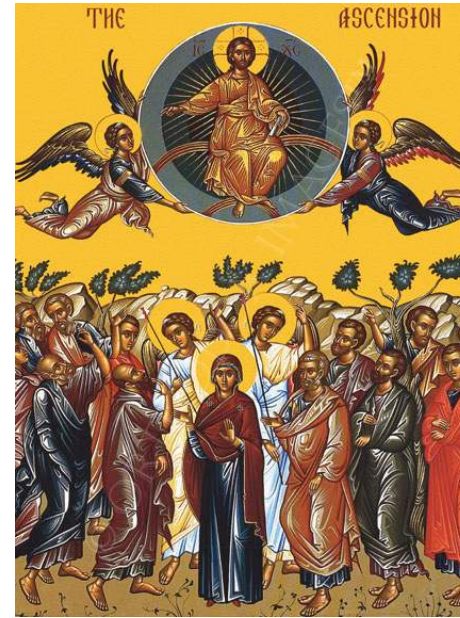
**O**n this day, that is, the fortieth after His Resurrection, the Lord ascended into heaven. We have not seen, but we believe. They who beheld Him proclaimed what they

saw, and they have filled the whole earth: *There are no speeches nor languages where their voices are not heard. Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth; and their words unto the ends of the world.* [Ps. 19:3, 4] And so they have reached even unto us, and awakened us from sleep. And lo! This death is celebrated throughout the world.

**R**emember the psalm [57:6]. To whom was it said: *Be thou exalted, O God?* To whom was it said? Was *Be thou exalted* said to the Father, Who never was made lowly? Be Thou exalted: Thou, Who wast enclosed in the womb of a mother. Thou Who wast formed in her whom Thou made. Thou Who hast lain in a manger, Thou Who as a true Child in

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the flesh drank milk from the breast. Thou Who while borne in Thy Mother's arms sustained the world. Thou whom the venerable Simeon beheld a child, and extolled as mighty. Thou Whom the Widow Anna saw at the breast, and knew Omnipotent. Thou Who has hungered because of us, suffered thirst for us, grown weary on the way (but did the Bread of Life hunger, the Fountain thirst, the Way grow weary?). Thou Who hast borne all these things for us. Thou Who hast

slept, yet unsleeping watches over Israel. And lastly, Thou Who was seized, bound, scourged, crowned with thorns, hung upon the Tree, pierced with a lance, died, and was buried. Be Thou exalted, O God!

**B**e Thou exalted, he cries, *exalted above the heavens*: for thou art God. Take Thou Thy seat in heaven Who hung from the Cross. As Judge to come Thou art awaited Who awaited and received judgement. Who could believe this without his help Who raised the needy from the earth, and uplifted the poor from the dunghill? He has raised up His own needy flesh, and placed it with the Princes of his people, with whom He shall judge the living and the dead. He has placed this needy flesh with those to whom He said: *Ye shall sit on twelve seats, judging twelve tribes of Israel* [Matt. 19:28]

**B**e Thou therefore exalted above the heavens, O God! This has come to pass. It is now fulfilled. Yet we also say of that which was proclaimed of the future: *Be thou exalted above the heavens, O*

*God! We have not seen it, but we believe. For lo! Before our eyes is now fulfilled that which follows: Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: and thy glory above all the earth. He cannot believe the first who does not see this. For what does, And thy glory above all the earth mean but Thy Church which is spread over all the earth. Thy Spouse spread over all the earth, thy Bride over all the earth? Thy Beloved, Thy Dove, Thy Consort! She is Thy glory.*

## *St. Sophia the Righteous*

*Feast Day ~ May 6*

**H**ow often did our Lord tell his followers that God's ways are not the ways of the world? How many times did he turn accepted "wisdom" upside down? The saints are people who have taken our Lord's words to heart and followed him completely, sometimes appearing as fools to the world. St. Sophia the Righteous is one from the last century who shows us this way.

**S**ophia was born in the village of Trebizond, Turkey, and led the normal life of a devout Orthodox Christian in this area of the world for the first part of her life. Remaining in her village among her extended family, she married and had a son. But her life began to change after seven years of marriage when her husband mysteriously disappeared and then her infant son died. Sophia took her grief and loneliness to God in prayer, spending much of her time on a nearby mountain top. Her life as an ascetic had begun.

**I**n 1919, shortly before the forced exchange of Christians from Turkey with Muslims from Greece, Sophia left with others from her village to go to Greece. There was a violent storm as they traveled by sea and when the winds subsided, the captain remarked that there must be a very righteous person aboard, as all were saved. The other passengers looked toward Sophia, who had spent the entire time in a corner of the ship, praying. Years later, she



recalled this incident and told how, to her eyes, the waves had been filled with angels and she had conversed with the Theotokos.

**U**pon arrival in Greece, Sophia had a vision of the Mother of God, who said to her: "Come to my house." When she asked where her house was, she was told "in Kleisoura." So Sophia found the Monastery of the Nativity of the Theotokos in Kleisoura and moved there. Although she never officially became a monastic, she remained in the monastery for the rest of her life.

**S**ophia lived in the monastery kitchen, where she slept only a few hours every night in the cold fireplace. She ate very little, only enough to survive, her clothing was torn and her sandals had holes in them. In the eyes of the world, this woman was a "tramp"; indeed, the villagers called her "Crazy Sophia." But in the eyes of God, she was already a saint.

**S**ophia did as St. Paul commanded and "prayed without ceasing", keeping a lighted votive lamp before a fresco of the Blessed Virgin. When anyone gave her new clothing, she would immediately give it away to a poor person. She sometimes also received gifts of money, which she would hide and then retrieve whenever she discovered another person's need.

**H**aving shed all the trappings of the world and having left behind all the habits, customs, desires, and needs of the worldly, Sophia was in greater communion with the saints and angels and was endowed with the gift of foreknowledge. When visitors came to the monastery to see her, she would call them by name before they introduced themselves and she knew their

problems and family circumstances without their telling her. Her advice was always simple and clear.

Often visitors to the monastery videotaped their conversations with Sophia so that not only her words are preserved but also the sight of this humble ascetic. Among her many simple sayings are these:

*The fear of God makes a person wise. What is the fear of God? Not that one should be afraid of God, but to be afraid to sadden someone, to harm someone, to do them no wrong, and to not make accusations. This is wisdom. After all this, God will illumine you as to what to do in your life.*

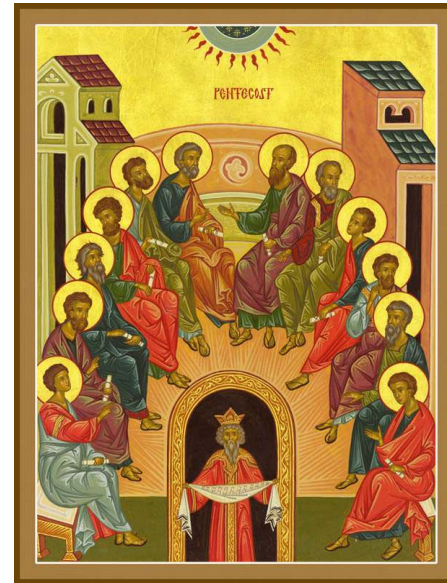
*The angels speak every day. God sends the angels to see if people are repenting.*

In 1967, Sophia became very ill with a disease affecting her stomach. Without medical attention, she was healed through a vision of St. Mary, St. George, and the Archangel Gabriel. As with most ascetics, Sophia had a great affinity for wild animals such as bears in the nearby forest and birds and snakes.

When she fell asleep in the Lord on May 6, 1974, Sophia was buried on the monastery grounds. In 2011, St. Sophia the Righteous was named among the saints by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. She is known as an eldress because of her simple wisdom and an ascetic because of her prayer and fasting. We ask for the intercessions of St. Sophia the Righteous, especially for the poor and needy and for those who grieve. Holy Sophia, pray for us.

*Sources: website of the American Carpatho-Russian Diocese of the U.S.A.; internet article by the Very Rev. Dr. Edward Pehanich; Mystogogy (Johnsanidopoulos.com)*

## Parish News



We continue to bask in the joy of the Resurrection in the month of May, through the celebration of our Lord's Ascension and ending the month with the great feast of Pentecost. Mass for the Ascension will be offered on the Eve, Wednesday, May 20, at 7:30PM (Vespers at 7). Several additional feast days will be observed this month: The Finding of the Holy Cross on Sunday, May 3 and the Sunday in the Octave of the Dedication of our Church on

May 10. Vespers will be cancelled for May 9, as Metropolitan JOSEPH will be at St. George's on 16<sup>th</sup> St. that weekend. All are invited to attend Vespers at St. George's at 5:30PM.

Many thanks to all those who helped to make Holy Week and Pascha so beautiful: altar servers, bread bakers, flower arrangers, singers, cooks... all worked together to beautify this most important week of the Church year and to make our celebrations joyful.

We welcome Bernt Johnson into the holy Orthodox Church. Bernt was chrismated at the Easter Vigil and has taken as his patron saint St. Anthony of Egypt.

A parish work day has been scheduled for Saturday, June 6. Please mark your calendars now to help with our parish "spring cleaning".

# *Spiritual Thirst*

by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

*With spiritual thirst longing,  
wearily I wandered in a desolate desert waste,  
And a six-winged seraph  
Appeared to me at the crossing of the ways..*

(From “The Prophet” by Alexander Puskin)

Years and centuries have passed since Alexander Pushkin wrote the remarkable words of his poem, yet they remain an appropriate inscription to man’s destiny on earth: “with spiritual thirst longing...” Civilizations have followed one after another, the external forms of human life have changed, the face of the earth has changed, but this spiritual thirst remains ever indestructible, ever unquenchable. It is a gift, given to human beings alone as the sign and essence of their very humanity, and it is both precious and tormenting: precious because it always draws men and women upward, not allowing them to find peace in the exclusive pursuit of animal pleasure, and enabling them to taste communion with transcendent joys that cannot be compared to anything else; tormenting because it so often contradicts their earthly instincts, and transforms their entire life into struggle, search, restlessness.

Almost everything in this world seems to tell us: give up this spiritual thirst, renounce it and you will be full and satisfied, healthy and happy... And sure enough, complete ideologies have sprung up, based on the rejection and renunciation of spiritual thirst, on hatred toward it - ideologies striving with all their might to get us to suppress within ourselves the very source of this thirst, to admit its delusion and self-deception, and then to join in building a life now purified of all searching whatsoever. If anything sets apart our 20<sup>th</sup> century from all previous centuries -



then above all it is the extreme sharpening of two opposing, antithetical understandings of human life and of man himself. One view affirms that man is man precisely because of the spiritual thirst within him, a searching, a restlessness for transcendence. For the other, man begins his human destiny only after having killed this thirst. In this battle everything else, all that is occurring in the contemporary world, is ultimately secondary. For everything else

flows from the depths of this primary question: politics, economics, culture, everything people argue about so passionately, and in the name of which they fight each other.

Thus, whether we like it or not, whether we realize it or not, the *religious question* is at the heart and very center of contemporary life. For religion, by its very nature is in fact the sign and presence in this world of *spiritual thirst*. Just as the smell of smoke tells us there is a fire nearby even if we do not see it, so religion’s presence in the world, whatever its forms, is reliable testimony that man’s spiritual thirst, spiritual search, has not ceased to live within him...

What is this a thirst *for*? What is its longing *about*? With *what* search is it filled? It is these questions we need to address because at this moment in the world there is no subject more important. The world now stands at the very “crossing of the ways” of which Pushkin spoke.

Today, the various appeals directed to man collide with each other in the world with unprecedented force; the various “ways” constantly intertwine, cross and then diverge. And above

them all, looming ever more terrible and striking, is the specter of unimaginable catastrophes, unprecedented upheavals. “If anyone has an ear to hear, let him hear...” [Rev. 13:9]

**I**t is already too late for us to resolve all this by partial measures, by patching material that is now threadbare and rotting. Again we begin to understand why the Gospel proclaims salvation - precisely *salvation* - and why it is directed to those who are perishing. Christ says: “I came to cast fire upon the earth, and how I long that it were already kindled” [see Lk. 12:49]. Religion is truly religion only when it concerns what is most essential, when it reveals simultaneously both man’s spiritual thirst and the response to that thirst; when it is fire, a fire that both purifies and transforms our weak and shameful life. We do not have the strength of the “six-winged seraph” who revealed himself to the prophet at “the crossing of the ways.” But each of us, according to the measure of his strength, is called today to be a witness to that “one thing needful.” [Lk. 10:42].

**T**he New Testament ends with these terrifying, yet joyful words: “Let the evildoer still do evil and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy. Behold I am coming soon...Let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price...” [Rev. 22:11, 17]. If only we would not betray this gift of spiritual thirst and exchange it for something else, if only we would open our eyes and open our ears to that shower of light, love and beauty pouring on us eternally. May God help all of us to be truthful and steadfast, humble and loving for then it will be impossible to hide the ever-shining light, the salvation given to the world.

*This essay is one of many that Fr. Alexander gave as talks on Radio Liberty to listeners in Soviet Russia. After his repose in 1983, some of these talks were compiled into three books on The Celebration of Faith, The Church Year, and The Virgin Mary. Despite the 20<sup>th</sup> century references, these essays are as timely today as they were then.*

**St. Gregory Orthodox Church**  
c/o 9415 Wire Avenue  
Silver Spring, MD 20901

*Address Correction Requested*

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>May 2015</h1>					1 Ss. Philip & James, Apostles, 1 <sup>st</sup> c.	2 St. Athanasius, BCD, 373  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
3 Finding of the Holy Cross; comm. Third Sunday after Easter  <i>W</i>	4 St. Monica, Ma, 387	5	6 Dedication of St. Gregory's; St. John before the Latin Gate	7 of the Octave of Dedication; St. Alexis Toth, PrC, 1909 and St. John of Beverly, BC, 721	8 of the Octave of Dedication; Apparition of St. Michael the Archangel	9 of the Octave of Dedication; St. Gregory Nazianzen, BCD, 389  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
10 Sunday in the Oct. of Dedication; comm. Fourth Sun. after Easter; Ss. Gordian, 362 & Epimachus, 250, Mm <i>W</i>	11 of the Octave of Dedication	12 of the Octave of Dedication; St. Epiphanius, BC, c. 403	13 Octave Day of Dedication	14 St. Boniface of Tarsus, M, 290	15 St. Pachomius, Ab, 346	16 St. Brendan the Navigator, 577, Ab  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
17 Fifth Sunday after Easter  <i>W</i>	18 Rogation Monday; St. Venantius, M, 250; St. Theodotus & comp., Mm, c. 303	19 Rogation Tuesday; St. Pudentiana, V, c.160 St. Dunstan, BC	20 Vigil of the Ascension  <i>Mass at 7:30pm W</i>	21 Ascension Day	22 of the Octave of Ascension	23 of the Octave of Ascension  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
24 Sunday after the Ascension; St. Vincent of Lerins, C, 450  <i>W</i>	25 of the Octave of Ascension; St. Urban, PM, 230; St. Aldhelm, BC, 709  <i>(Memorial Day)</i>	26 of the Octave of Ascension; St. Augustine of Canterbury, BC, 605; St. Eleutherius, PM, c. 189	27 of the Octave of Ascension; St. Bede, CD, 735; St. John I, PM, 526	28 Octave Day of the Ascension; St. Germanus of Paris, BC, 576	29	30 Vigil of Pentecost; St. Felix I, PM, 274  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
31 Pentecost (omit St. Petronilla, VM, c. 100 )  <i>R</i>						<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</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.