

# ✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

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*St. Gregory the Great Orthodox Church*  
*A Western Rite Congregation of the Antiochian Archdiocese*  
*stgregoryoc.org*

## *An excerpt from a Homily of St. Gregory Palamas d. 1359*

**A**sower went out to sow his seed [Luke 8:5]. Who is he? The Lord Himself, who through the psalmist foretold concerning Himself *I will open my mouth in parables* [Ps. 78:2]. But whence did He come out, who is everywhere present? Whither did

He come, who is absent from nowhere? Again He said of Himself, *I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world* [John 16:28]. Without being separated from the Father's bosom He who is in the world and by whom the world was made came out and entered the world. He who fills heaven and earth came down from heaven to earth. Consequently, the coming forth of the only-begotten Son of God, and His descent from heaven, represent nothing other than His manifestation of divinity down to human nature at the other extreme.

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**H**e came out in this way “to sow His seed.” What seed is this? The word of instruction, the words of eternal life, the commandments of immortality, the promise of restoration to life, and the gospel of the kingdom of heaven. These all belong to Him, for He said of Himself, *The words that I speak unto you they are spirit, and they are life* [John 6:63]... Such seed is His alone and He alone ceaselessly sows it, showing in this way that He is God over all. Every teacher, evangelist and preacher of godliness and pious living also sows the

words of life, the word of evangelical and heavenly teaching, but once he has served God's will in his generation he departs, nor did he exist previously. Moreover, the word of salvation which he sows by teaching is not his own but belongs to God, who assists him and *gives utterance at the opening of his mouth*. [Eph. 6:19]

**O**ur Lord Jesus Christ, however, being true God, has this seed of eternal life as His own possession, and is always sowing it through the natural law in creation, through the law given in writing to the Israelites, through the prophetic word, and later through the gospel of grace. So the season for such sowing is the entire life-time of every person, or rather, the whole period from the Lord's advent until the end of the world. Harvest time for this seed will be at the Lord's second coming and manifestation, which we await. That is why the apostle says, *He that ploweth should plow in hope* [Gal. 6:8]. Also the psalmist says, *They that sow in tears now shall reap in joy* at that time [Ps. 126:5].

**T**he Lord went out to sow His seed. Where? In people's hearts, for these are the fields which receive spiritual seeds. Some of

them resemble a path, as they have been trampled down and pressed solid by evil thoughts and passions, and by the most wicked demons who oversee these things. Those who are like rocky ground are unable, on account of their faint-heartedness and hardness, to hold on to the seeds of teaching to the end, or to bear fruit through them for eternal life. As for those who resemble ground which brings forth thorns, they are intent on possessions and wealth, fleeting pleasures and what springs from these...

**T**he Lord cried, 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear'. [Luke 8:8] Those who have ears to hear are the ones who listen with their minds and with understanding... Before all else, brethren, I beseech you, let us hear with understanding that the Lord did not say that He went out to plow the human fields, or to break up the ground two or three times, dig up the roots of the weeds and smooth out the clods of earth, that is to say, to prepare our hearts for cultivation, but that He went out immediately to sow. Why? Because this preliminary work on our souls prior to sowing ought to be done by us. That is why the Forerunner of the gospel of grace, anticipating this fact, says with a loud voice, *Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight*. [Matt 3:3], and *Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. [Matt 3:2] Our preparation and the starting point of repentance is blaming ourselves, confession, and abstention from evil.

**L**et us repent, brethren, and display fruits worthy of repentance. Let each of us abstain from his wicked ways, and let us learn to speak and do what is good. Let us prepare ourselves to receive the heavenly seed, the word of life.

## *Welcome to Our Church!*

**A**s this newsletter is being printed, our "Use and Occupancy" permit for our new home at 13407 Roxbury Road in Silver

Spring, Maryland should soon be issued. For the past seventeen months, we have worked diligently to follow the mandates of Montgomery County in accomplishing all that was necessary for getting to this point. While some of the outside work, such as plantings around the property, will remain unfinished until Spring, everything that we need to begin our full parish life here has been accomplished. We have enjoyed the hospitality and generosity of the Woods Academy in Bethesda while we were in transition, but now we are ready to make this our parish home.

**N**ow is the time to open our doors and welcome others into our church. *Now* is the time to share our faith joyfully with those who are searching. *Now* is the time for each of us to be evangelists in whatever ways we find in our everyday lives. Every Christian is charged with this responsibility.

**A**s we begin to make our presence known in this community, to advertise our services, to meet our neighbors and to enjoy the beauty of this property, we pray that we may show forth the light of Christ as we welcome others in His name.

## *St. Anskar, Bishop & Confessor*

*Feast Day ~ February 3*

**E**very housekeeper knows the feelings of frustration and failure while scrubbing, mopping and dusting to clean the house, when a set of muddy paws or an accident of spilled food spoils all the hours of labor. These feelings - greatly magnified - must have been experienced by many of the saints who took to heart our Lord's call to "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" [Matthew 28:19].

**T**he efforts of many missionary saints were not met with immediate success: some were martyred before they could see

the results of their teaching; often converts relapsed into their former pagan way of life. Sometimes a ruler who had become a Christian and whose subjects were following their leader's example was succeeded by a ruler who put an end to Christian conversion during his reign. Helping others to come to the knowledge of the love of Christ has never been an easy task. But we know that when a seed is planted it will grow and produce fruit, even if it takes many years to germinate and many other missionaries to carry on the work. Such was the case with St. Anskar, 9<sup>th</sup> century "Apostle to the Scandinavians".

Anskar was the son of a noble Christian Frankish family, born in 801 near Amiens. His mother died when he was young and his father sent him to Corbie Abbey to live and later to be educated by the Benedictine monks in Picardy, where Anskar eventually took monastic vows. As a boy, Anskar did not show any particular interest in religion until he experienced a vision regarding the mother he had lost. He saw her with the Blessed Virgin Mary, assuring him of her happiness and from that moment on, Anskar became serious in his devotion to Christ and the saints. Such

visions continued throughout his life, guiding him in the decisions and actions he took regarding his missionary endeavors.

In 826, Harald Klak, an exiled Danish king, came to the court of Louis the Pious (one of Charlemagne's sons) at Ingleheim to receive Christian baptism. He had expected - as had the Franks who were helping him - to return home to consolidate his rule and bring more of his Danish subjects to Christianity. Anskar and a



group of other monks were sent with King Harald to carry out this latter work.

But Harald was not accepted as a king over others and the expectation for mass conversions did not happen. So in 829, King Louis sent Anskar and the friar Witmar as missionaries to Sweden and a small congregation was formed there. (Another of Anskar's visions preceded his journey to Sweden in which he met an abbot who gave him instructions as to what would happen.) In 831, Anskar was consecrated Archbishop of Hamburg, a new diocese with the challenge of evangelizing the northern lands - Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The new archbishop first founded a monastery and school for the purpose of educating young Danes.

In 845, without warning, the Danes raided Hamburg and destroyed the church and all its treasures and books. Two years later, Anskar was given the diocese of Bremen but due to some canonical irregularities regarding the division of dioceses, this was not made permanent until 864.

In the meantime, Bishop Anskar continued to work for the conversion of the people of the north. During a Danish civil war, he established good relations with the king; he was able to have Christianity accepted as a "tolerated" religion and was given permission to build a church. During several more trips to Sweden, he found the king receptive to accepting the Christian God, but only as one of several gods. The Swedes expected to test this new God's power to help them by striking a deal: Would He give them success in battle if they would endure the Christian fasts?

When Archbishop Anskar passed from this life into the next in the year 865, there was not much to show for his missionary efforts in Scandinavia - a few churches, some converts, but not the conversion of kingdoms as had been hoped. But seeds had been planted which came to new life in future generations. The introduction to Christianity that St. Anskar had made to the people

of the north, the increased contact with Christian practices and beliefs after raids in the British Isles and Germany, and the greater desire on the part of later rulers to accept Christianity finally brought to realization the missionary dreams of St. Anskar.

We know from the *Life* of St. Anskar, written by Rimbert, his successor as Archbishop, that St. Anskar was diligent in his ascetic practices, living only on bread and water at times. He was charitable to the poor and worked to free slaves. May we remember St. Anskar's missionary zeal, his willingness to plant the seeds of the Gospel in a sometimes hostile land, and his patience in adversity. Holy Anskar, pray for us!

*References: Peter Brown: The Rise of Western Christendom; David Hugh Farmer: The Oxford Dictionary of Saints; Richard Fletcher: The Barbarian Conversion; Andrew Louth: Greek East and Latin West - the Church AD 681-1071; online article from Wikipedia.*

## Parish News



We begin this month with the celebration of the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple on the Eve, Wednesday, February 1. Also called the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, or Candlemas, and the Meeting of the Lord, this feast day includes the blessing of the candles which will be used during this year and we end by anticipating the feast of St. Blaise (February 3) with the blessing of throats.

At our Annual Parish Meeting on January 22, we welcomed new Parish Council members, Karl Tsuji and Nathaniel Green. Many thanks to Dave Caldwell and Patrick Woolley for their faithful service as they rotate off the Council.

Thanks to all who helped to collect 129 pounds of canned and packaged food for the "Food For Hungry People" program of our Archdiocese and thanks to the Caldwell family for delivering this food to the Manna Food Bank in Gaithersburg.

Saturday, February 11, will be the last day for Epiphany house Blessings. Please speak with Fr. Nicholas or Fr. Raphael as soon as possible to schedule a blessing.

His Grace, Bishop JOHN, recently represented the archdiocese at the March for Life. While here he was very pleased to see the renovations to our property and looks forward to being with us for a blessing of our new church later this year.

As the Epiphany season draws to a close, we begin to make our preparations for the greatest of Christian feasts - Pascha. The first of our preparations are liturgical: the *Gloria in excelsis* is omitted from the Mass, we begin to use purple vestments, and the word which best expresses our Christian joy is put aside for a time of reflection and repentance until it reappears at our Easter celebration: *Alleluia!* February 5 is the last Sunday after Epiphany and the three "gesima" Sundays (Septuagesima, Sexagesima and Quinquagesima) precede the beginning of Lent on Ash Wednesday, March 1.

## Candlemas: February 2

In accordance with Mosaic law Mary came to the Temple forty days (inclusively reckoned) after bearing Jesus both to be



purified and to present him, as a male firstborn, to the Lord [see Luke 2:22 ff]. The commemoration began c. 350 at Jerusalem, where it took place on 14 February, the fortieth day of Epiphany, combining Christ's Nativity and Baptism, as still in Armenia; in 542, after the end of a plague, the emperor Justinian proclaimed it for 2 February, the fortieth day of the separate Christmas, in honour of the Christ child's encounter (in Greek *Hypapante*) with Simeon and Anna. This remains its significance in the East; but when it spread to the West it was understood as the purification of the Virgin and, like the other great Marian feasts of Annunciation (March 25), Dormition or Assumption (15 August), and Nativity (8 September), was enriched by Pope Sergius I (687-701) with a solemn procession. More recently [in the West] emphasis has shifted to the Presentation...



The popular name, however, is neither Purification nor Presentation but Candlemas (Latin *Candelaria*, French *Chandeleur*, German *Lichtmesse*), from the candles carried during the procession and blessed to commemorate Simeon's description of the child Jesus as "a light to lighten the Gentiles" [Luke 2:32 from Isaiah 42:6]; his canticle, the *Nunc Dimittis*, is sung during the procession around church before Mass.

From *The Oxford Companion to the Year* by Bonnie Blackburn & Leofranc Holford-Strevens.

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>February 2017</h1>						<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</i>
			<b>1</b> St. Ignatius of Antioch, BM, c. 107; St. Bridget, Abs, 523  <i>Mass at 7:30pm W</i>	<b>2</b> Presentation of Our Lord: Candlemas	<b>3</b> St. Blaise, BM, c. 316; St. Anskar of Hamburg, BC, 865	<b>4</b> New Martyrs of Russia, 1917 and following; St. Joseph of Aleppo, M, 1686  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>5</b> Fifth Sunday after Epiphany; St. Agatha, VM, c. 250  <i>G</i>	<b>6</b> St. Photius, BCD, 891; St. Dorothy, VM c. 313	<b>7</b> St. Romuald, Ab, 1027	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b> St. Cyril of Alexandria, BCD, 444; St. Apollonia, VM, c. 248	<b>10</b> St. Scholastica, V, 543	<b>11</b> St. Gregory II, PC, 731; St. Benedict of Aniane, Ab, 821; St. Theodora, Empress Ma, 860  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>12</b> Septuagesima  <i>V</i>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b> St. Valentine, PrM, 3rd C	<b>15</b> Ss. Faustinus & Jovita, Mm, 120	<b>16</b> St. Nicholas of Japan, BC, 1912	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b> St. Simeon of Jerusalem, BM, 1st c.; St. Colman, BC, 675  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>19</b> Sexagesima  <i>V</i>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b> Chair of St. Peter at Antioch	<b>23</b> Vigil of St. Matthias	<b>24</b> St. Matthias, Apostle, 1st c.	<b>25</b> St. Walburga of Heidenheim, V, 779  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>26</b> Quinquagesima; St. Porphyrius of Gaza, BC, 420; St. Ethelbert, KC, 616  <i>V</i>	<b>27</b> St. Raphael of Brooklyn, BC, 1915; St. Alexander, BC, 326; St. Leander, BC, 600	<b>28</b> St. Oswald of Worcester, BC, 992				

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

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