

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

March, 2017 - Volume XXII, Issue 3

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

*An excerpt from
a Homily of
St. Gregory
the Great
d. 604*

Without doubt the devil is the head of all evildoers; and the wicked are the members of this head. Was not Pilate a member of the devil? Were not the persecuting Jews, and the soldiers who crucified Jesus, members of the devil? Why then

should we be astonished if He allows Himself to be taken up into a mountain by the devil, when He suffered Himself to be crucified by his members? And is it not also fitting that He chose to be tempted Who had come that He might suffer death? It was indeed fitting, that as He had come to undo our death by His own, He would also overcome our temptations in his temptations.

Let us consider through what greatness we are delivered from temptation. Our ancient enemy set himself against

Inside:

<i>The Four Hundred and Forty Martyrs of Lombardy..</i>	4
<i>Reflections on a Psalm of Repentance .</i>	6
<i>Parish News.....</i>	8
<i>Calendar.</i>	11



the First Man, our parent, with three temptations; for he tempted him by gluttony, by vain glory, and by avarice; and tempting him defeated him; for by consenting to the temptation [Adam] placed himself under the power of the devil.

He tempted him through gluttony when he put before him the forbidden fruit of the tree, and persuaded him to eat it. He tempted him by

vain glory when he said, *Ye will be as Gods*. He tempted him from the heights of avarice when he said, *knowing good and evil*. For there is an avarice not alone of money, but of grandeur. Rightly is it called avarice when exaltation is desired above all moderation.

But by the very means by which he laid low the First Man, by these same did he himself succumb to the Second Man. For he tempted Him by gluttony when he said, *Command that these stones be made bread*. He tempted Him by vain glory when he said, *If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down*. By greed of dominion when he showed him all the kingdoms of the earth and said, *All these will I give thee, if falling down thou wilt adore me*. But by these very means by which he gloried in defeating the First Man, was he overcome by the Second; so that defeated he goes out from our hearts by that very way through which, once forcing an entrance, he was wont to hold us in slavery.

There is, Dearly Beloved, yet another thing we must consider in this temptation of Our Lord; namely, that the Lord when tempted by the devil answers in words from the holy Scripture; that He Who, by that Word which He is, could have cast the tempter into the pit, does not reveal His Majesty, but answers only

according to the precepts of the Divine Words. He did this to give us an example of patience, that we also, as often as we suffer anything from an evil person, may be moved to remembrance of what He taught us, rather than to the desire of revenge.

We, as far as we are able, must endeavor to mortify our bodies by abstinence during this yearly time of Lent... Let each one mortify his own body, as far as his strength allows, and let him weaken its desires, and lower the pride of its evil lusts, so that he may become, in the words of Paul *a living sacrifice*. [Rom. 12:1] A man is both living and a sacrifice when he has died to the desires of his body, though he has not departed from this life. It is the pleasure-loving body that leads us into sin; mortification leads us back to forgiveness. The parent of our death sinned against the commandments of our life, because of the fruit of the forbidden tree. We therefore who, because of eating, have fallen from the joy of paradise, as far as we are able, return to it once more through fasting.

But let no one believe that fasting alone is sufficient; for the Lord tells us by the mouth of the prophet, *Is not this rather the fast that I have chosen? Deal thy bread to the hungry, and bring the needy and the harborless into thy house*. The Lord therefore blesses that fast which uplifts our hands in almsgiving before His eyes, which is joined to the love of our neighbor, and founded on compassion. That which you deny yourself let you therefore give to another; so that that by which your body is weakened, may refresh the body of your hungry neighbor.

He eats and drinks for himself who enjoys the food of the body, which is the common gift of the Creator, without a thought for those in need. And each one fasts for himself if that which he denies himself for a time he gives, not to the needy, but saves that he may later offer it to his own stomach. To sanctify a fast is to offer to God a worthy mortification of the body, provided we are worthy in other respects also. Let anger cease, and quarreling end.

In vain do you deny the flesh when the soul is unchecked in its evil delights.

By doing penance ourselves, and humbled by others, we shall obtain from God pardon for what we have done unjustly, if for love of Him we let go our hold of what is rightly ours; by the grace and aid of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who reigns with the Father and the Holy Ghost for ever. Amen.

The 440 Martyrs in Lombardy

Feast Day ~ March 2

Why is the feast day of St. Valentine, the 3rd century Roman martyr, celebrated with cards and flowers and everything associated with romantic love? Why is the “Easter Bunny” more prominent in our society than icons of the Resurrection? Why are things like mistletoe associated with the Nativity of Our Lord? Why is the Eve of All Saints Day observed with costumes of ghosts and goblins? Are these not remnants from pre-Christian, pagan religions? When the Emperor Constantine granted Christianity tolerance and then made it the official religion of the Empire, widespread conversions followed but the ways of the “old religions” held fast for many years.

The martyrdom of a group of shepherds near the end of the 6th century is a clear example of how pagan beliefs and practices continued to affect Christians long after the Edict of Milan in 313. In northern Italy, invading Lombards (who eventually gave their name to this area) captured a group of simple rural workers. Their first act was to compel the captives to eat food which the soldiers had first offered to their idols. The shepherds, though “simple” - probably uneducated and certainly not prepared to debate theological nuances - were devout in their Christian faith. They refused to eat the food - not that the food itself was tainted in any



way, but that eating it would have meant renunciation of Christianity to the Lombard soldiers, and so the shepherds were killed.

When another group of shepherds was captured, a goat's head - worshiped by the Lombards as one in

their pantheon - was placed before Christians and they were ordered to follow the soldiers in dancing around it, singing and bending their knees in worship. These shepherds also refused to follow this pagan ritual and so they were beheaded. The number of those who were martyred by the Lombards for their faith in the year 579 was about four hundred and forty.

St. Gregory the Great, who told their story not many years after it had happened, says that the shepherds had lived their faith in constant devotion, penance, and patience in affliction so that they were prepared for this end to their earthly lives.

Over two millennia after the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ and the gradual conversion of much of the world to Christianity, we see that pagan ways have never been eradicated and, in fact, have become more prominent in this century and the last. While giving your sweetheart roses on Valentine's Day is certainly an innocent - and commendable - practice, Christians should never lose sight of the true meaning of a Christian celebration and we must be ever careful to discern pagan elements which may dilute this true meaning or distract from it. (Fertility, represented by the "Easter Bunny", is worthy of praise to God, but human fecundity is not the central message of Pascha!)

May the Four Hundred and Forty Martyrs under the Lombards help us to remember our Christian heritage and may they pray for us that we have the courage to uphold our faith against a resurgence of paganism.

Reflections on a Psalm of Repentance

Have mercy upon me, O God, after thy great goodness [Psalm 51:1] David himself has been sent to you. Hear him crying, and cry with him; hear him groaning, and groan with him; hear him weeping, and mingle your tears; hear him amended, and rejoice with him. If sin could not be excluded from you, let hope of pardon not be excluded. The man Nathan, the prophet, was sent, and observed the king's humility. He did not reject the words of one giving admonition. He did not say, "Do you dare to speak to me, a king?" An exalted king heard a prophet, let His humble people hear Christ.

Hear these words, and say with him, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy." He who implores great mercy, confesses great misery. Let them seek a little mercy of You those who sinned in ignorance. *Have mercy on me*, he says, *according to Thy great mercy*. Relieve a deep wound after Your great healing. What I have is deep, but in the Almighty I take refuge. Of my own so deadly wound I would despair, unless I could find so great a Physician.

- St. Augustine of Hippo, *On the Psalms*

Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness, and cleanse me from my sin. I acknowledge my faults, and my sin is ever before me. [Psalm 51:2, 3] You have already given me forgiveness, [David] is saying, through the prophet Nathan, and have brought to bear on me manifold calamities. But I still need purges, giving off



as I do an awful stench of sin. So wash me again, Lord, so as to remove all the filth of sin... Despite the forgiveness coming from you, I have not allowed myself to forget the sin; instead, I constantly see images of my wickedness and the faults committed, dreaming of them at night and imagining them by day. Now, God himself through Isaiah also bids sinners do this; *I am he*, he says, *who blots out your iniquities and does not remember your*

crimes. For your part, on the other hand, remember, and let us come to judgment: tell your iniquities first so as to be justified. [Isa. 43:25-26] And in the thirty-second psalm blessed David himself also wrote something in harmony with this: *I said, I shall admit to the Lord against myself my lawlessness, and you wiped out my heart's impiety.* [Ps. 32:3]

- St. Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentary on Psalm 51*

Then shall I teach thy ways unto the wicked, and sinners shall be converted unto thee. (v. 13) Who would not have grieved and groaned when the king in place of a bejewelled diadem wore ashes on his head...He was unwilling to appear adorned externally when he knew that he was most foul within; he was more handsome in his grime, for he rejected the pomp of the world in his sinful state...Happy indeed three and four times over is that state in which a secular lord won the merit of repentance before God, and the heavenly King received the glory of crucifixion!

This is the reason why, though seven psalms of penitents are taught in the book, it has become customary in the Church that whenever pardon for sins is sought, the Lord is entreated through this one, and rightly. First, because in no psalm is such virtuous humility - an attitude particularly necessary for penitents - displayed, that a powerful king, set on a prophet's pedestal, hastened to lament his sins as the most abject of men; second, because after the promise of forgiveness, he bound himself with such constraints of tears as if he had not been forgiven at all...Nothing involving difficulty is stated here, as it is in the other penitential psalms... Once he has been rebuked by the prophet and terrified by the recognition of his sin, the king begs the most indulgent Judge that through His mercy he may be cleansed and wholly purified of the foulness of all his sins...

Perhaps a further meaning is to be grasped here: that the Psalmist said in this psalm: *I shall teach transgressors Thy ways, and the ungodly shall turn back unto Thee*, because he foresaw that in the future people would through this psalm seek the gifts of most abundant repentance.

- Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms*

Parish News

Finally, after eighteen months of endeavoring to fulfill the requirements of Montgomery County on work inside and outside at our new property, we were issued a "Use and Occupancy" permit on February 22, the Feast of the Chair (or Throne) of St. Peter at Antioch, an appropriate feast day for a Western Rite parish of the Antiochian Archdiocese. We give thanks to God for allowing us to reach this point and we now look forward to a full liturgical life in our new home. Some landscaping work, along with removal of sediment control measures must wait



until the Spring. Bishop JOHN has agreed to be with us on Sunday, May 21, to dedicate the building; with good weather, this will include an outdoor procession and a banquet will follow the service.

We begin the month of March with Ash Wednesday, when the solemn ceremony of blessing ashes made from the palms of the previous year and the imposition of those ashes in the sign of the

Cross on our foreheads will take place. Vespers will be sung at 7PM and the Ash Wednesday rituals and Liturgy will follow at 7:30. Please bring a Lenten dish to share at a pot-luck supper after the service.

The annual pan-Orthodox service in celebration of the Sunday of Orthodoxy - the First Sunday in Lent - will be hosted by St. Peter & Paul parish in Potomac, Maryland on March 5. The service will begin at 5PM, and the preacher will be our own Bishop Nicholas (the Antiochian Bishop of Brooklyn).

On Fridays during Lent, beginning on March 10, we will have Stations of the Cross and Litany of the Holy Name of Jesus, beginning at 6:30PM. A lenten potluck supper and Bible study will follow.

As The feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, March 25, falls on a Saturday this year, the Mass will be at 10AM (preceded by Matins at 9:30) and followed by a pot-luck brunch.

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

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>March 2017</h1>						<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</i>
			1 Ash Wednesday; comm. St. David of Wales, BC, 544 <i>Blessing of Ashes and Mass at 7:30pm</i> ✓	2 St. Chad, BC, 672	3 St. Lucius, BM, 254	4 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
5 First Sunday in Lent <i>(Sunday of Orthodoxy Vespers at 5pm at Ss. Peter & Paul Church in Potomac)</i> ✓	6 Ss. Perpetua & Felicitas, Mm, 203	7	8 Ember Wednesday	9 St. Gregory of Nyssa, BCD, 394	10 Ember Friday; Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, Mm, 320 <i>Lenten Supper & Stations of the Cross at 6:30pm</i>	11 Ember Saturday; St. Sophronius of Jerusalem, BC, c. 369 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
12 Second Sun- day in Lent; St. Gregory the Great, BCD, 604 ✓	13	14	15	16	17 St. Patrick, BC, 461; St. Joseph of Arimethea, C, 1 st c. <i>Lenten Supper & Stations of the Cross at 6:30pm</i>	18 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, BCD, 386; St. Edward, KM 979 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
19 Third Sunday in Lent ✓	20 St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin; 1 st c. (tr. from 3/19); St. Cuthbert, BC, 687	21 Repose of St. Benedict, c. 550	22	23	24 St. Gabriel the Archangel <i>Lenten Supper & Stations of the Cross at 6:30pm</i>	25 The Annun- ciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary; <i>Mass at 10am</i> W <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
26 Fourth Sunday in Lent ✓	27 St. John of Damascus, CD, 749	28	29	30 St. John of the Ladder, Ab, 649	31 St. Innocent of Alaska, BC, 1879 <i>Lenten Supper & Stations of the Cross at 6:30pm</i>	

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

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