

# ✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

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*St. Gregory the Great Orthodox Church*  
*A Western Rite Congregation of the Antiochian Archdiocese*  
*13407 Roxbury Rd., Silver Spring, MD -- stgregoryoc.org*

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*An excerpt from  
the writings of  
St. Nektarios of  
Pentapolis  
d. 1920*

**T**he virtuous Christian is a magnificent sculpture, because he has been shaped in the image and likeness of his Creator. He has been robed with the cloak of God's grace and adorned with his original, glorious beauty. He has received God's gifts

abundantly and has been honored through communion with Him.

**T**he virtuous Christian has become blissful because he has concentrated within himself the entire wealth of grace and has secured for himself blissfulness on earth forever. Blissfulness is a fruit of the grace of God's Spirit as well as of moral richness; thus, it ensues virtue alone, and it has set its abode within the breasts of virtuous Christians. God has placed bliss within the hearts of virtuous Christians, he has made it their inalienable possession, and has rendered it

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completely independent of and unaffected by any external surroundings. Nothing external can influence the blessed state found within the virtuous Christian. This is why they who are barren of virtue and deprived of God's grace, they who do not sense this blessedness within their hearts, but seek it outside of themselves, resemble people who chase after their own shadows.

**T**he virtuous Christian is truly blissful because God has filled his heart with joy and his spirit with delight. The virtuous Christian is blessed because, having become enriched in this manner, he leads a peaceful, undisturbed, and undistracted life. He is content with fulfilling his obligations and role in society. He seeks the truth, he works on behalf of virtue, good, and justice, and he toils joyfully in order to have these prevail. His soul delights in his labors, he continuously struggles in order to achieve that which is good, and he hastens with all his strength to become beneficial in all things.

**T**he ideal beauty of virtue has captivated his soul and reigned within his heart. He meditates upon virtue night and day. In his supplications to God, he prays for the supremacy of virtue. He calls upon God's power to aid and help him in his undertakings, so that he may safely complete the good works that are dictated by his heart. He desires what is good because he has come to love it alone. He desires virtue because it has saturated his heart. Behold, the virtuous Christian way of life, which attests to the brilliance and enlightening power of the Christian faith.

## *St. Porphyrius the Actor* *Feast Day ~ September 15*

True persecution is usually preceded by less severe forms of harassment - limits on freedom, paying of “tributes”, relegation to second-class position in society, loss of legal protection - and it usually begins with ridicule. In some places around the world today, Christians are being killed by those who believe they are pleasing their god. But in America, we are still in this preliminary stage and opposition to us is from several directions.

It is practically impossible to watch a film without hearing the precious name of Jesus used as an expletive expressing anger or merely surprise. Christian business owners who hold to traditional religious beliefs and practices are accused of “hate” crimes. Our laws now protect some of the sins most abhorrent to Christians but give no protection to those of us who still consider those actions sinful. Christians are berated for our traditional words and concepts about man - God’s highest creation - as our language and definitions are being twisted away from what has been revealed by God.

This pattern has happened before. Even though some of the extreme positions which our society at large now takes may be a new thing, the way we arrived at this point has been tried before: factions lobbying for changes, powerful public figures swaying public opinion, the law being used against Christians and, above all, ridicule of those who hold fast to Christian tradition. The devil has been hard at work and we should have been paying closer attention.

Our main recourse now is to prayer. There are particular saints of the Church who will intercede for us because they experienced this in their earthly lives; some were even active participants in it. Among those is St. Porphyrius the actor.



The facts we have about St. Porphyrius are few. He was a stage performer during the reign of the Emperor Julian the Apostate, who ruled from 361-363 and who, though he had been raised as a Christian and had been acquainted with saints of the Church, had turned away from the faith in order to “restore” the Roman Empire to its pagan past. Actors like Porphyrius played into this apostasy of their Emperor in some of their public performances.

On the occasion of the Emperor’s birthday in the year 361, which he was celebrating in the city of Ephesus, the acting troupe in which Porphyrius was a member was called upon to provide the entertainment. A comical skit was prepared which would mock the Christian Sacrament of Baptism and Porphyrius was the actor chosen as the one to be “baptized.” Amidst exaggerated movements and gestures and humorous asides which amused the Emperor and his friends, Porphyrius was immersed in “blessed” water three times in the name of the Holy Trinity and he came out of the water declaring himself a Christian.

Suddenly, this was no longer an act. Porphyrius knew in his heart that he really was a Christian, a believer in the truth of this faith, and he knew that he wanted to be a follower of Jesus Christ. So, putting aside all pretense and forgetting his acting skills, he assured the audience that he was truly a Christian. Of course, the Emperor was furious and ordered his immediate torture and execution. With his beheading, St. Porphyrius received the baptism of martyrdom.

Perhaps the actor had prepared for his role in this important performance before the Emperor by thoroughly studying the

teachings and rituals of Christians. Perhaps he had even heard the story of another actor, Genesisius, who had experienced a similar conversion at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century before the Emperor Diocletian. Whatever the circumstances which led up to this dramatic conclusion, St. Porphyrius was now ready to declare his beliefs and accept the consequences.

In writing about St. Porphyrius, St. Nikolai of Ochrid declared: “God is not mocked. He either punishes mockers to correct them, or turns them to that which they mocked.” We pray that those in our midst today who would mock us for our beliefs will, like St. Porphyrius, see the truth and turn to Christ themselves. *Holy Porphyrius, pray for them and us.*

## *Life as Revelation*

by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann (reprinted from *Celebration of Faith*)

God is revealed to people, and it is their receptive response, their acceptance of God’s revelation, that is the very definition of faith.

Revelation, as a word, has only quite recently in history - in the last two hundred years - come to be widely understood as a synonym for the supernatural and miraculous, as something opposed to observable fact and incompatible with science. And because it is understood to be incompatible with science and “real” life, revelation of any sort is regarded simply as a fiction, a figment of the imagination - or worse - the offspring of darkness and ignorance.

This world view has gradually stripped man (but thankfully not every man) of an incomparable deeper and richer understanding of the world, with the result that today we are

tyrannized by this ideology. It is as if we have been told that all questions of life, of the world and of everything in it can be approached and understood exclusively through the use of a computer.

If, however, we free ourselves for a moment from bondage to this trivial, shallow, and above all extremely oversimplified world view, then a completely different approach to everything in the world becomes possible, acceptable, convincing and ultimately self-evident. Suddenly the words “revelation” and “miracle” cease to be the offspring of darkness and ignorance.



What if *everything* is revelation? What if everything in the world and all of life is - in some completely different and deep sense which at the same time is so childishly simple - a revelation? What if everything is a miracle and everything is a mystery totally unrelated to the almighty computer? And what if every person’s deepest, and at the same time most obvious, experience is that everything in the world is at once both what it is (what the computer can know about it) and something other, which no computer is capable of understanding and defining, something which is *revealed* to us, which *appears* and enters us as the most important and precious thing in our life?

Science studies nature. But isn’t it true that the study of nature can also be approached quite differently, through poetry, music and art? And isn’t it true that they reveal something *other* about nature, something just as true and perhaps even much more necessary for us?

*About what are you wailing, wind of night?  
What do you so frantically lament?...  
In a language the heart can comprehend you speak...*  
[Fedor Tiutchev, 1803-73]

Are these just mindless and absurd words absolutely unrelated to life or does this poetry unmask the lies of ideologues who deny something self-evident to all: that everything in the world and life both conceals and reveals some deeper meaning, witnesses to a kind of mysterious presence; everything holds out the promise and pledge of an “other” knowledge, an “other” understanding.

It is possible to speak about this endlessly, but even what has already been said is perhaps sufficient for us to sense, at least slightly, how Christianity understands *revelation* - that it is not simply a strange and inexplicable manifestation of some sort, but is something which man’s own experience confirms. *The heavens are telling the glory of God.* [Ps. 19:1]. *Let everything that breathes praise the Lord* [Ps. 150:6].

To put it simply, faith apprehends the world itself, life itself, as revelation, as the presence of the unseen in the seen. Indeed, by his very nature man lives genuinely only by revelations: revelations of beauty, revelations of love, revelations of nature, revelations of good. These are the things about which computers have nothing to say, but which at all times and in every place have given authentic meaning and real content to life.

## Parish News

The following feasts which fall on week-days this month will be celebrated at St. Gregory’s: the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (September 8) on the Eve, September 7; the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14) on the Eve,



Wednesday, September 13; and the feast of St. Michael and All Angels on the Eve, Thursday, September 28. On each of these evenings, we will sing Vespers at 7PM, Liturgy will be celebrated at 7:30, and a pot-luck supper will follow.

In the liturgical cycle of the Western Rite, Ember days are observed on the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday following Holy Cross Day. On these days of fasting, we pray for the mission of the Church and for those ordained to serve in the Church.

Our annual parish picnic is planned for Sunday, September 24, following Liturgy. Please plan to stay after church for an afternoon of food, games, and fellowship. If it rains, the “picnic” will be inside.

In every home, it takes all members of the family working together to maintain the household. So it is in the Church - God’s house - where all members of the parish family have to “pitch in” to keep things in order. Thanks to Sharon Green for organizing our “chores” so that we can keep our chapel and parish hall clean and beautiful.

## The Nativity of the Theotokos

excerpted from *Orthodox Saints* by George Poulos

The establishment of four major feast days to honor the Blessed Virgin Mary took place in the days of the apostolic era and

have a significance in the Orthodox Church which has remained unaltered through nearly twenty centuries of Christianity... A fifth day of commemoration is celebrated on September 8, honoring the Virgin Mary on the day of her birth. This day was set aside...in the Western Church [in] the eighth century, when Pope Sergius saw fit to join with the East during his reign, which extended from 687 to 701. All of Christendom agreed on the date that the Virgin Mary was born...



There is no doubt that [Mary's] birth came about as an act of God. Her parents, Joachim and Anna, were childless and were fast approaching the years which would place Anna beyond the age of childbearing. Perhaps it was because of the intensity of their prayers that a child be born to them that their prayers were not only answered, but their child would, in turn, bear a child ordained by God as His Son. No one who calls himself a Christian can accept the Virgin Birth as anything but an act of God.

Although Mary is known as the mother of God, she has been accorded numerous titles in the Orthodox Church... Considered the Mother of Mothers and the Mother of all Mankind, she is venerated in a manner which helps to sanctify the role of motherhood and the preservation of the family as the only hope for civilization. In an age of equal rights, the God-given right to motherhood, which is the mainstay of Christianity, is lost in a cloud of other rights that have no meaning in the presence of God. Those who clamor for those rights are not aware that there is no inferiority in women, proof of which is an approach to God and a reading of the Bible as a stronger document than any constitution.

**St. Gregory Orthodox Church**  
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*Address Correction Requested*

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>September 2017</h1>						<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</i>
					<b>1</b> St. Giles, Ab, 708; Twelve Holy Brothers, Mm, c. 303	<b>2</b> St. Stephen of Hungary, KC, 1038  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>3</b> Consecration of St. Gregory the Great, 590; comm. Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost  <i>W</i>	<b>4</b> St. Gorazde of Prague, BM, 1942  <i>(Labor Day)</i>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b> St. Cloud, C, 560; St. Sergius I, PC, 701  <i>Mass at 7:30pm W</i>	<b>8</b> Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary	<b>9</b> St. Gorgonius, M, 304  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>10</b> Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost  <i>G</i>	<b>11</b> Ss. Protus & Hyacinth, Mm, c. 257; St. Paph- nutius, BC, 4th c.	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>  <i>Mass at 7:30pm R</i>	<b>14</b> Exaltation of the Holy Cross	<b>15</b> St. Nicomedes, M, 4th c.; St. Porphyrius, M, 361	<b>16</b> Ss. Cornelius, PM, 254 & Cyprian, BM 258; St. Ninian, BC, 5 <sup>th</sup> c.  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>17</b> Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost; St. Lambert, BM, 705  <i>G</i>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b> St. Theodore of Canterbury, BC, 690; Ss. Janu- arius & comp., Mm, c. 305	<b>20</b> Ember Wednesday; Ss. Eustace & comp., Mm, c. 118	<b>21</b> St. Matthew, Evangelist & Apostle, 1st c.;	<b>22</b> Ember Friday; St. Maurice & Comp., Mm, 3rd c.; St. Lioba of Mainz, V, 781	<b>23</b> Ember Saturday; St. Thecla of Iconium, VM, 1st c.; St. Linus, PM, c. 80 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>24</b> Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost; Ss. Juvenaly, PrM, 1796 & Peter the Aleut, M, 1815  <i>G</i>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b> Ss. Cyprian, BM & Justina, VM, c. 303	<b>27</b> Ss. Cosmas & Damian, Mm, c. 303	<b>28</b> St. Wenceslas, M, 938  <i>Mass at 7:30pm W</i>	<b>29</b> Dedication of St. Michael the Archangel	<b>30</b> St. Jerome PrCD, 420; St. Gregory the Illumin- ator, BC, c. 323  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>

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

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