

✠ 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

An excerpt from a homily of St. Bede the Venerable d. 735

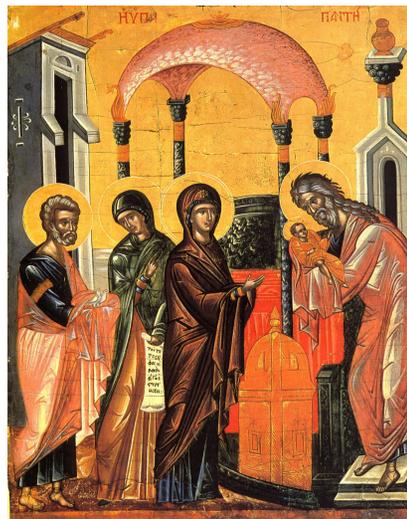
The sacred reading of the Gospel tells us about the solemnity we celebrate today. We venerate it with proper offices on the fortieth day after the Lord's birth. It is dedicated especially to the humility of our Lord and Savior, along with that of his inviolate

mother. The reading explains that they who owed nothing to the law made themselves subject to the fulfillment of its legal decrees in everything.

It is good that the boy Jesus was first circumcised, and then after some intervening days he was brought to Jerusalem with a sacrificial offering. When still a young man, he first trampled all the corruption of the flesh under his feet by dying and rising, and then, after some intervening days, he ascended

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to the joys of the heavenly city, with the very flesh, now immortal, which he had made a sacrificial offering to God for our salvation. Each one of us is also first purged by the water of baptism from all sins, as if by a true circumcision, and thus advancing by the grace of a singular light to the holy altar, we go in to be consecrated by the saving sacrificial offering of the

Lord's body and blood. Now also since the humanity of our Savior itself is uniquely simple and chaste, and since it is offered to the Father for us, it can fittingly be represented figurally by the immolation of a pigeon or a dove. But the entire Church too will, at the end of the world, first put off all blemish of earthly mortality and corruption in the general resurrection, and then be transferred to the kingdom of the heavenly Jerusalem, there to be commended to the Lord by the sacrificial victims, her good works.

And let them give a sacrificial offering according to what is written in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. [Luke 2:24] This was the sacrificial offering of poor people. The Lord commanded in the law that those who could were to offer a lamb for a son or a daughter, along with a turtledove or a pigeon, but one who did not have sufficient wealth to offer a lamb should offer two turtledoves or two young pigeons. Therefore the Lord, mindful in everything of our salvation, not only deigned for our sake to become a human being, though he was God, but he also

deigned to be poor for us, though he was rich, so that by his poverty along with his humanity he might grant to us to become sharers in his riches and his divinity.

St. Nicephorus, Martyr

Feast Day ~ February 9

The stories of the martyrs which we read about in the many lives of the saints and which we hear read from the *Roman Martyrology* at every Vespers service are usually stories of constancy and steadfastness. The martyr has most often been a faithful Christian who was arrested by the authorities during one of the persecutions before Christianity became a legal religion. The martyr is described as declaring his belief in Jesus Christ and refusing to worship the pagan gods, thus gaining the crown of martyrdom at his execution.

But there are a few stories of sudden martyrdom, when a person declared his beliefs at the very moment of decision or when a missionary's efforts were met with violent hostility. There is an even more unusual story of martyrdom recorded in the stories of the saints from around the year 260.

Sapricius, a priest of the city of Antioch, was very good friends with a layman of that city, Nicephorus. They were as close as brothers and spent many pleasurable hours of conversation together. But some hurtful thing happened between them which spoiled their friendship. Whether it was a strong disagreement or some wrong done by one to the other is not known, but the result was that the two could no longer abide each other's company. They avoided all contact and even refused to speak to one another when they passed on the streets.



Nicephorus could soon bear this no longer and, examining his conscience, he decided to take the full blame and beg his friend's forgiveness. He first sent some mutual friends to intercede on his behalf, but Sapricius refused to relent. He stubbornly held on to his hurt feelings which had now grown to hatred. Nicephorus tried to visit his former friend to plead his case himself but Sapricius refused to see him.

The Emperor Valerian began a new persecution of Christians in the year 257, ordering first that the clergy were to offer incense to the Roman gods. The priest Sapricius refused to do this and was soon arrested and thrown into prison. Nicephorus was so concerned for his former friend that he redoubled his efforts at begging for forgiveness. The Emperor soon ordered the execution of those clergy who had refused to worship idols and, after enduring severe torture, Sapricius was bound and marched through the city to the place of execution. Nicephorus followed him the whole way, all the time imploring him to forgive and restore their love before he became a martyr for Christ's sake. But Sapricius turned his face away from Nicephorus and would not be moved by his pleas, even as he contemplated his own death.

The soldiers leading the priest through the streets were highly amused by this strange man, Nicephorus. They laughingly told him that he was a great fool for wasting time trying to make amends with someone who was about to die. What difference would it soon make?

After turning away from the commands of our Lord to forgive his brother - not once, but seventy times seven - Sapricius then

committed the ultimate sin. When he saw the executioner's sword, his fear of death overcame him and he denied his Lord and Savior. He said that he would offer incense to the pagan gods if the soldiers would spare him. Having first hardened his heart against his friend, he now hardened his heart against God.

Nicephorus' anxiety was even greater now for his friend who was in sight of the crown of martyrdom. He pleaded with him to remain steadfast. When the priest walked away, having saved his own life and lost his soul, Nicephorus cried out to the soldiers: "I am a Christian. I will not deny Christ. Let me die in this man's place." The soldiers, just wishing to finish the job they had been given to do, led Nicephorus to the executioner and to a crown of glory in God's eternal kingdom.

Following Christ faithfully is something we struggle to do every day, in all relationships, in all the events of our lives. If we hope to be faithful in times of real crisis or persecution, we must be willing to follow His commandments by forgiving those who have wronged us. May we follow the example of St. Nicephorus and may he intercede for us.

Resources: Rev. Alban Butler: Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and Other Saints; George Poulos: Orthodox Saints; St. Nikolai of Ochrid: Prologue from Ochrid; website of the Orthodox Church in America.

Parish News

In the month of February, we move from the Church's liturgical cycle which is based on the Incarnation to that which points us to the Resurrection. The Presentation of Christ in the Temple (also called by other names: *Candlemas*, when candles for use in church are blessed; *Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, commemorating her visit to the Temple in Jerusalem for ritual

purifying forty days after giving birth; and in Eastern usage, the *Meeting of the Lord* for Simeon and Anna's meeting of Christ) occurs on February 2. We will celebrate this feast on Thursday evening, February 1, with Vespers at 7pm, Mass at 7:30 and a pot-luck supper afterward.

Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the Lenten season in Western Rite Orthodoxy, will be observed on February 21, with Vespers at 7pm, the blessing and imposition of ashes and Liturgy at 7:30, and a Lenten supper following. On Fridays in Lent, beginning on March 3, we will have light suppers at 6:30pm, a Lenten study, and Stations of the Cross.

At our annual Parish meeting on January 21, Keivan Shahrokhi and Dave Caldwell were elected (or re-elected) to the Parish Council. Our charitable outreach allocations for the year 2017 were announced: to the Manna Food Center, Shady Grove Pregnancy Center, Holy Transfiguration Monastery and Holy Assumption Monastery, IOCC, the OCMC Support a Priest program, and the various Archdiocesan appeals. We also collected 100 pounds of mostly canned goods for the Food For Hungry People program, which was donated to The Shepherd's Table in Silver Spring, and we continue to collect items for flood relief kits.

Love for God and One's Neighbor

Reprinted from *The Illustrated Sayings of the Holy Fathers* by Monk John Vranos

Love is the queen of virtues. One who strives after love will be enriched with an incomparable treasure. More than anything else, we must love God. Let us love all men without exception as we love ourselves.



Many think they have love, but how can this be confirmed? By your works and your conduct, O man, it will be made obvious. If being injured and slandered you don't hold hostility within you against those who offend you; if you cannot endure seeing a poor man, but give him the most choice of your goods; if you deny yourself various necessities so as to be able to give them to one in need, then, in truth, you have love for your neighbor.

If you desire to glorify God by praying or giving thanks to Him for the good things He has given you, and this time of prayer is for you not an obligation and duty, but rather a deep yearning of your heart; and if you grieve over your sins and struggle to correct your behavior, then take courage - truly you love God.

If we don't love our fellow men, then it is impossible that we love God. Impossible. Many there are who run to churches, travel to the Holy Land, and make many prayers, but at the same time have quarrels with their neighbors, and years have passed since they have said "good day" to them, or they are embittered against them for various causes. Or they deal unjustly with others and are a heavy burden to their fellow men. Let us not deceive ourselves, however. St. John the Evangelist writes, *"I love God," but hates his fellow man, his love for God is even a lie. Because inasmuch as he does not love his fellow man, who is an icon of God, even seeing him daily, how is it possible for him to love God, Whom he has never seen?*

Love of God is the second step; on the first, the lower one, is the love of one's neighbor. No one is able to achieve love of God if he doesn't gain love for his neighbor first of all. A certain Saint

writes: *the key that opens the door to the Kingdom of God is your neighbor.*

The Priesthood of the Laity

by Paul Meyendorff (excerpts from an essay in *Christ at Work: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Vocation**)

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. [I Peter 2:9]



With these words, the author of the epistle seeks to encourage the Christians of Asia Minor while they face persecution. In their suffering, they are to imitate Christ. They are to imitate him also in the proclamation of the gospel, the good news, to the world. In this way, they are to share in the priestly ministry of Christ himself...

As Christians who share in Christ's priesthood, we are called to share in Christ's sacrifice by accepting the suffering which those who

follow Christ have always had to endure. We are called to share in Christ's sacrifice by praising God. We are called to share in Christ's sacrifice by doing good deeds...

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Address Correction Requested

Liturgy is the work of the entire people of God ... , and not, as was the case in Jewish antiquity, the task of a clerical caste. Liturgy...literally means “common work,” or “work on behalf of the community.” The function of the ordained clergy is to lead the gathered assembly in performing their priestly function of praising and giving thanks to God, of offering prayers and intercessions on behalf of all creation...

We are called to live out our priesthood in day to day life. In our modern, secularistic world, we tend to segregate our religious life from our everyday life. We practice our faith by going to church for an hour or two each week, but then we shed our religious identity as we step outside the doors of the church. Yet it is precisely in the world, in the family, at the workplace, in the public sphere, that the priestly role of the laity is most central.

Why is this so? We are Christians because, through our baptism, we have “put on Christ.” We have become members of his Body, the Church, and thus, through us, Jesus Christ remains present in the world. Just as Christ was empowered with the Holy Spirit at his baptism in the Jordan, so we too, in our baptism, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit...

Every baptized Christian, therefore, is a sign of God’s presence in the world. This is affirmed by Scripture, realized in the liturgy, and it must be lived out in the world. Every Christian is a priest, called to bring God’s divine love and forgiveness to a world which lives in sin and darkness. Every Christian is called to this priestly, mediatory task...

Whatever we choose to do - whether as a laborer, an engineer, a doctor, a lawyer, or a teacher - we are called to act as Christ acted. Wherever we are - whether at home, at the workplace, in the park - we are called to reflect the presence and the love of Christ.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>February 2018</h1>						<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</i>
				1 St. Ignatius of Antioch, BM, c. 107; St. Bridget, Abs, 523 <i>Mass at 7:30pm W</i>	2 Presentation of Our Lord: Candlemas	3 St. Blaise, BM, c. 316; St. Anskar of Hamburg, BC, 865 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
4 Septuagesima; New Martyrs of Russia, 1917 and following; St. Joseph of Aleppo, M, 1686 ✓	5 St. Agatha, VM, c. 250	6 St. Photius, BCD, 891; St. Dorothy, VM c. 313	7 St. Romuald, Ab, 1027	8	9 St. Cyril of Alexandria, BCD, 444; St. Apollonia, VM, c. 248	10 St. Scholastica, V, 543 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
11 Sexagesima; St. Gregory II, PC, 731; St. Benedict of Aniane, Ab, 821 ✓	12	13	14 St. Valentine, PrM, 3rd C	15 Ss. Faustinus & Jovita, Mm, 120	16 St. Nicholas of Japan, BC, 1912	17 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
18 Quinquagesima; St. Simeon of Jerusalem, BM, 1st c.; St. Colman, BC, 675 ✓	19 <i>(President's Day)</i>	20	21 Ash Wednesday <i>Blessing of Ashes and Mass at 7:30pm</i> ✓	22 Chair of St. Peter at Antioch	23 Vigil of St. Matthias	24 St. Matthias, Apostle, 1st c. <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
25 First Sunday in Lent; St. Walburga of Heidenheim, V, 779 <i>(The Sunday of Orthodoxy)</i> ✓	26 St. Porphyrius of Gaza, BC, 420; St. Ethelbert, KC, 616	27 St. Raphael of Brooklyn, BC, 1915; St. Alexander, BC, 326; St. Leander, BC, 600	28 Ember Wednesday; 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.*