

✠ 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 by St. Leo the Great d. 461

After the blessed and glorious Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, (wherein was raised up in three days that true Temple of God which had been destroyed), there came by God's providential ordering a season of forty days, the annual commemoration of which endeth on this day. The original great forty days, dearly beloved, were spent by the Lord in profitable instruction for our benefit.

On this wise, His bodily presence was still given to the earth during all those forty days, that our faith in His Resurrection might be armed with all needful proofs. For the death of Christ had troubled the hearts of many of His disciples; their thoughts were sad when they remembered His agony upon the Cross, His giving up of the ghost, and the burial in the grave of His lifeless body: and so a sort of hesitation had begun to weigh on them.

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Hence the most blessed Apostles and all the disciples who had been fearful concerning the death on the Cross, and doubtful of the trustworthiness of the report of Christ's Resurrection, were so strengthened by the clear demonstration of the truth that, when they saw the Lord going up into the heights of heaven, they sorrowed not; nay, they were even filled with great joy.

And, in all verity, it was a mighty and unspeakable cause of rejoicing for all the holy multitude of believers, when they perceived that the nature of mankind was thus exalted above all creatures, even the heavenly spirits, so as to pass above the ranks of the Angels, and be raised beyond the heights of the Archangels. For on this wise they perceived that no limit was set upon the uplifting of that nature short of the right hand of the eternal Father, where it was to be Sharer of His throne, and Partaker of His glory; and nevertheless it was still nothing more than that nature of man, which the Son hath taken upon Him.

Therefore, dearly beloved, let us also rejoice with fitting joy. For the Ascension of Christ is exaltation for us. And whither the glory of the Head of the Church is passed in, thither is the hope of the body of the Church called on to follow. Let us rejoice with exceeding great joy, and give God glad thanks. This day is not only the possession of paradise made sure unto us, but in Christ our Head we are actually entering into the heavenly mansions above. Through the unspeakable goodness of Christ we have gained more than ever we lost by the envy of the devil. For those whom our venomous enemy cast down from the happiness of their first estate,

these same hath the Son of God made to be of one body with Himself, and hath given them a place at the right hand of the Father: with whom He liveth and reigneth, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

St. Tamar of Georgia, Queen

Feast Day ~ May 1

It is almost impossible for Americans to conceive of a saintly ruler. We are taught from early childhood that it is only right to maintain a separation of Church and State, to keep religion out of politics and politics out of religion, that our Constitution mandates it. We also live in an age when the conduct of our country's leaders (of either party) is often far from the precepts of any faith tradition. So the idea that there might be a Christian ruler whose governance shows the mercy, love, and humility that are the marks of a follower of Jesus Christ is beyond our imaginations. But this has not always been the case in other nations and certainly not in some ages past. St. Tamar, the queen of Georgia from 1184 to 1213, is one who ruled with Christian charity and who is revered by the Georgian people as a saintly monarch.

Born in 1166 to King George III and Queen Burdukhan who did not have a son, it was evident that Tamar would be the only heir of her father. Fearing the great strife that a battle over the succession would cause, the king named Tamar as his co-regent when she was twelve years old. Upon her father's death when she was eighteen, Tamar was declared the sole ruler of Georgia, often titled "king" to emphasize the strength of her position, as she was the first woman to have this responsibility.

Tamar began her rule by calling a church council, asking the clergy to "judge according to righteousness" and to begin with her and the other nobles - to condemn sin and not be influenced by



wealth. She described the joint purpose of the State and the Church saying that "You by word and I by deed, you by preaching and I by the law, you by upbringing and I by education will care for those souls whom God has entrusted to us, and together we will abide by the law of God... You as priests and I as ruler, you as stewards of good and I as the watchman of that good".

In order to ensure that the succession would not be contentious the next time, the Court and the Church insisted that Tamar marry and they chose a Russian prince to be her husband. He proved to be handsome and a good soldier who helped the Georgian army in its many battles. But he also proved to be an unsuitable husband for the good queen. He was accused of drunkenness and sexual immorality, was banished from Georgia, and Tamar was granted a divorce.

After offers from many other hopeful suitors, Queen Tamar chose her own second husband who was also a capable soldier but a constant support for the queen who encouraged her good works. A son, George, and a daughter, Rusudan - both of whom became rulers of Georgia - were born to the couple.

Georgia was in constant warfare with its Muslim neighbors, with Christians often suffering at the hands of Muslim conquerors. Queen Tamar became known as the protector of Christians, battling to free Armenia from Muslim control. Armenia had been the first entire country to become Christian on the conversion of King Tiradates in 301; Georgia was declared a

Christian state in 327 by the newly-converted King Mirian III, so both countries had a long, rich history of Christian life which had to be protected.

One of Queen Tamar's efforts at strengthening Christianity was to build and support monasteries, not only in Georgia but also in Greece, Macedonia, Romania, on Mt. Athos and in the Holy Land. When Saladin took Jerusalem from the western Crusaders in 1187, Tamar was evidently successful in her pleas to him to return the property of the eight Georgian monasteries there which he had confiscated, and Georgians were allowed free access to the city, unharmed. On the coins of the realm in her day, Queen Tamar was styled as "champion of the Messiah" and she made every effort to be worthy of that title.

It was known that the queen spent her days dressed in the usual royal finery and attending to state affairs but that, in the evenings, she was on her knees in prayer for her people, the nation that had been entrusted by God to her care. She made and embroidered clothing which she gave to the poor and also made vestments for the churches.

In preparation for her own death, Queen Tamar had her son George named as co-regent, as her father had done with her. Giving up her earthly kingdom into his care, Tamar fell asleep in the Lord in the year 1213. Perhaps to prevent desecration by any enemies of Georgia, the burial place of the queen was never revealed. The possible sites include the Monastery of Gelati and the Monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem, but her relics have never been found.

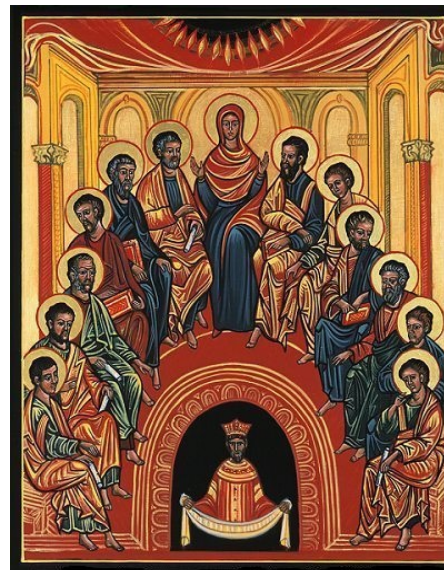
In the centuries since her death - and even during her reign - St. Tamar has been revered by the Georgian people and her reign considered a "Golden Age". She has been portrayed in art, poetry, folk song, and literature as the ideal woman and ideal ruler.

St. Tamar shows us that it is not impossible for a temporal ruler

to be a saint. Whatever the circumstances of our lives - whether our duty is to manage a household or run a country, to be a diligent worker or supervise employees - if we do these things in humility, with love and care for those in need, in constant prayer for others, then we are on our way to holiness, to becoming saints. May St. Tamar, Queen of Georgia, pray for us on our journeys toward the Kingdom of God.

Parish News

Thank you to all those who worked so hard to make our services of Holy Week and Easter so beautiful. Everyone was involved in some way - serving at the altar or in the choir, purchasing and arranging flowers, preparing food, baking bread, cleaning, and joining in the prayers - and we pray that our offerings have been pleasing to God.



Our first ever visit by Metropolitan JOSEPH on Good Friday was a wonderful opportunity for us to greet our father in God and for him to experience one of the most ancient of the liturgies of the Western Rite. Sayedna JOSEPH was very gracious in his comments to us and we look forward to another episcopal visit in the future.

We have much to celebrate in the month of May. Anticipating the Rogation days

(Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before Ascension Day), we

will end the Liturgy on May 13 with a procession around the property (weather permitting), singing the Litany of the Saints and invoking their prayers for the bounty of the earth and for protection against natural disasters. We continue our Paschal celebrations until the Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord. Mass will be offered on the Eve - Wednesday, May 16 - at 7:30PM, preceded by Vespers at 7. The great Feast of Pentecost will be celebrated on Sunday, May 27. As is our custom at St. Gregory's, we will hear portions of the Epistle read in different languages, just as the Holy Spirit, descending upon the Apostles, gave them the ability to speak in the tongues of many different people.

On Sunday, May 20, we will celebrate the baptism of Lucy Miao Caldwell between Matins and Mass and in the Liturgy, we will remember in the prayers the Dedication of our building by Bishop JOHN last year on May 21.

Rogation Days

Rogation days - days set aside by the Church for petitions to God and his saints while the Litany is sung in procession and prayers are offered particularly for the bounty of the earth and protection against calamities of all sorts - have been a part of Christian observances from very early times.

It is believed that the first Rogations days were a "baptizing" of a Roman pagan practice of making supplications for good crops on April 25 of each year.

The Rogation processions which are observed prior to Ascension Day were established by Bishop Mamertus of Vienne about the year 470, in response to calamity. There had been frequent earthquakes and an Easter Sunday fire destroyed the king's palace.



So the bishop called for a fast and three days of processions with the singing of the Litany and prayers for the intercessions of the saints. The 13th-century *Golden Legend* describes

the use of the Trisagion (*Holy God, Holy, Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us*) as part of the Litany on these days. In Western liturgical practice today, this prayer is used only on Good Friday.

These latter Rogation days (called the "Minor Rogations" as compared to the "Major Rogation" of April 25) were soon adopted in other parts of the West. The Fifth Council of Orleans in 511 established the practice throughout Gaul. St. Caesarius of Arles (d. 542) attested to the widespread observance. St. Augustine of Canterbury (d. 604) brought the practice to Britain after learning of it in Gaul, and the Council of Clovesho in 747 called for the Rogation processions throughout England.

Despite their occurrence in the last days of the Paschal season, the earliest Rogation processions were fully penitential. According to Abbot Prosper Guerranger in his *Liturgical Year*, the processions began with the imposition of ashes, the faithful were expected to fast on these three days and abstain from meat, and participants walked barefoot. The procession would begin in one of the smaller churches in a town and would stop in each church along the way for the singing of antiphons and prayers appropriate to that church, ending in the Cathedral or largest church where Mass was celebrated. St. Caesarius relates that each day's procession lasted about six hours! Through the centuries, the more penitential aspects of the Rogation processions were gradually discontinued.

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Address Correction Requested

Although not celebrated yearly in Rome until the time of Pope Leo III (d. 816), St. Gregory the Great (d. 604) called for the processions when the Roman people were besieged by a terrible plague. He organized the orders of people in the processions (clergy, monastics, lay people, children), led by the cross and with the ringing of bells. The *Golden Legend* describes the processions in this way:

In this procession we carry the cross and ring the bells to make the devils flee in terror; for just as a king in the midst of his army has the royal insignias, namely, trumpets and standards or banners, so Christ the eternal King in the midst of his Church militant has bells for trumpets and crosses for standards. Any tyrant would be terrified if he heard in his land the trumpets and saw the banners of some powerful king, his enemy; and so the demons who are in that murky air are sore afraid when they hear Christ's trumpets - the bells - and catch sight of his standards - the crosses.

Our Rogation processions have been adapted to our circumstances. As most of us would not be able to attend church on the three week-days, we anticipate the Rogation days on the Fifth Sunday after Easter. On May 13 the procession will occur at the end of the Liturgy and will proceed outside (weather permitting). In the prayers for the fruits of the earth, we will pray for our "Mary garden" and the newly-planted grass seed.

The world continues to experience natural disasters of all sorts (earthquakes, wildfires, epidemics) and we recognize the delicate balance between man and nature and our need to care for what God has given us. In our Rogation procession, may we ask for the prayers of the saints to protect us from calamities and to grant us the benefit of the fruits of the earth. *All ye holy men and women of God, intercede for us.*

Edited and expanded from an article in the May 2009 *Journal*.

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
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| <h1>May 2018</h1> | | | | | | <i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</i> |
| | | 1 Ss. Philip & James, Apostles, 1 st c. | 2 St. Athanasius, BCD, 373 | 3 Finding of the Holy Cross | 4 St. Monica, Ma, 387 | 5 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i> |
| 6 Fourth Sunday after Easter; St. John before the Latin Gate, 95 <i>W</i> | 7 St. Alexis Toth, PrC, 1909; St. John of Beverly, BC, 721 | 8 Apparition of St. Michael of the Archangel | 9 St. Gregory Nazianzen, BCD, 389 | 10 Ss. Gordian, 362 & Epimachus, 250, Mm | 11 | 12 St. Epiphanius, BC, c. 403 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i> |
| 13 Fifth Sunday after Easter <i>W</i> | 14 Rogation Monday; St. Boniface of Tarsus, M, 290 | 15 Rogation Tuesday; St. Pachomius, Ab, 346 | 16 Vigil of the Ascension; St. Brendan the Navigator, 577, Ab <i>Mass at 7:30pm W</i> | 17 Ascension Day | 18 St. Venantius, M, 250; St. Theodotus & comp., Mm, c. 303; of the Octave of Ascension | 19 St. Dunstan, BC, 988; St. Pudentiana, V, c.160; of the Octave of Ascension <i>Vespers at 6pm</i> |
| 20 Sunday after the Ascension <i>W</i> | 21 Dedication of St. Gregory's; of the Octave of Ascension | 22 of the Octave of Ascension | 23 of the Octave of Ascension | 24 Octave Day of the Ascension; St. Vincent of Lerins, C, 450 | 25 St. Urban, PM, 230; St. Aldhelm, BC, 709 | 26 Vigil of Pentecost; St. Augustine of Canterbury, BC, 605 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i> |
| 27 Pentecost; St. Bede, CD, 735 (<i>omit St. John I, PM, 526</i>) <i>R</i> | 28 Monday after Pentecost: St. Germanus of Paris, BC, 576 <i>(Memorial Day)</i> | 29 Tuesday after Pentecost | 30 Ember Wednesday in the Oct. of Pentecost; St. Felix I, PM, 274 | 31 Thursday after Pentecost; St. Petronilla, VM, c. 100 | | |

Confessions may be made during the Psalms at Matins, following Vespers, and by appointment.

Coffee Hour follows Sunday Liturgy. Christian Education for all is offered during Coffee Hour.