

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

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St. Gregory the Great Orthodox Church
A Western Rite Congregation of the Antiochian Archdiocese
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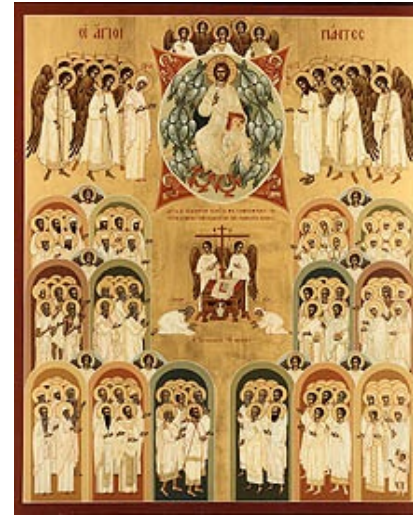
A Homily by St. Nikolai of Ochrid d. 1956

The Apostle calls the Christians in Ephesus saints. He does not call one or two of them saints, or any one group of them, but them all.

Is this not one of God's great wonders: that men, not in the desert but in the city, and that an idolatrous and dissolute city, should be saints? That married men should be saints, men who had children, who worked and traded. Such were indeed the first Christians. Their dedication, faithfulness and zeal in the Faith, as well as their holiness and purity of life, gives them the right to be called saints. If saints have become the exception in these latter days, the unholy were the exception in those first days. Saints were the norm. We must not, therefore, be surprised that the Apostle calls all baptized souls in Ephesus saints - and has another, yet more lofty, name for all Christians: that of sons, sons of God [Gal. 4:6]. The Lord Christ Himself gave us the right to call ourselves

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such, when He taught us to address God as “Our Father”.

Oh, my brethren, do we not say to God every day: “Holy God”? Do we not call the angels holy? Do we not call the Mother of God holy? And the prophets and apostles, and the martyrs and the righteous? Do we not call heaven, and the Kingdom of heaven, holy? Who, then, can dwell in the holy Kingdom but the saints? If we hope for

salvation, we hope also for sanctity.

O holy God, who dwellest in the holy place and restest among the saints, calling the holy to Thyself and having mercy on them; help us also, that we may be sanctified in thought, word and deed - to Thy glory and our salvation. To thee be glory and praise for ever. Amen.

Ss. Vitalis and Agricola, Martyrs Feast Day ~ November 4

It is difficult for twenty-first century Christians to imagine just how dramatically counter-cultural Christianity was in the first several centuries. Following the teachings of our Lord and His Apostles was so challenging to the accepted norms of behavior that Emperors attempted to destroy this religion and those who practiced it.

Two Christians who show clearly this departure from the ways of the Roman Empire are Saints Vitalis and Agricola, who

were put to death because they were faithful Christians in the persecutions of Emperor Diocletian around the year 304.

Agricola was a Christian citizen of the ancient Roman city of Bologna, who owned a slave named Vitalis. Through the example of his master, Vitalis was converted to Christianity and the relationship between master and slave was transformed. In Roman society, slaves were considered property, to be acquired or disposed of as needed. A slave might be considered valuable for the kind of work he could do for you (perhaps the most famous example being that of Marcus Tullius Tiro, the slave and secretary of the Roman statesman, Cicero), but most slaves were not companions of their masters and were certainly not considered to be “brothers”.

All that changed when a master and his slave became Christians. The Apostle Paul had taught that *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* [Gal. 3:28]. Agricola and Vitalis took this teaching to heart and became close friends.

Vitalis was the first to be brought before the authorities and accused of being a follower of Christ. Holding firm to his faith and refusing to deny Christ, Vitalis was sent into the amphitheater and executed, perhaps for the entertainment of Bolognese citizens. Agricola may have then “turned himself in”, as he was soon tortured and crucified. The bodies of the two were buried in the Jewish cemetery in Bologna.

What Roman of the time would have died for Jupiter or Venus? A soldier might be prepared to die in defending the Empire, but the idea that belief in a god - One God - could be so strong that a person would endure torture and even death rather than deny that God was revolutionary. The Roman gods were appealed to for specific needs (a child, prosperity in business, etc.) but they



primarily represented stability for the home and therefore, the Empire. And when the emperors declared themselves divine and expected incense to be offered to them, an ordinary citizen would have considered it his patriotic duty to do just that. Christians were indeed revolutionary in their refusal to offer incense to emperors.

Almost a hundred years after their martyrdom, the burial place of Agricola and Vitalis was discovered by the Bishop of Bologna, Eusebius, and their relics were removed for proper Christian burial. St. Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, was present at this ceremony and was responsible for having some of the relics translated to other cities. He helped to spread knowledge of the two martyrs so that veneration of these saints increased. A church in honor of Saints Vitalis and Agricola was eventually built over the remains of the amphitheater where their martyrdom took place.

Now in this “post-Christian” age, Christianity should once again be considered revolutionary. The zeal and fervor of our traditional faith should be strong in contrast to the world’s constantly shifting versions of “truth”; our treatment of all others with love and compassion should be obvious to those who put great value on wealth and social status or who hold athletes, movie stars, and popular musicians in higher regard than the saints of the Church.

We pray that God, through the intercessions of Saints Vitalis and Agricola, will increase our faith and give us courage to be counter-cultural, revolutionary Christians.

On the Path to Sainthood

For two thousand years, the Church has held up the saints for our veneration, for their intercessions for us who still toil in this life, for the examples they give us for life and death. Who are the saints and what makes them saints? How are the saints recognized? How does the Church decide to name someone a saint?

The path to sainthood is not always clear cut. A person whose life has not always been perfect can, in a moment of trial, become so steadfast in the faith that he becomes a martyr saint: St. Alban (feast day, June 22), the Proto-Martyr of Britain, was only a catechumen, not yet taught all the essentials of the faith, when he made the split-second decision to change clothes with the priest who was his teacher and was killed by the authorities in his stead. A monk may live a quiet life of prayer and his holiness only be recognized through his writings or his counsel to others: St. Bede (May 27) spent his entire life praying the Divine Office in his monastery in northern England, but through his writings on Holy Scripture and the history of the Church, his sanctity has been recognized for centuries. A Bishop might be a loving shepherd of his flock but is considered a saint because of his staunch defense of Orthodoxy: St. Hilary of Poitiers (January 14) carried out the normal duties of visiting his churches, ordaining priests, teaching Scripture, but his sainthood rests mainly on his lifetime spent defending the divinity of Christ against the relentless efforts of the Arians. A ruler may govern for the good of his kingdom but be called a saint for the one act of bringing Christianity to his subjects: St. Edwin (October 12) was the pagan ruler of Northumbria who engaged in the expected battles and power struggles of that time; he married a Christian wife and took many years and several “negotiations” with God before himself becoming a Christian and inspiring his subjects to do the same.

The first to be declared saints were the Apostles, those who knew our Lord in the flesh and followed Him while He was on

this earth. The Evangelists, those who wrote the Gospels, were also named as saints. During the great persecutions in the first three centuries, most of the saints were martyrs for the faith.

A saint has usually been honored first by his or her local community and gradually, stories about the saint have spread further afield. When liturgical calendars have been compiled, those saints most well-known have been included on the days for their celebrations (typically the day of their death, also referred to as their “heavenly birthday”) and, eventually, some saints have become universally known and venerated.

In more modern times, each jurisdiction of the Orthodox Church goes through a process from popular local devotion to greater knowledge and acceptance to glorification - the declaration of a person as a saint of the Church. Other jurisdictions then begin to include this saint in their liturgical calendars.

The most common categories of saints are Apostles, Evangelists, Martyrs, Bishops, Doctors, Confessors, Kings, Queens, Abbots (or Abbesses), Virgins, and Matrons although there are saints who do not fall into any of these traditional groupings. Sometimes a saint who has died a natural death is named a Martyr for the many persecutions he suffered in his lifetime. The term “Confessor” is given to those saints who defended the faith heroically or who were tortured and mutilated (such as those attending the first Ecumenical Council who had limbs severed or tongues cut out) for refusing to deny Christ.



When we celebrate the Feast of All Saints, we will remember well-known saints such as our patron St. Gregory the Great (March 12), who as Pope of Rome played such an important role in promoting beauty in worship and evangelizing Britain. We will also remember little-known saints such as the Bishop Hypatius (November 14), who became a martyr for the Orthodox faith when he was stoned to death by Novatian heretics on his way home from the Council of Nicaea. And we should also think of those, such as Fr. George Calciu and Fr. Arseny, who endured torture by the Communists for their faith and who will, most likely, eventually be declared Confessor saints.

Through the intercessions of the holy saints of God, may we lead our lives in such a way that we, too, may be on the path to sainthood.

Pilgrimage to Jerusalem, *the Holy City, Al Quds* By Monica Burnett

In last month's newsletter we were edified by Fr. Noah Bushelli's explanation of the importance of pilgrimage in the Christian life. He concluded his discussion of earthly pilgrimages to holy sites by remarking that these geographic journeys serve as pointers to the progress that we must make toward "the new Jerusalem on high in heaven." In fact, the very name of Jerusalem stirs the hearts of Christians in varying ways, depending on which aspect of the Holy City our minds are pondering at the moment.

Although St. Jerome and other Fathers believed that the name Jerusalem means "Vision of Peace," some modern scholars of the ancient Middle East theorize that the name means, "Established by Shalim" (Shalim being an ancient Canaanite god). The city's Arabic name seems to capture its essence: *Al Quds*, "the Holy." In

the Old Testament, Jerusalem is the primary locus of holiness because it is Jerusalem, specifically the Temple, where God's presence is most clearly manifested. Thus the Hebrew exiles in Babylon yearned for it in the depths of their souls (see Psalm 137), and during the Babylonian Exile it was to Jerusalem that Ezekiel was transported in order to receive a divine revelation. Here he heard the Lord's promise that He would put a new heart and spirit into the people, replacing their stony hearts with a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19-20).

In the Gospels, however, Jesus foretells the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple (Matthew 24:1-2, Mark 13:1-2, Luke 21:5-6) and enjoins the worship of God *neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem, but in spirit and truth* [John 4:21, 23]. Moreover, St. Paul presents the earthly Jerusalem as typologically representing slavery under the Old Testament law, in contrast to the heavenly Jerusalem of freedom in the gospel; the two Jerusalems are as different from each other as the bondwoman Hagar and the free woman Sarah (Galatians 4:21-31). For the authors of the New Testament, the role of Jerusalem as the focal point of religious devotion seemed to be at an end.

In fact, the Temple was indeed destroyed in A.D. 70. Subsequently, in 135, the Roman forces under Emperor Hadrian razed the entire city to the ground. Jerusalem was then rebuilt and transformed into a pagan Roman city named Aelia Capitolina, and the Jews were expelled. Included in the displaced population were the Jewish Christians, who comprised most, if not all, of the Jerusalem church. The repopulated city featured temples of Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, and Venus in addition to theaters and public baths, as well as statues of Hadrian and his imperial successor placed on the former site of the Jewish Temple.

We need not be surprised, then, that Christians did not consider Jerusalem a site to be venerated or a destination for pilgrimages in the first three centuries. Jesus himself had lamented, *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones*



those who are sent to her
[Matthew 23:37, Luke 13:34]. Moreover, Jerusalem was the city that had rejected God's own Son, attempting to delete Him from the ranks of God's people. And now, with the erasure of monotheistic worship and its replacement by pagan polytheism, the city could not be regarded as a site where one could readily draw near to God. Although the Jerusalem church survived, undoubtedly through the presence of Gentile Christians in the city, the Christian literature

of this era refers to the city as "Aelia," not as "Jerusalem," and it was the Bishop of Caesarea (in Palestine) who exercised patriarchal authority over the region—not the bishop of the first community of believers, the mother of all other churches.

In the fourth century the sweeping changes instituted by the Christian Emperor Constantine gave rise to enthusiasm not only for identifying the holy sites but also for worshiping at them. The pilgrimages to the Holy Land by Constantine's mother-in-law and subsequently (and more spectacularly) by his mother, St. Helena, inspired a massive, government-funded effort in church construction and adornment. Churches and shrines proliferated in locations associated with Biblical narratives. These waves of devotion spread to the West. An anonymous pilgrim from Bordeaux in Gaul was the first to produce a written record of a religiously motivated visit to Jerusalem, which occurred in 333. A more famous pilgrim was Egeria, thought to have been a nun from

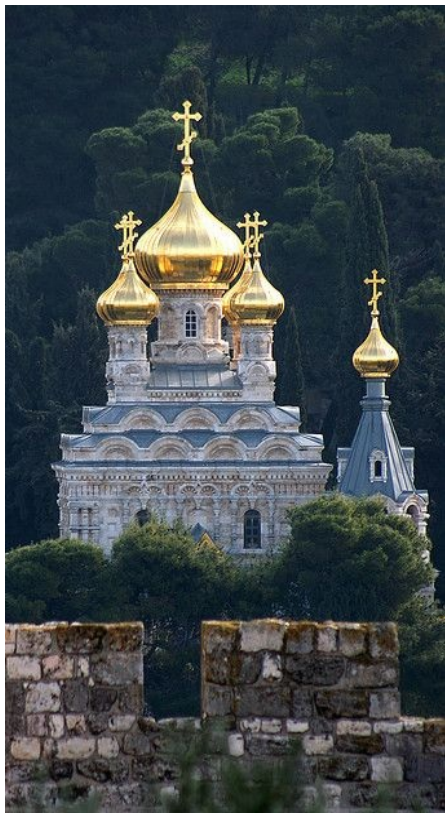
Roman Spain, who participated eagerly in the liturgical celebrations of the Jerusalem church and penned detailed descriptions sometime in the 380s. The Christian residents of the city, too, were devoted to the holy places: St. Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem in the mid-fourth century, encouraged his catechumens to feel a special connection to the Biblical sites that were part of their everyday landscape.

Nevertheless, not all of the fourth-century Fathers regarded the newly Christian Jerusalem as worthy of devotion. For example, St. Gregory of Nyssa, commissioned by the authorities in Constantinople—either by the ecumenical council of 381 or by a local council—to mediate ecclesiastical disputes in Jerusalem, wrote disparagingly of the shocking mores of the city. Asserting that the fornication, idolatry, and murder prevalent in that setting precluded any notion that some special grace abounded there, he stated that his faith was "neither diminished nor increased" by his visit. Nevertheless, he characterized Jerusalem as "the very spot that has received the holy footprint of the true Life."

St. Jerome exhibited similar ambivalence toward travel to the Holy sites. A year after his own arrival there in 385, he waxed lyrical about the opportunities to bring the past into the present by reliving the events of Christ's life and Passion at the sites where they occurred and by experiencing the emotions felt by the saints of Holy Scripture. In an epistle to the Roman matron Marcella cajoling her to join him in the Holy Land, he offered the following prospect: "we shall together enter the Savior's cave, and together weep in the sepulcher of the Lord with His sister and with His mother . . . touch with our lips the wood of the cross, and rise in prayer . . . upon the Mount of Olives with the ascending Lord. We shall see Lazarus come forth bound with grave clothes . . ." On the other hand, several years later he dissuaded the ascetic Paulinus of Nola (Italy) from relocating to Jerusalem. Jerome told his friend, "Access to the courts of heaven is as easy from Britain as it is from Jerusalem," and "The true temple of Christ is the believer's soul." Like St. Gregory of Nyssa, he also described the sins and vices

rampant in the city of Jerusalem. It should be noted, however, that these remarks appear in the context of St. Jerome's practical argument that Paulinus would find it much more difficult to maintain the monastic life in the midst of any crowded and chaotic urban context.

In consideration of the situation in Jerusalem today, it is natural to feel the same sort of ambivalence that St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Jerome experienced. The current level of violence and hatred there—among both of the opposing ethnic groups—makes it tempting to label Jerusalem as the Unholy City. It is heart-rending to see that Palestinians are uprooted from their homes to accommodate Israeli settlers, and the anxiety of Israelis who fear the anger of Palestinians can elicit our sympathy also. Christian



pilgrims can undergo an inner conflict when pondering this ongoing tragedy while simultaneously hoping to enjoy the ancient history of the city and to lift their hearts to the Lord with special devotion.

Nevertheless, we must remember that the Roman-occupied Jerusalem upon which Jesus cast His gaze was far from peaceful. Similar hostility and suffering reigned there in His time. By refusing to turn a blind eye to the shadow side of the Holy City, we can identify more strongly with our compassionate Lord, whose own heart ached for Jerusalem.

Moreover, we know that God Himself came to earth as one of **M**us. In so doing, He accepted the limitations of time and space that we experience. This means that He became incarnate at a particular time in a particular geographic location. The location that He chose is a worthy focus of veneration in expressing our awe and reverence toward the intimate connection between divinity and humanity that God initiated. More importantly, as Fr. Noah Bushelli noted, every Christian is a pilgrim striving for progress on an upward journey toward this God, the Lover of Mankind.

Sources: Elon Gilad, "Why is Jerusalem Called Jerusalem?" *Haaretz*, May 17, 2015; Egeria, *Diary of a Pilgrimage*, tr. George Gingras; Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lecture 14, tr. Leo McCauley; Gregory of Nyssa, Epistles 2 and 3, tr. Anna Silvas; Jerome, Epistles 46 and 58; Karen Armstrong, *Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths*.

Parish News

We will observe All Saints Day on the Sunday in the octave of the feast, November 4. At Coffee Hour following the Liturgy, we will continue our celebration of the saints by sharing something about our patron saints or favorite saints. You are invited to give a brief description of the saint's life, bring "props" to demonstrate something about the saint, or wear a costume that is appropriate for the saint's time. There are numerous books on the saints in our parish library and if you need further ideas or suggestions, please speak to Kh. Becky.

Vespers for the Departed (at 7pm) and Requiem Mass (at 7:30) for All Souls Day will be celebrated on Thursday, November 1, followed by a pot-luck supper. If you wish to have departed loved ones included in the prayers, please use the form provided at the entrance to the Chapel or send the names to Fr. Nicholas via email before November 1.



On Tuesday, November 20, the Eve of the Presentation of the Theotokos in the Temple, Vespers and Liturgy will be celebrated beginning at 7:00pm, followed by a pot-luck supper.

The study of the Gospel of Mark, which we began last month, will continue on Wednesday evenings (excluding November 21, the day before Thanksgiving) at 7:30pm. All are welcome to

join this Bible study at any time. We conclude the evening with the brief service of Compline.

We will collect canned and packaged food for the *Food for Hungry People* program until the Feast of the Epiphany, January 6. A collection box is provided in the Parish Hall. The food will be donated to a local soup kitchen or food bank.

Two new books, acquired on the pilgrimage to Scotland and England undertaken by Fr. Nicholas and Kh. Becky this summer, have been added to our parish library. The children's book, *Egfroth of Lindisfarne*, by Kate Tristram relates the stories of the most important saints who were on the Holy Isle of Lindisfarne, as told by an elderly monk to a young monk. The second book, *Father George Calciu: Interviews, Homilies, and Talks*, reveals details of the sufferings of Fr. George in the Communist persecutions of Christians in Romania, but also of his undying love for God and his fellow man - even his torturers. This book is a wonderful testimonial to the power of forgiveness and Christian love.

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Address Correction Requested

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>November 2018</h1>						<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Sung Mass at 9:30AM</i>
				1 All Saints Day <i>Mass at 7:30pm</i> B	2 All Souls Day	3 of the Octave of All Saints; St. Winifred, VM, c. 660; St. Silvia, Mother of St. Gregory, Ma, 592 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
4 Sunday in the Octave of All Saints; comm 23 rd Sun. after Pentecost Ss. Vitalis & Agricola, Mm, c. 304 G	5 Ss. Zachariah, M, and Elizabeth, Ma, 1st C.	6 St. Leonard of Noblac, Ab, c. 559	7 St. Wilibrord of Echternach, BC, 739 <i>Bible Study at 7:30pm</i>	8 Patriarchs & Prophets of the Old Law; Four Crowned Martyrs	9 Dedication of the Basilica of St. Savior in Rome, 324; St. Benignus, BC, c. 468	10 Ss. Tryphon, Respicus & Nympha Mm, c. 250 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
11 24 th Sunday after Pentecost; St. Martin of Tours, BC, 397; St. Theodore the Studite, Ab, 826 G	12 St. Martin I, PC, 655	13 St. Britius of Tours, BC, 444	14 St. Gregory Palamas, BCD, 1359 <i>Bible Study at 7:30pm</i>	15	16	17 St. Gregory the Wonder-worker, BC, c. 270; St. Gregory of Tours, BC, 594 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
18 25 th Sun. after Pentecost; Dedication of Basilica of Ss. Peter & Paul, 4 th c.; St. Odo of Cluny, Ab, 942 G	19 St. Pontianus, PM, 235	20 St. Edmund, KM, 870 <i>Mass at 7:30pm</i> W	21 Presentation of the BVM; St. Gelasius, PC, 496; St. Columbanus, Ab, c. <i>No Bible Study</i>	22 St. Cecilia, VM, c. 230 <i>(Thanksgiving Day)</i>	23 St. Clement, PM, 96; St. Felicity of Rome, M, 165	24 St. Chryso-gonus of Aquileia, M., c. 304 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
25 26 th & Last Sunday after Pentecost; St. Katherine of Alexandria, VM, c. 4th c. G	26 St. Peter of Alexandria, BM, 311	27	28 <i>Bible Study at 7:30pm</i>	29 St. Saturninus, M, 309	30 St. Andrew the Apostle, 1st c.	

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

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