

✠ 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

From a Treatise by St. Innocent of Alaska

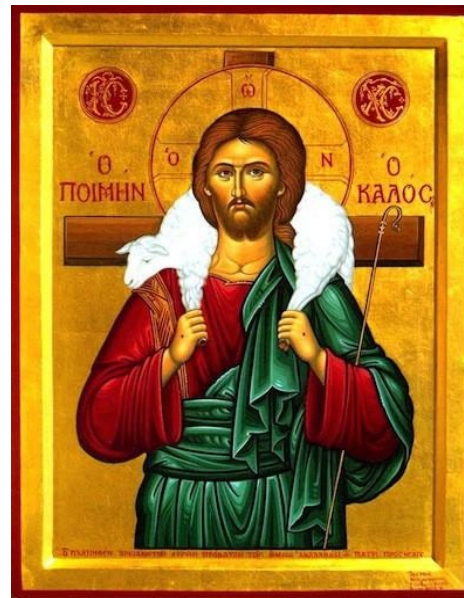
People were not created merely to live here on earth like animals that disappear after their death, but to live with God and in God, and to live not for a hundred or a thousand years, but to live eternally. But only Christians can live with God: that is to say, those who rightly believe in Jesus Christ.

Everyone, whoever he may be, desires and seeks propriety and happiness. To desire what is good for oneself and to seek prosperity or happiness is part of man's nature, and, therefore, it is not a sin or vice. But we need to know that here on earth there has not been, is not, and never will be true and perfect happiness and prosperity without God or outside God.

Nothing in this world but God can fill our heart or fully satisfy our desires. A fire cannot be put out with brushwood and oil because only water will put it out. In exactly the

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same way, the desires of the human heart cannot be satisfied with the goods of this world because only the grace of God can quench the thirst of our desires.

Everything we desire pleases us only so long as we do not possess it; and when we get it, we soon get tired of it. Or only what we do not as yet have seems to us good and attractive; whereas all that we have, even though it is the very best, is either not enough for

us or does not attract us. A good example of this is King Solomon, who, as is well known, was so rich that all the household plate and furniture in his palaces was of pure gold; he was so wise that kings came to visit him; and he was so glorious that his foes were terrified of him. Being wiser and mightier than all his contemporaries, he was able to satisfy all his wishes and desires, so that there was hardly a thing in the world that he did not possess or could not obtain. But with all this he could not satisfy his heart, and the desires of his heart wearied and tormented him far more than an ordinary man; and in the end, having tried everything in the world, he said in his writings, "Everything in this world is vanity, and nothing can satisfy our desires."

Truly, not a single earthly pleasure can satisfy our heart. We are strangers on earth, pilgrims and travelers; our home and fatherland are there in heaven, in the heavenly kingdom; and there do not exist on earth things that could perfectly satisfy our desires. Let a man own the whole world and all that is in the world, yet all that will not interest him for more than a minute, so to speak, and it

will never satisfy his heart; for the heart of man can be fully satisfied only by the love of God, and therefore God alone can fill the heart and soul of man and quench the thirst of his desires.

And so, do you wish to live with God there, in the kingdom of heaven? Be an Orthodox Christian. Do you want prosperity and happiness? Seek it in God. Do you want your heart to be fully satisfied? Turn it to God from Whom you have been separated by your sins.

However, no one by himself, without Jesus Christ, can turn and draw near to God, because our sins, like a high wall, do not let us come to Him. And unless Jesus Christ in His mercy to us had come down to earth, and unless He had taken to Himself our human flesh and by his death destroyed the wall that separated us from God, everyone would have perished and not a single soul could have drawn near to God or lived with Him. For everyone is a sinner and is born in sin from his mother's womb; and even in an infant, although it knows nothing of the world and does nothing, there is already the seed of sin.

Therefore Jesus Christ is our Redeemer, Savior, Deliverer, and Benefactor. Now everyone who wants to do so can return to God and enter the kingdom of heaven. But there is only one way into the kingdom of heaven, and that is the very way that Jesus Christ went when He lived on earth. There is no other way, and never was, and never will be, for Jesus Christ said, *I am the way* [John 14:6]. *If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.* [Matt. 16:24]

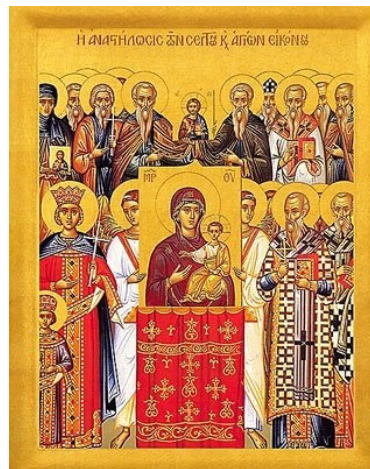
This is reprinted from the book Indication of the Way Into the Kingdom of Heaven by St. Innocent (d. 1879), published by Holy Trinity Publications, Jordanville, NY, 2013.

Parish News

We begin the season of Lent on Ash Wednesday, March 13, with Vespers at 7PM and the blessing and imposition of ashes and Mass at 7:30. In the weeks following, the Church calls us to more intense prayer, fasting, repentance, and alms-giving in order to better prepare for the celebration of the Feast of Feasts, the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ at Pascha. On Friday evenings during Lent, we will share pot-luck suppers at 6:30PM, continue with a class, and then end with Stations of the Cross and Litany of the Cross.

Because of the way the date falls on the calendar this year, we will not have Mass for the feast of our parish patron, St. Gregory the Great on Tuesday, March 12. Please remember the feast in your personal prayers.

Mass will be celebrated for the Feast of the Annunciation on Monday evening, March 25, at 7:30PM, preceded by Vespers at 7 and followed by a pot-luck supper.



We will join with our brothers and sisters in all of the Orthodox jurisdictions represented in the Washington DC area at Vespers on the first Sunday in Lent, March 17. This celebration of the Triumph of Orthodoxy over iconoclasm will be held at Ss. Peter & Paul Church in Potomac, Maryland, at 5PM. The speaker this year will be Fr. Nicholas Belcher, Hierarchical Assistant to Metropolitan Joseph.

A new book in our parish library recounts the journey of the Orthodox Christians who were led from China by St. John Maximovich at the beginning of the Communist revolution there. *Exodus* is a documentary compiled from letters, reports and eyewitness accounts of this harrowing tale of a journey from China to the Philippines and eventually to the United States. As Bishop of Shanghai, St. John became the advocate and spokesman (and even Washington DC lobbyist!) for the Orthodox Christians as they escaped from wars and Communism. This is a heroic story of a saint who was a true shepherd of his flock.

Archangel Gabriel

Feast Day ~ March 24

Belief in the existence of angels - heavenly spirits who at times shine forth into the earthly realm - was common in pre-Christian pagan times and has always been basic to Jewish thought. The Old Testament contains many references to these spiritual beings as messengers of God, sent to give man good news, warning, protection, and direction.

This belief in heavenly messengers was confirmed for Christians when the coming of Christ was announced by one of these messengers. The Archangel Gabriel first appeared to Zacharias to tell him of the birth of his son, John, the Forerunner of the Messiah. Gabriel then appeared to Mary to tell her that she was “highly favored” and had been chosen to bear God’s Son.

This knowledge of the existence of heavenly beings who, at the will of God, interact with earthly beings is central to the unfolding of the Christian story: Joseph was warned by an angel in a dream to flee from Israel to Egypt to escape the massacre of the Holy Innocents [Matt. 2:13]; angels ministered to Christ after his temptation in the wilderness [Matt. 4:11]; an angel announced the



Resurrection of Christ to the myrrh-bearing women [Matt. 28:2-7]; an angel released Peter from prison [Acts 12:7-11].

Despite the skepticism of modern “rational” man, the Church has continued to acknowledge and celebrate these spiritual creations of God, sent to give us help in times of need. In the Mass, we refer to the angels numerous times - from the prayers at the foot of the altar (“I confess to... blessed

Michael Archangel...”); the *Gloria in excelsis* (“Glory be to God on high”), the song of the angels announcing the Nativity of Our Lord to the shepherds; to the *Sanctus* (“Holy, holy, holy...”), the song the angels sing perpetually in heaven; when we ask in the Prayer of Consecration that our offering of bread and wine be “borne by the hands of thine angel to thine altar on high”; to our repetition of St. Gabriel’s message in the *Angelus* at the end.

The Church honors the angels with feast days throughout the liturgical year: St. Michael the Archangel, our defender against evil, on September 29; the Guardian Angels, who are sent to protect us, on October 2; the Archangel Raphael, the healer of God, on October 24; and the Archangel Gabriel, who “stands in the presence of God” [Luke 1:19] on March 24, the day before we celebrate his most important mission from God, the Annunciation to the Theotokos.

As we pray before the icon of the Annunciation of the Archangel Gabriel to the Theotokos in church, may we give thanks for the angels of God and may we always be open to the assistance of these heavenly messengers.

A Word on Pious Prayer

by Fr. George Calciu

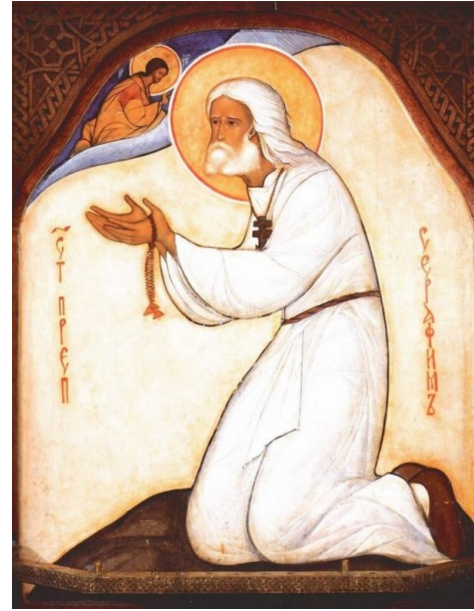
Prayer is an act of concentration and detachment from material reality - one's anchoring into a realm that is new for any man, even if he is a believing man, because genuine prayer does not mean the mechanical reciting of some texts and the directing of attention, every now and then, to the meaning of the words. In prayer one is to be seized and carried off. It is a going out of yourself and making straight for God in a mysterious way which is not even understood by him who practices it. Prayer is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In the first place, one who prays knows that he is engaging himself in an activity full of demonic snares. Anyone - no matter how rarely he has prayed - who has desired to feel the sweetness of prayer knows by what difficulties and temptations he will be hit. On the other hand, stay in front of the television for hours on end and watch a movie full of trivialities and the commonplace, and not one other thought will distract you from the dissipation that occurs on the screen.

Set yourself to prayer - and I am not speaking of those who pray mechanically, but of those who come with the good intention to pray - and a thousand other thoughts will assail you, contrary to your good intentions. Memories and stupid and unimportant preoccupations will invade your mind, as well as anger, bad words, jokes, and whatever else can distract you from prayer which would unite you with God...

He who wants to have his prayer improve must, before anything else, realize that he is a sinner. He must watch over his attitudes, actions, and thoughts and realize how sinful he is every day and every hour... Then, step-by-step, he must make a shield against the temptations of the world, as much as possible and not

be frightened if, at the beginning, this shield is easily penetrated by the temptations of Satan. In time, the shield strengthens him and it is more difficult for the devil to penetrate beyond it. No one, however, is spared temptations as long as he lives in the flesh...



Just as God knows all our deeds and thoughts and intentions, so also He knows our repentance and tears and regrets. If someone lives all these things, he begins to be integrally formed in the Spirit. That is, he gains a sort of immunity from the evils of the world; he is no longer so strongly disturbed by the malice of Satan, offences from his neighbors, and all that usually creates sufferings for us. According to the expression of St. John of the Ladder, "I have partly

closed the windows of the soul to the world." In this case, prayer begins to become all the more devout, all the more genuine.

Prayer is a conversation with God in which he who prays takes his position on the lowest step of humility. The devil fell because of his arrogance, and therefore humility enrages him, because he cannot do anything against it. He can perhaps turn a good deed against you through self-praise or by having someone else praise you. Anything performed with good intentions can be subverted into your destruction if you let yourself be tempted. But humility and repentance are untouchable by him.

As soon as you prepare your heart for prayer and have purified your mind of the cares of the day which, no matter what, you

St. Gregory Orthodox Church

c/o 9415 Wire Avenue

Silver Spring, MD 20901

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will not be able to vanquish completely, set yourself to prayer. In that moment, the angel of prayer who watches over you comes to your right side, and the devil cunningly and covertly sets himself on your left. You must take a pious position, appropriate for the attitude of prayer: be it on your knees, or standing - your position must express a relationship to prayer.

For us common folk who pray, it is better that we have before us icons of the Savior and of the Mother of God and of the saints to whom we wish to pray. The icon, however, is only your step toward the spiritual - toward the heart of Jesus, toward the compassion of the Holy Virgin, and toward the goodness of the saints. In fact, do not see the icon except as a gate of entrance into the world of divinity.

If you pray aloud, do not be carried away by the sound of your own voice... In that moment, prayer abandons you, leaving you with only the barren prayer of the lips, which, in any case, is better than no prayer at all, because at least the flesh prays... If you pray mentally, know that thought is more rapid than the uttering of words, even if it is just in your mind... We must carefully pronounce every word mentally, with the same care that we pray aloud.

All of these endeavors and personal prayers are only a drop of water. The great prayer - saving and unifying - is the Holy and Divine Liturgy, from which the Christian cannot be absent on the days that are fixed by the Church. Confession and Communion are necessary. They are the crown of our endeavors and put upon our prayers the seal of the Holy Spirit and deify us through the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true Man.

These excerpts are from the book Father George Calciu: Interviews, Homilies, and Talks (St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2010). This book is in our parish library.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>March 2019</h1>					1 St. David of Wales, BC, 544	2 St. Chad, BC, 672 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
					3 Sexagesima; St. Lucius, BM, 254 ✓	4
10 Quinquagesima; Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, Mm, 320 ✓	11 St. Sophronius of Jerusalem, BC, c. 369	12 St. Gregory the Great, BCD, 604	13 Ash Wednesday <i>Mass at 7:30pm</i> ✓	14	15	16 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
17 First Sunday in Lent; St. Patrick, BC, 461; St. Joseph of Arimathea, C, 1 st c. (<i>Sunday of Orthodoxy</i>) ✓	18 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, BCD, 386; St. Edward, KM 979	19 St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin; 1 st c.	20 Ember Wednesday; St. Cuthbert, BC, 687	21 Repose of St. Benedict, c. 550	22 Ember Friday <i>Lenten Supper & Stations of the Cross at 6:30pm</i>	23 Ember Saturday <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
24 Second Sunday in Lent; St. Gabriel the Archangel ✓	25 The Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary <i>Mass at 7:30pm</i> W	26	27 St. John of Damascus, CD, 749	28	29 <i>Lenten Supper & Stations of the Cross at 6:30pm</i>	30 St. John of the Ladder, Ab, 649; Seven Sorrows of the BVM <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
31 Third Sunday in Lent; St. Innocent of Alaska, BC, 1879 ✓						<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Mass at 9:30AM</i>

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

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