

✠ 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 Discourse by St. Simeon the New Theologian d.1022

Let us follow Christ's commandments which lead us up to heaven and to God. Even though the word describes to us different paths, their intrinsic nature is the same; they are spoken of as though branching off into several paths according to each person's ability and disposition. We begin from many and varied works and actions, just as

travelers depart from different places and many cities, the destination we are anxious to reach is on, the kingdom of heaven. The actions and ways of godly men must be understood as spiritual virtues. Those who begin to walk in them must run toward one goal, just as those who come from various countries and places come together, as we have said, to one city, the kingdom of heaven. There together they become worthy to reign with Christ and become subjects of one King, our God and Father. By this city, which is one,

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not many, you will understand the holy and undivided trinity of virtues.

Above all it is that virtue which comes before the others but is also mentioned as the last of them, since it is the goal of all good things and greater than then all - charity. All faith comes from it and is built on its foundation; on it hope is based. Apart from love nothing whatever has existed, nor ever will. Its names and

actions are many. More numerous still are its distinctive marks; divine and innumerable are its properties. Yet it is one in nature, wholly bond utterance wether on the part of angels or men or any other creatures, even such as are unknown to us. Reason cannot comprehend it; its glory is inaccessible, its counsels unsearchable. It is eternal because it is beyond time, invisible because though cannot comprehend it, though it may perceive it. Many are the beauties of this holy Sion not made with hands! He who has begun to see it no longer delights in sensible objects; he ceases to be attached to the glory of this world...

By no other virtue, by no other fulfillment of the Lord's commandment, can anyone be known as a disciple of Christ, for He says, *By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another* [John 13:55]. It is for this reason that *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us* [John 1:14]. For this reason He was incarnate; He willingly endured His life-giving sufferings, in order that He might deliver man, His own creature, from the bonds of hell, and restore him and lead him up to heaven. Moved by love the apostles ran that unceasing race and cast on the whole world the fishhook and net of the word to drag it up from

the deep of idolatry and bring it safe into the port of the kingdom of heaven. Moved by love the martyrs shed their blood that they might not lose Christ. Moved by it our God-bearing Fathers and teachers of the world eagerly laid down their own lives for the catholic and apostolic Church.

St. Barbatus of Benevento

Feast Day ~ February 19

Although there are many stories of group and even mass baptisms both in holy Scripture and in the lives of the saints, the conversion of the Roman Empire and beyond to Christianity was, for the most part, not smooth sailing! There are many instances of areas which had become Christian falling back into pagan practices, often with a change in the ruler of the area. Many Christian clergy and missionaries - including St. Paul himself - had to struggle constantly to maintain commitment and fidelity among those they had brought into the Church. St. Barbatus of Benevento is one who faced such a struggle in 7th century Italy.

Born in a village in the duchy of Benevento (southern Italy) around the year 610, Barbatus was a devout child who received a Christian education and loved reading the Scriptures. All during his childhood his one desire was to be a priest, so as soon as he had reached the canonical age, the local bishop ordained him. It was discovered that Fr. Barbatus had a great gift for preaching, so the bishop gave him the task of preaching frequently and he eventually assigned him to be pastor of a village parish near the city of Benevento. Here, however, Fr. Barbato's preaching skills were not so appreciated. The people were very nominal in their faith and were not at all pleased when the priest called them to repentance and amendment of life in his sermons. They rebelled, using every weapon at their disposal - particularly slander - to vent



their sinful rage at their pastor. Eventually, Fr. Barbatus returned to Benevento where he was welcomed back.

But all was not entirely rosy in Benevento either. Although the inhabitants of the city had become Christian through the efforts of a disciple of St. Peter, there had been many changes in the centuries since then. The Goths had sacked the city in 545 and then

it was overtaken by the Lombards, who were Arians. Although some citizens retained their Catholic beliefs, most had preserved some very strange pagan rituals which had been promoted by the ruler, Romuald. These rituals included bowing down to a golden viper and paying honor to a tree, upon which an animal skin was hung for archers to shoot at and then this ceremony was celebrated with public games. These holdovers from a pagan past required the strong preaching of Fr. Barbatus!

Once again, the people were resistant to change, enjoying their customs and superstitions without concern for their inconsistency with Christian faith. Only when another threat was made - one they considered more terrible and imminent than the idea of losing their souls to the devil - did the people turn to God in prayer and fasting and repentance. Emperor Constans II was bringing an army toward southern Italy for the purpose of overthrowing Lombard rule and with the possibility of the city of Benevento being sacked again. Fr. Barbatus warned about this possibility and the people finally listened. Events happened as he had foretold, but he also told of the end of the siege, which happened as he predicted.

With the people's change of heart and the disaster over, Fr. Barbatus melted down the golden viper to make a chalice for the church, he chopped down the tree which had been such a source of sinfulness, and Christianity became strengthened in Benevento. When the bishop passed away in 663, Fr. Barbatus was consecrated to be the new bishop. He participated in a regional church council in Rome in 680 and in the Sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 681 which was called to refute the Monothelite heresy. St. Barbatus died shortly after the end of this Council in 682 at about 70 years of age, having spent his life arduously working to bring his people to authentic Christian faith and practice.

Once again, entire nations and regions which had been faithfully Christian for centuries are now slipping rapidly backward through the retention or reinstatement of pagan practices. From seemingly innocent customs (such as hanging mistletoe at Christmas) to our barbaric laws declaring that killing a child in the womb or at birth is a "right". It is difficult for the Christian to stay on the narrow path which Christ demands. May St. Barbatus intercede for us as we try to discern the right way. Holy Barbatus, pray for us.

Resources: Rev. Alban Butler: Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs, and Other Saints; on-line articles from CatholicSaints.Info, newmanconnection.com; and Wikipedia.

Pre-Lent: the "Gesimas"

One of the principal characteristics of Christianity is the marking of time. Our liturgical calendar is full, not only of specific days of special importance (saints' feast days, the Nativity of our Lord, the day of the Resurrection, etc.), but also of days (vigils) and even whole seasons of preparation (Advent, Lent) for

great celebrations. The Church recognizes that this earthly life - which in itself is a preparation for life eternal in the heavenly kingdom - sometimes requires gradual movement between the highs and lows of this liturgical calendar. The "gesima" Sundays are such a period of gradual descent into the spiritual and physical rigors of the season of Lent.

The three Sundays - Septuagesima, Sexagesima, and Quinquagesima - point us toward Pascha, marking the time before that greatest of feasts in the year, as approximately 70, 60, and 50 days prior to Passiontide and then Holy Week, the last of the preparations for the celebration of the Resurrection.

The liturgical calendar as we know it today was a long time in developing. The first several centuries saw great variety in how time was marked with feasts and fasts; there were controversies between those who tried to maintain the connection with Judaism and its calendar and those who recognized the need to separate from Judaism; the times of preparation for celebrations fluctuated greatly from place to place and time to time; and practices between the Greek-speaking eastern part of the Empire and the Latin West often differed and prompted controversy. Gradually, between the 6th and the 9th centuries, Ash Wednesday became established as the beginning of Lent throughout the West and, according to Dom Prosper Gueranger in his series *The Liturgical Year*, the practices observed today on the "gesima" Sundays were begun as early as the 9th century.

To avoid going abruptly from the joyous celebrations of Christmas and Epiphany to the starkness of the penitential nature of Lent, the Church gradually eliminates some of the signs of our earlier celebrations on these three Sundays before we begin the Lenten period: the *Alleluia* and the *Gloria in excelsis*, the most joyful of all our Christian utterances, are now suspended and the color of the vestments has already changed to purple, the color for penitential times. The eastern fasting practices also gradually

eliminate meat and dairy products from the diet during these weeks. By the time we receive ashes on our foreheads at the beginning of Lent, we have turned our attention more intensely toward repentance and amendment of life.

Parish News

We rejoice to welcome Penelope Irene, daughter of Mark and Thaomy Neuhoff, into Christ's holy Orthodox Church. Penelope's Baptism and Chrismation took place during the morning Mass on January 19.



At the annual Parish Meeting, Sharon Green and Nathaniel Green were elected to the Parish Council, and Karl Tsuji was appointed as Treasurer (a position he holds for life!). The Parish Council is responsible for the “nuts and bolts” side of church life - building maintenance, heating and air conditioning, finances, etc. This coming year, the Council will be engaged in plans for the next stage of our remodeling, making the

parish hall arrangement more conducive to our needs and ADA-compliant. All meetings of the Council are open to any parishioner who would like to attend.

At the annual national March for Life on January 24, Bishop THOMAS represented our archdiocese. St. Gregory's hosted

several students from St. Vladimir's Seminary, who were also here for that event and were with us for Saturday Vespers and Liturgy on Sunday (and slept on our parish hall floor!).

February 2 is the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple, also known as the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Candlemas. It is from the Gospel for this feast that we get the *Nunc Dimittis* (“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace”) which we sing at every Vespers service and the name Candlemas is applied to the feast because it is at this service that candles to be used in church throughout the year are blessed, distributed, and carried in procession. Writing about the fact that in ancient times, the month of February had been dedicated to the god Pluto and that towns, cities and households were purified by offerings to the household gods in that month, St. Bede (673-735) tells us:

But the Christian religion appropriately altered this custom of purification, since in the same month, on the feast of Saint Mary, all the people, with their priests and ministers and hymns sung in melodious voice, proceeded through the churches and through appropriate locations in the city, and they carried in their hands burning candles... not, of course for the purification of the earthly empire, but in perpetual memory of the kingdom of heaven, when, according to the parable of the wise virgins, all the elect will soon come to meet their bridegroom and king, while the lamps of their good actions blaze, and they will enter with him into the nuptials of the eternal city. [From Bede's *On Time*, as quoted in *On the Liturgy* by Amalar of Metz (775-850)]

Although the small size of our chapel means that only the clergy and altar servers will form the procession, we will continue this more than thirteen hundred year-old tradition at St. Gregory's on this feast day,

And a Sword Shall Pierce Thy Soul

by St. Nikolai of Ochrid



Who on this earth can come near equaling the Lord's patient endurance of suffering but His most holy Mother? The aged Simeon, adorned with age like a white swan, foresaw as a prophet her future suffering, and likened this suffering to a sword in her soul. A sword passed through her soul when righteous Joseph doubted her at the time of her pregnancy, and another when she had to

flee to Egypt from Herod's sword, the third and fourth and many, many others when she saw the hatred and plotting of the Jewish elders against her Son, day after day through the whole time of His preaching and wondrous works among men. But the sharpest sword pierced her heart when she stood beneath the Cross of her Son and Lord. This sword was the one foreseen and spoken of to her by the holy, aged Simeon. Her silence was majestic and moving, a silence beneath which, like a curtain, she hid all her pain, all the wound in her heart. In the darkness, all this pain which had accumulated in her most pure heart shone as an inextinguishable flame of faith and hope in God, and consecration to him. The handmaid of the Lord, peerless in her nobility. She had seen her place within God's plan for man's salvation; she had read of herself in the prophets; she had spoken with angels, God's heralds. Therefore, all that came upon her, joy or pain, she knew came from God, and therefore neither went delirious in her joy nor grumbled in her pain. She kept silent with a "yes" in her heart.

Most holy Virgin, Mother of God, help us that we may, like thee, be obedient to the will of God. To thy Son and Lord through thee be glory and praise for ever. Amen.

St. Gregory Orthodox Church
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Address Correction Requested

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>February 2020</h1>						
<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Mass at 9:30AM</i>						1 St. Ignatius of Antioch, BM, c. 107; St. Bridget, Abs, 523 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
2 Presentation of Our Lord; Candlemas; comm. 4 th Sunday after Epiphany <i>W</i>	3 St. Blaise, BM, c. 316; St. Anskar of Hamburg, BC, 865	4 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 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
9 Fifth Sunday after Epiphany; St. Cyril of Alexandria, BCD, 444; St. Apollonia, VM, c. 248 <i>G</i>	10 St. Scholastica, V, 543	11 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 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
16 Septuagesima; St. Nicholas of Japan, BC, 1912 <i>V</i>	17 <i>(President's Day)</i>	18 St. Simeon of Jerusalem, BM, 1st c.; St. Colman, BC, 675	19	20	21	22 Chair of St. Peter at Antioch <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
23 Sexagesima <i>V</i>	24 Vigil of St. Matthias	25 St. Matthias, Apostle, 1st c.	26 St. Walburga of Heidenheim, V, 779	27 St. Porphyrius of Gaza, BC, 420; St. Ethelbert, KC, 616	28 St. Raphael of Brooklyn, BC, 1915; St. Alexander, BC, 326; St. Leander, BC, 600	29 St. Oswald of Worcester, BC, 992 <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.