

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

March, 2020 - Volume XXV, Issue 3

St. Gregory the Great Orthodox Church
A Western Rite Congregation of the Antiochian Archdiocese
13407 Roxbury Rd., Silver Spring, MD - stgregoryoc.org

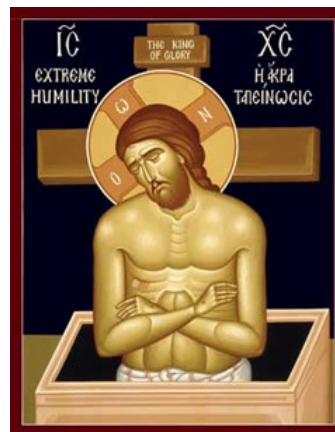
*From a homily
by St. Basil
the Great
d. 379*

Would that man had abided in the glory which he possessed with God - he would have genuine instead of fictitious dignity. For he would be ennobled by the power of God, illumined with divine wisdom, and made joyful in the possession of eternal life and its blessings. But, because he ceased to desire divine glory in expectation of a better prize, and strove for the unattainable, he lost the good which it was in his power to possess. The surest salvation for him, the remedy of his ills, and the means of restoration to his original fate is in practicing humility and not pretending that he may lay claim to any glory through his own efforts but seeking it from God...

That stern Pharisee, who in his overweening pride not only boasted of himself but also discredited the publican in the

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presence of God, made his justice void by being guilty of pride. The publican went down justified in preference to him because he had given glory to God, the Holy One, and did not dare to lift his eyes, but sought only to win mercy, accusing himself by his posture, by striking his breast, and by entertaining no other motive except propitiation.

Be on your guard, therefore, and bear in mind this example of grievous loss sustained through arrogance. The one guilty of insolent behavior suffered the loss of his justice and forfeited his reward by his bold self-reliance. He was rendered inferior to a humble man and a sinner because in his self-exaltation he did not await the judgement of God, but pronounced it of himself. Never place yourself above anyone, not even great sinners. Humility often saves a sinner who has committed many grievous transgressions. Do not, then, justify yourself as regards another... Keep as your familiar that word of the Lord: *Everyone that humbleth himself shall be exalted and he that exalteth himself shall be humbled* [Luke 14:11].

Such reminders regarding self-exaltation we should keep reciting constantly to ourselves, demeaning ourselves that we may be exalted, in imitation of the Lord who descended from heaven to utter lowliness and who was, in turn, raised to the height which befitted Him. In everything which concerns the Lord we find lessons in humility. As an infant, He was straightway laid in a cave, and not upon a couch but in a manger. In the house of a carpenter and of a mother who was poor, He was subject to His mother and her spouse. He was taught and He paid heed to what He needed not to be told. He asked questions, but even in the asking He won admiration for His wisdom. He submitted to John - the Lord received baptism at the hands of His servant. He did not

make use of the marvelous power which He possessed to resist any of those who attacked Him, but, as if yielding to superior force, He allowed temporal authority to exercise the power proper to it. He was brought before the high priest as though a criminal and then led to the governor. He bore calumnies in silence and submitted to His sentence, although He could have refuted the false witnesses. He was spat upon by slaves and vilest menials. He delivered Himself up to death, the most shameful death known to men. Thus, from His birth to the end of his life, He experienced all the exigencies which befall mankind and, after displaying humility to such a degree, He manifested His glory.

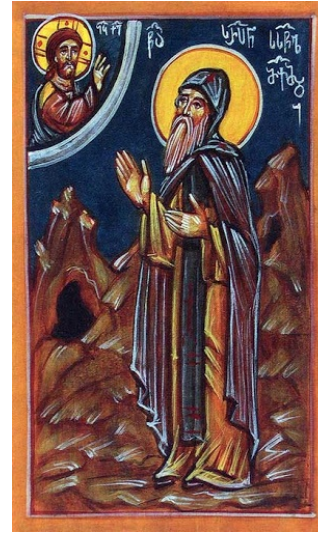
But how shall we, casting off the deadly weight of pride, descend to saving humility? Let your aspect, your garb, your manner of walking and sitting, your diet, bed, house and its furnishings reflect a customary thrift. Your manner of speaking, your conversation with your neighbor, also, should aim at modesty rather than pretentiousness... Be obliging to your friends, forbearing with the froward, benign to the lowly, a source of comfort to the afflicted, a friend to the distressed, a condemner of no one.

Thus you will travel to good purpose the road leading to that true glory which is to be found with the angels and with God. Christ will acknowledge you as his own disciple before the angels and He will glorify you if you imitate His humility, for He says: *Learn of me because I am meek and humble of heart and you shall find rest to your souls.* [Matt. 11:29]. To Him be glory and empire for ever and ever. Amen.

St. Serapion the "Sindonite"

Feast Day ~ March 21

Not many people would take the words of our Lord Jesus Christ so literally and have it impact their lives so dramatically as did



the Apostles, who left all and followed Him [Mark 10:28-30]. Most Christians are willing to give a portion of their income to the Church or even tithe the biblical standard of ten percent, but few would actually sell everything they have and give to the poor [Mark 10:21]. Among the saints, however, are some who did just that. St. Serapion, whose feast day is March 21, was such a follower of Christ.

An Egyptian by birth (sometime in the fourth century), Serapion went into the desert to live the life of a monk: he kept no money, he had no belongings, he ate very little, and he wore only a thin garment made of coarse linen called a *sindon*, thus earning himself the nickname “*Sindonite*”.

St. Serapion had a great missionary fervor and wanted to convert men to life in Christ, so he left the desert from time to time to seek out lost souls. Once, he sold himself into slavery in the service of a Greek actor. During his time of service, his humility and the persuasiveness of his teachings led the master and his family to ask for baptism so that they, too, could be Christians. Leaving acting behind, the master begged Serapion to remain in his household as a teacher and friend, but the saint refused the money he was offered and moved on to find other opportunities.

Again, he sold himself to be the slave of a wealthy widow who - in gratitude for the spiritual counsel and example she received from the slave - gave him a cloak, a tunic and a book of the Gospels. No sooner had Serapion left the service of the widow than he gave the cloak to a poor man and then the tunic to another. Left with no other garment than his thin *sindon*, he discovered another very needy person and sold the Gospel book to help that man in his

distress. When asked why he had given up such a gift, Serapion replied, “This book seemed continually to cry to me, ‘Go and sell all that you have and give to the poor.’”

The monk traveled to Rome and entered the ship without paying for his passage. He was approached by the ship owners who, when they saw that Serapion had not eaten but given his food ration to others for several days, began to take care of him, giving them an opportunity to practice charity.

It is said that Serapion learned from St. Anthony, the father of monasticism, and was inspired by him to lead such an austere life. He was also a friend of St. Athanasius of Alexandria and joined him in the struggle against Arianism. St. Serapion was eventually made bishop of Thmuis in lower Egypt. Several written documents are attributed to him, including a letter on the death of St. Anthony and a *Euchologion* (or collection of prayers and liturgical rites) found in an 11-century manuscript on Mt. Athos and published in the late 19th century.

Returning to the desert in his later years, St. Serapion reposed in the Lord around the year 370, having given his life to Christ and His Church. May St. Serapion inspire us to be more intentional in following the commandments of Christ and may he intercede for us in our efforts.

Resources: Rev. Alban Butler, Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and Other Saints; website of the Orthodox Church in America; OrthodoxWiki.

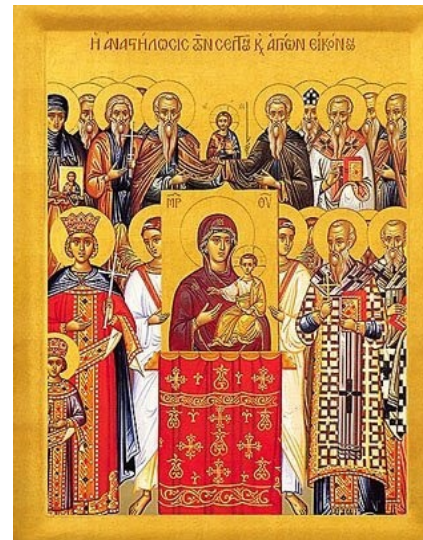
The Sunday of Orthodoxy

Since the year 843, the first Sunday in Lent has been an occasion for celebrating the triumph of the Orthodox veneration of icons over the charge of those who considered this veneration as

idolatrous. While this celebration, known as the “Sunday of Orthodoxy” or the “Triumph of Orthodoxy,” was never a part of the Western liturgical calendar, the controversy certainly affected the West, and Western popes and synodal decisions reflected the Orthodox view.

The controversy, which had been brewing for some time, escalated when the Emperor Leo III issued an edict in 726 which declared that all icons were idols and should be destroyed. Leo was probably influenced by the Monophysite heresy, which tended to minimize the humanity of Christ, and the Muslim and Jewish prohibition against depicting human figures. The resulting violent destruction of icons in churches and monasteries was a painful rift in the relationship between Church and State. Patriarch Germanos was deposed, councils which made iconoclastic decisions were held without the attendance of other patriarchs, and monks became martyrs for their defense of the veneration of icons.

St. John of Damascus, writing from the relative safety of the Muslim caliphate, defended the veneration of icons and condemned the actions of the Emperor. Pope Gregory III and later



Pope Hadrian I both issued condemnations of iconoclasm. More than a century earlier, St. Gregory the Great had strongly reproved the bishop of Marsaille for his tearing down the images in the cathedral on the grounds that those images provided the illiterate with Biblical stories and lives of the saints which they could not read in books. This indicates a much simpler attitude toward icons (and wall paintings, frescoes, mosaics, statues) than that held in the

East, but, nevertheless, the church in the West was strongly opposed to iconoclasm.

Finally, Empress Irene, acting as regent for her young son after the death of his father, called for a church Council to deal with this issue. The first effort, in Constantinople, was disbanded when the attendees were threatened by soldiers armed with swords. A year later (in 787), the Seventh Ecumenical Council was held in Nicaea. The Council made clear that icons are to be venerated - a veneration which is passed to the person it depicts - and not worshiped. Worship is due to God only.

We declare that, next to the sign of the precious and life-giving cross, venerable and holy icons - made of colors, pebbles or any other material that is fit - may be set in the holy churches of God, on holy utensils and vestments, on walls and boards, in houses and in streets...For the more these are kept in view through their iconographic representation, the more those who look at them are lifted up to remember and have an earnest desire for the archetypes. [quoted in Louth, below]

If only this had settled the issue, but the ugly face of iconoclasm appeared again under Emperor Leo V in 813. In the West, the Frankish empire, under Charlemagne, had refused to accept the decrees of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (despite the Roman church's clear opposition to iconoclasm) in part due to a mistranslation from Greek to Latin of the decisions of the Council. In the East, icons were again destroyed, clergy and monastics were killed or sent into exile, and all this was accompanied by subterfuge that demonstrates the term "Byzantine intrigue".

Once again, a widow Empress, acting for her young son, was responsible for the end to the crisis and the restoration of the icons - this time, Empress Theodora. Under her influence, *iconophile* clergy were reinstated, icons were returned to the

churches, and the ceremony which is now preserved in part around the Orthodox world on the first Sunday of Lent was established.

It may be true that this controversy began with those who had endowed icons with superstitious, magical qualities and who carried veneration to a degree equaling worship. But it is also true that the extreme reaction against such attitudes was wrong. Destruction of icons or any religious art shows a denial of the Incarnation and that man is made in the image (*icon*) of God. We pray that the periodic resurgence of iconoclasm (such as the destruction of statues and wall paintings at the time of the Protestant Reformation, the rejection of even the use of crosses by some puritanical faiths, the confiscation of icons by Communist authorities, etc.) will come to an end, and that these images may always point us toward heaven.

We venerate Thy most pure image, O Good One, and ask forgiveness of our transgressions, O Christ God. Of Thy good will, Thou wast pleased to ascend the cross in the flesh, and deliver Thy creatures from bondage to the enemy. Therefore with thankfulness we cry aloud to thee: "Thou hast filled all with joy, O our Savior, for Thou didst come to save the world." [Sung at the procession of the icons at Vespers on the Sunday of Orthodoxy]

Resources: Greek East and Latin West: The Church AD 681-1071 by Andrew Louth (Volume III of the series The Church in History,); A Dictionary of Greek Orthodoxy by Fr. Nicon Patrinoacoc.

Parish News

On Wednesday, March 4, we begin the penitential season of Lent with the Blessing and Imposition of Ashes and Mass at 7:30pm, followed by a pot-luck Lenten meal.

St. Gregory Orthodox Church
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Address Correction Requested

Vespers for the Sunday of Orthodoxy will be celebrated at St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Washington DC at 5PM on March 8. This very moving service, with participants from many Orthodox jurisdictions serving together, marks the triumph of the Orthodox faith over false teaching, especially concerning the veneration of icons. The speaker this year will be Bishop Joachim of the Greek Archdiocese, who grew up in the DC area, and who is now also on the faculty of Holy Cross Seminary in Brookline, MA.



Lent is a time of more intense self-examination, fasting, study, and service. To aid us in our Lenten journey, services for this month are as follows: on Wednesday, March 11, the Eve of St. Gregory the Great, Mass will be at 7:30pm (Vespers at 7); on Friday, March 13, at 7pm, we begin a study of the prophecies which are read at the Paschal Vigil, and end with Stations of the Cross and Litany of the Holy Cross; on Wednesday,

March 18, Mass for the Eve of St. Joseph will be at 7:30pm; on Friday, March 20, a continuation of our Lenten study and Stations; on Wednesday, March 25, we will celebrate the Feast of the Annunciation at 7:30pm (preceded by Vespers and followed by a pot-luck meal); Class and Stations will be on Friday, March 27.

Our food contributions for the Food for Hungry People weighed in at 111 pounds. These canned and packaged goods were donated to the Manna Food Center, which has locations in Silver Spring and Gaithersburg.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>March 2020</h1>						<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Mass at 9:30AM</i>
1 Quinquagesima; St. David of Wales, BC, 544 ✓	2 St. Chad, BC, 672	3 St. Lucius, BM, 254	4 Ash Wednesday <i>Mass at 7:30pm</i> ✓	5	6 Ss. Perpetua & Felicitas, Mm, 203	7 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
8 First Sunday in Lent (<i>Sunday of Orthodoxy</i>) ✓	9 St. Gregory of Nyssa, BCD, 394	10 Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, Mm, 320	11 Ember Wed- nesday; St. Sophronius of Jerusalem, BC, c. 369 <i>Mass at 7:30pm</i> W	12 St. Gregory the Great, BCD, 604	13 Ember Friday <i>Study & Stations at 7pm</i>	14 Ember Saturday <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
15 Second Sunday in Lent ✓	16	17 St. Patrick, BC, 461; St. Joseph of Arimathea, C, 1 st c.	18 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, BCD, 386; St. Edward, KM 979 <i>Mass at 7:30pm</i> W	19 St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin; 1 st c.	20 St. Cuthbert, BC, 687 <i>Study & Stations at 7pm</i>	21 Repose of St. Benedict, c. 550 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
22 Third Sunday in Lent ✓	23	24 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 <i>Study & Stations at 7pm</i>	28 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
29 Fourth Sunday in Lent ✓	30 St. John of the Ladder, Ab, 649	31 St. Innocent of Alaska, BC, 1879				

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

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