

✠ 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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From a
Homily by
St. Gregory
the Great
d.604

Brethren, the lesson, which ye have just heard from the holy Gospel, is clear enough if it be considered in its historical sense only. However, not only doth it contain history, but also suggestions of a mystic import, into which it is meet that we should at least make a brief enquiry. The Evangelist saith that

Mary Magdalene came to the sepulchre early, when it was yet dark. By these words, according to the historical interpretation, is known the time of her visit. But according to a mystical interpretation, there is also set forth the state of mind of her who thus came, and sought the sepulchre, namely, in these words: *It was yet dark*. For Mary was seeking after the very Author of life. But she was seeking him as though he were lifeless, even as she had seen him, in bodily fashion. And because she could not on this wise find him, she thought that his body had been stolen. Therefore, truly, she was as yet in darkness.

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And she ran quickly, and told Peter and John; of whom we read that they also ran. Verily, those who are most exercised by love, do go more quickly, and further, than other folk. So Peter and John ran, both together; and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. But note that he paused there, and waited, and did not at once enter in. Peter, however, when he came, went at once, and

that boldly, into the sepulchre. Brethren, of what doth this haste put us in mind? Is there no subtlety here, no mystic meaning? Doubtless the Evangelist would not have thus said of himself: *Yet went he not in* if in that reverent shrinking of his there had been no mystery. For John, like the Synagogue of the Jews, waited upon knowledge; whereas Peter, like the church of the Gentiles, came at once, although blindly, to the mystery of the empty sepulchre.

We have also heard how, according to the Evangelist Mark, Mary Magdalene and the other holy women who had followed the Lord came to the sepulchre bringing sweet spices. For him whom they had loved in life, they would also serve in death, and that with all care and tenderness. But in this there is indicated something which is to be done by all of us who are members of holy Church. If we, who believe in him that was dead, and is alive again, do come, seeking the Lord, and bearing with us the perfume of good works, and the sweet odor of holiness, then do we come, as it were to his sepulchre, bearing spices which are sweet indeed.

St. Thomas, the Fool-For-Christ

Feast Day ~ April 24

The Church honors saints who fall into many different categories - first the martyrs, who were killed for being Christians; then Popes, Bishops, Priests, and monastics who were spiritual leaders for the faithful; and many others, including devout rulers. The most unusual category is that of fool-for-Christ, one who gives the appearance to the world of someone who is mentally handicapped. St. Thomas, who lived in sixth century Syria, was such a saint.

Thomas undertook the monastic life in a monastery in Cappadocia and realized that his greatest struggle would be against the sin of pride. With the blessing of his abbot, Thomas became a fool-for-Christ and through the ridicule he received, he was able to become more humble and forgiving of others.

Thomas' main obedience was to obtain the yearly supply of alms for the monastery which were provided by the Patriarch of Antioch, and one year - during a time of plague in the Byzantine Empire - the apparently simple-minded monk begged in the churches of Antioch. A steward of one of the churches became so irritated by him that he struck the monk across his face. The man was strongly rebuked by those who had witnessed this act, but Thomas simply said that the steward would no longer provide alms and that he would no longer receive alms from him.

This simple statement proved to be prophetic as the steward died the next day and St. Thomas, as he was returning from Antioch to the monastery, also passed away. He had stopped to pray at a church of St. Euthemios and here his body was buried in a part of the cemetery reserved for strangers and paupers. Soon, another person was buried in this grave and suddenly, the grave became uncovered. That body was re-buried but the phenomenon occurred



again. When this was reported to the Patriarch, he realized that this had something to do with the holy fool-for-Christ, Thomas.

The monk's relics were removed from the grave and carried in procession into Antioch where they were placed in a special tomb, and the plague immediately ceased in Antioch. A small church was built over the tomb of St. Thomas and soon there were many reports of those receiving healing after prayers at the tomb.

May the intercessions of St. Thomas, the Fool-For-Christ, aid us as we face an epidemic and may his prayers help us to overcome the sin of pride. *Holy Thomas, pray for us.*

Resources: God's Fools: The Lives of the Holy "Fools for Christ" tr. By Bishop Varlaam Novakshonoff; The Prologue from Ochrid by St. Nikolai; the web sites of Mystagogy, the Orthodox Church of America, and OrthodoxWiki.

Christians in Time of Tribulation

Throughout her 2000 year history, the Christian Church has faced many times of trial; individual Christians have suffered and the Church as an institution has suffered. At times, the enemy we faced was a hostile pagan civil government; at other times the

enemy was illness and sudden death; and many times, Christians have suffered in times of war. The challenge in all these different adversities has been to remain faithful, hopeful, and joyful in the midst of the crisis.

The pandemic we are facing today - however unique and terrible it seems - presents us with that same challenge. As Christians we know that “God is our hope and strength, a very present help in trouble” [Ps. 46:1] and “whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s” [Rom.14:8].

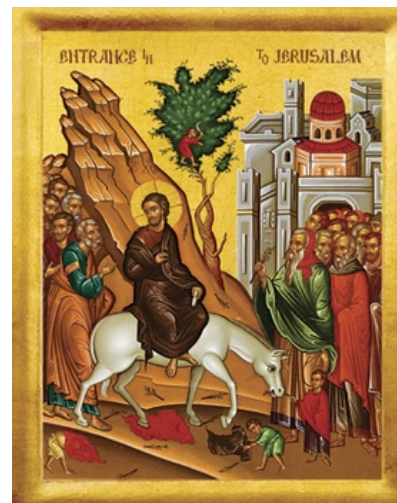
It may be helpful to us to remember how earlier Christians responded to the terrors and deprivation in times of peril - the stories of condemned Christians (such as St. Cecilia) singing psalms while awaiting public execution in the arena in the first several centuries; the examples of Christian communities praying and singing litanies for deliverance from plague such as that of our patron, St. Gregory the Great, in 590; the courage of monks still praying while being slaughtered by the enemies of Christ in the Viking attacks on monasteries in 9th century Britain or the Arab Muslim invasions in much of the Middle East in the 7th and 8th centuries. We can ponder the bravery of such priests as Fr. Nicola Yanney who, during the quarantine of his people in Kearney, Nebraska in the 1918 Spanish flu epidemic, continued to minister to the sick and dying in their homes and eventually succumbed to the illness himself. The two World Wars provide many stories of Christians continuing to pray and sing despite the constant terror of bombings.

An account by Fr. George Calciu who, as a young medical student in Romania in 1948, was arrested and sent to the Pitesti prison, one of the most violent and repressive prisons established by the Communist regime, is an inspiring example of how prayer can help Christians survive even the most terrible of times:

There in Pitesti, we were young people between eighteen and nineteen years old, up to twenty-six years old. We were the future intellectuals of Romania, Christians who loved each other. And we started continual prayer. Four people were put into every cell. One of us would say the "Our Father" or other prayers. Each one of us would pray for an hour, so that in four hours a cell would accomplish its assignment. Then a person from that cell would knock on the neighboring cell, and the people there would start their prayers. The prayer went around the prison day and night, without any stopping. During one year we prayed and prayed and prayed. *[from a lecture included in the book, Father George Calciu: Interviews, Homilies, and Talks, which is in our parish library.]*

May we carry on this Christian tradition of faithfulness in times of tribulation, pouring out our prayers to God, reading his Holy Word, and - thanks to modern technology - joining with each other through the live-streaming videos of our services.

Parish News



During this time of pandemic, we are making every effort to live-stream our services of Stations of the Cross and Litany in time of Peril on Fridays along with Sunday Matins and Mass.

In consultation with bishops of other jurisdictions and health officials, Metropolitan JOSEPH has issued new directives for Holy Week. We are to limit church attendance for services to clergy,

servers, and singers numbering no more than five in an effort to limit contact between people. Many of the ceremonies which are part of the Holy Week services (such as processions, the foot washing, the Altar of Repose) will not be included this year. With the directives from the archdiocese in mind, the following services will be offered for Holy Week and available to all through the Youtube livestream. On Saturday, 4/11, we will serve Vespers for Palm Sunday at 6pm. On Palm Sunday, 4/12, we will offer Matins at 9am and Sung Mass following, around 9:30. On Holy Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, 4/13-15, we will serve Vespers only at 7pm. On Maundy Thursday, 4/16, Vespers will be at 7pm and the Liturgy will follow around 7:30. On Good Friday, 4/17, the Liturgy will be at Noon. On Holy Saturday, 4/18, the Paschal Vigil will begin at 10pm.

Thomas Sunday A Homily by Fr. George Calciu

The Apostle Thomas represents those who are dominated by rationality and who need evidence. They are not unbelievers, but they need evidence to strengthen their faith. The moment they are given proof, their faith deepens, up to the ultimate sacrifice, as it was with the holy apostle Thomas.

Why was Thomas not with the disciples? All the disciples were gathered together in a house for fear of the Jews, as the Evangelist John relates. But Thomas was not with them. It is possible that Thomas was the most courageous of them and went outside to gain information and hear what else was said about Jesus, or perhaps he went out to bring food because the other Apostles didn't have the courage to do so. Thus, when Jesus came, he was not with them.

When they told him, *We have seen the Lord*, Thomas answered, *Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my*

hand into His side, I will not believe. [John 20:25] The day when Jesus appeared to His disciples and Thomas was not with them, the disciples doubted Him. Even when our Savior said to them, *Peace be unto you* [John 20:19], they did not believe it was He until *Jesus showed unto them His hands and His side* [John 20:20], saying, *Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have.* [Luke 24:39] So who is unfaithful: Thomas, who had not seen the Lord and doubted, or the disciples who saw Him and doubted?

Our Savior knew of Thomas' doubt and came especially for him. Jesus came into this world not only for believers and sinners, but also for those who live in doubt...

In the book of Revelation, the angel of the Lord, addressing the Churches of Asia Minor, said to the one in Laodicea, "I will spit you out of my mouth because you are neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm." God does not love the lukewarm. Perhaps, God knows that he who advocates strongly "against" Him can be converted. St. Paul was a great persecutor of Christians, but when our Savior met him on the way to Damascus, he turned to the Faith and became one of the greatest Apostles. It is easier to convert such a man than one who is lukewarm. The lukewarm man lives in warm water: he neither "boils" nor "freezes", nor is he good for anything.

Thomas was not a lukewarm man. He had faith, but he needed some evidence. Our Savior appeared to him and said, *Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side: and be not faithless, but believing.* [John 20:27] The Evangelist John does not mention whether Thomas put his hand in our Savior's side, but we know what Thomas said, *My Lord and my God!* [John 20:28] He saw Jesus and understood that the proof was right before him. There was no other evidence for him to seek when Jesus was right there in front of him, shining in the light of the Resurrection, entering through the locked doors and through the walls, a bright Savior shining forth everywhere.



Our Savior said something not for Thomas but for us: *Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed.* [John 20:29] Jesus did not say, “Because thou hast touched Me, thou hast believed”; instead He said, *Because thou hast seen Me, and blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.* [John 20:29]

This blessing is for all of us pious Christians. This blessing is for us who come to church to confess that Christ is the Son of God, Who

suffered, was crucified, died, was buried, rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven. This is the foundation of our faith!

The lesson that we draw from the Gospel is that Jesus Christ came for everyone. He didn’t come only for those who believe or for Jews, or only for sinners. He came for the lukewarm as well, if they “warm up.”

So, He came for the doubtful. And all of us have doubts...We doubt because we once asked for something, and God did not grant our request! But merely one cry in a “time of need” does not show faith. It rather shows human weakness. We must have a strong, steadfast faith, one that is indisputable. And this Gospel is for all of us who doubt.

When Jesus appeared to Thomas, who doubted Him, Thomas, seeing our Lord, fell at his feet and said, *My Lord and my God!* Let us also fall at the feet of Jesus and cry out, *My Lord and my God!*

Reprinted from the book *Father George Calciu: Interviews, Homilies, and Talks*, translated by Elena Chiru

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Address Correction Requested

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>April 2020</h1>						
<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Mass at 9:30AM</i>			1 St. Melito of Sardis, BC, 177	2 St. Mary of Egypt, Penitent, c. 421	3 St. Sixtus I, PM, 127	4 St. Isidore of Seville, BCD, 636
5 Passion Sunday V	6 St. Notker, C, 912	7 St. Tikhon of Moscow, BC, Patron of the Western Rite, 1925	8	9	10	11 St. Leo the Great, PCD, 461 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
12 Palm Sunday R/V	13 Monday in Holy Week St. Hermenegild, M, 583 <i>Vespers at 7pm</i>	14 Tuesday in Holy Week St. Justin, M, 167 <i>Vespers at 7pm</i>	15 Wednesday in Holy Week <i>Vespers at 7pm</i>	16 Maundy Thursday <i>Mass at 7:30pm</i> W	17 Good Friday <i>Liturgy at noon</i> B	18 Holy Saturday <i>Vigil at 10pm</i> V/W
19 Pascha: The Resurrection of Our Lord <i>No Liturgy</i>	20 Monday in the Octave of Easter	21 Tuesday in the Octave of Easter	22 Wednesday in the Octave of Easter; Ss. Soter & Caius, PpMm, 174	23 Thursday in the Octave of Easter	24 Friday in the Octave of Easter	25 Saturday in the Octave of Easter
26 Low Sunday: First Sunday after Easter; St. Cletus, 89 & Marcellinus, 304, PpMm W	27 St. George, Martyr, 303 (tr.)	28 St. Mark, Evangelist (tr.); St. Vitalis, M, 3rd c.	29	30		

English: Christ is Risen! Indeed He is risen!

Russian: Khristos voskrese! Voistinu voskrese!

Greek: Christos anesti! Alithos anesti!

Arabic: El Messieh kahn! Hakken kahn!