

# ✠ 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. Ambrose d. 397

If the kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, and faith is like to a grain of mustard seed, faith is then truly the kingdom of heaven, and the kingdom of heaven is faith. He therefore that has faith, possesses the kingdom of heaven.

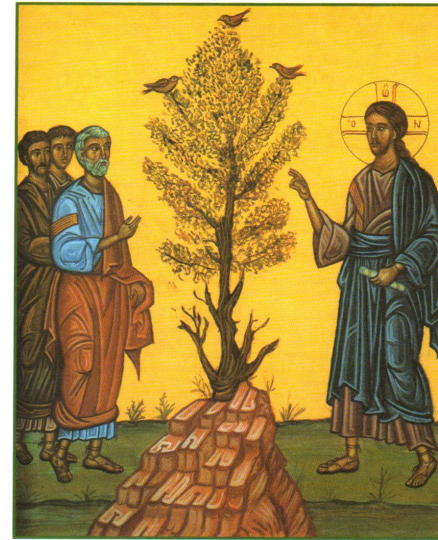
And the kingdom of heaven is within us, and faith is within us; for we read: *For lo, the kingdom of God is within you.* [Luke 17:21].

Now let us, from the nature of the mustard seed, estimate the force of this comparison. Its seed is indeed very plain, and of little value: but if bruised or crushed it shows forth its power. So faith first seems a simple thing: but if it is bruised by its enemies it gives forth proof of its power, so as to fill others who hear or read of it with the odor of its sweetness...

At one time the faith is bruised, at another time oppressed, at other times it is sown. The Lord Himself is the grain of

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mustard seed. He was without injury; but the people were unaware of Him as a grain of mustard seed of which they took no notice. He chose to be bruised, that we might say: *For we are the good odor of Christ unto God.* [II Cor. 2:15] He chose to be crushed, whence also Peter said: *The multitudes throng and press thee.* [Luke 8:45] He chose to be planted in the earth as a seed which a man took and cast into his garden.

For it was in a garden that Christ was taken prisoner, and likewise buried: He sprung up in a garden, where He also rose from the dead.

You also then sow Christ in your garden - for a garden is a place that is full of flowers and various fruits - in which by virtue of your labor He may grow and breathe forth the multiple sweetness of His many virtues. There where fruit is, let Christ be found. Plant ye the Lord Jesus. He is a seed when He is buried in the earth: He is a tree when raised to heaven.

Press close to Christ, and sow faith. We follow close and sow faith when we adore Christ crucified... We sow the faith when from the prophetic and apostolical writings and from the Gospel we believe in the passion of the Lord. We therefore sow the faith when we, as it were, bury it in the soft and tender soil of the Lord's flesh, so that from the embrace and warmth of the sacred Body, faith spreads itself abroad. For he that has believed that the Son of God became man, believes that He died for us, believes that He rose again. I therefore sow the faith when I plant it in His sepulchre.

## *St. Elian of Homs*

### *Feast Day ~ February 6*

In the year 284, Christians throughout the Roman Empire were persecuted in various ways; public opinion was weighted heavily against this new religion; families were divided by it and in most, discussion of the matter was impossible; the consequences of publicly espousing Christianity could be severe torture, even death. Nevertheless, as Christ our Savior had promised, even the gates of hell would not prevail against His Church.

In the city of Homs in Syria, the son of Khastares, a local high official, was born that year. The boy, Elian (or Julian), grew to be an intelligent and intense young man who perfected his studies of the healing arts and became a doctor. He also - despite his family's pagan beliefs - became a Christian and refused to keep this fact a secret. He went about his medical duties offering not only physical, but also spiritual healing. He openly told people about the love of Christ and the true healing that comes from this love.

The other physicians of Homs were jealous of the success that Elian was having in helping patients to recover from their illnesses and they complained loudly among themselves. At the same time, Khastares was furious with his son for his breach of acceptable behavior. He was not only concerned for Elian's safety but he feared more that he would be blamed for it and would lose his powerful position in government. Sure enough, other officials came to Khastares and complained that he was not able to control his own son. They reminded him that the Emperor had even been considering him for assisting in the prosecution of the laws against Christians.

Elian learned that the Bishop of Homs, Silvanus, the deacon Luke and Reader Mocime had been arrested and tortured but

had refused to denounce Christ. As they were being led to the arena to face the wild beasts and their martyrdom, Elian ran to them, kissed their prisoners' chains, and declared himself ready to join them.

He soon got his wish. When it became obvious that Elian would not stop professing his Christian faith, his own father turned him in to the authorities and suggested a torture which he thought might work as a last resort to dissuade his son from his rebellion against Roman ways. Elian was taken to the outskirts of the city, his head was shaved, and several long nails were driven into his skull, causing him to faint. The persecutors, thinking he was dead, left him by the side of the road. Elian revived long enough to drag himself into a nearby cave, which happened to be the workshop of a potter, who happened to be a Christian also. This is where Elian passed to life eternal.

The next morning, when the potter arrived to work, he was frightened to find the body of someone who had been a known Christian. Fearing that this was a plot to cause him harm, he left immediately and went back home. But that night, in a dream, Elian appeared to him and asked him to take his body to the nearby church for burial. The potter knew that this dream was from God and that he had to do as he was bidden. He went back to his workshop and picked up Elian's body to carry it to the church where the other Christians he had alerted were waiting. There was a moment of panic when he saw the night watchman coming toward him but, thinking quickly, he leaned Elian's body against a wall and, standing in front of him, began speaking softly. Obviously assuming that the potter was talking to a woman, the night watchman passed on by, allowing the potter to finally deliver the relics of the martyr to the church for a proper burial.

Soon, miracles began to happen in association with St. Elian's tomb - particularly miracles of healing, and after Emperor Constantine's Edict of Milan (in 313) made Christianity legal,



pilgrims came to venerate the saint. When Emperor Julian the Apostate (who reigned from 361-363) renewed restrictions for Christians, the church in Homs which contained the tomb of St. Elian was destroyed. The relics were saved and when Theodosius became Emperor in 408, Syrian Christianity flourished in peace for a while. Bishop Paul of Homs decided to build, at his own personal expense, a church dedicated to St. Elian located on the site of the potter's cave where the martyr died. Once again, the relics of this martyr physician

were venerated by the faithful.

Through centuries of turmoil from Muslim conquest, earthquake and the exodus of many Christians from the city, the church remained as a reminder to the people of the great steadfastness of this local saint, but the building suffered through the years. A restoration was accomplished in 1845 and when another was in progress in 1970, ancient frescoes were discovered by the workmen resulting in consultations with the experts from the Antiquities Museum of Damascus. New frescoes were added at this time as the ancient ones were restored.

Unlike St. Panteleimon, another physician martyred in the persecutions, knowledge of St. Elian did not spread to other parts of the world. He remained a local saint and even today, there is only one other church in the world named for him - St. Elien's Antiochian Orthodox Church in Brownsville, Pennsylvania, built by immigrants from Homs in 1917.

In the year 2021 it is illegal for some professionals to maintain Christian precepts in their work (i.e. physicians, school principles, athletic coaches, business owners); public opinion, especially as expressed in the media and entertainment industries, is weighted heavily against Christian beliefs particularly regarding abortion, sexuality, gender, and marriage; families are divided by these issues and in many, discussion is not even allowed; publicly espousing certain Christian precepts is enough to affect one's employment and social acceptance.

Are we, as Christians living in 2021, prepared to follow in the footsteps of St. Elian, who remained faithful to Christian truth no matter the consequences? May holy Elian and all the saints, pray for us to have strength in the time of trial.

*Sources: The original source of the life of St. Elian is now lost, but two Georgian manuscripts (from the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries) and an Arabic 17<sup>th</sup> century one are based on this account. The booklet St. Elian of Homs by Gabriel Saadé compiles these accounts. The article "Feast of St. Ellien of Homs, February 6" by Fr. George Alberts of our Archdiocese, also summarizes the saint's story. This article is based on those two accounts.*

## Parish News

One of the most beautiful feast days in our liturgical calendar is that of the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple, or the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, or Candlemas, which occurs on February 2. All three of these titles indicate an aspect of the celebration: the 40-day-old baby Jesus is taken to the Temple in Jerusalem to be blessed by the priest, according to the Law of Moses (with the parents presenting the required gift of two doves); at the same time, also according to the Law, Mary is ritually purified from the blood of childbirth so that she can resume attendance at worship; and the third title refers to the practice of



blessing all the candles for use in church, symbolic of this baby as the longed-for Light of the World. We will celebrate the feast on the Eve, Monday, February 1, at 7PM with Vespers at 6:30.

As we continue to be restricted by Montgomery County in the number of people allowed in the chapel at the same time, we have begun a more organized way of attempting to provide for everyone. Those who are not quarantining have been divided into two groups, one

of which will be in the church on Sundays while the other is upstairs in the parish hall viewing the service via live-stream (Communion is brought up to those people). The next week, the two groups switch places so that everyone has an opportunity to actually be in church every other week. We look forward to warmer weather when the two groups can safely meet outside following Mass for simple coffee hours and an opportunity for fellowship with one another. Even more, we look forward to the end of this pandemic when we can all be together in church again!

Although the work has been exceedingly slow, there are only a few more hurdles to get through before the parish hall renovation is completed and we have an occupancy permit.

Thanks to all who contributed 200 pounds of canned goods to the annual Food for the Hungry collection. The food will be taken to the Manna Food Center for distribution.

## *The Meeting of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple*

The Creator of the Law, in fulfillment of the Law, was brought to the Temple and presented to the Lord, for the external aspect of this great event in the Gospel narrative was in conformity with the rules laid down in the Old Testament. *The Lord said to Moses, "Consecrate to me all the first born..."* [Ex. 13:1] And so Mary and Joseph came after forty days of purification to the Temple to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons" [Luke 2:24].

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon... And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. [Luke 2:25-26] This was the crossroads between the Old Testament and the New. St Simeon symbolizes the departing Old Testament, exemplified by men of righteousness and prophets who in spite of all their doubts and searchings entertained the firmest faith in what had been foretold of the promised salvation. The righteous Simeon took Him up in his arms, and the Old and New Testaments stood together: the Old, departing, held in its arms and blessed the New. This was unity and continuity, a direct link and a development; the Law and the promised manifestation of the Grace of God as his Only-Begotten Son, the Redeemer.

To Simeon the God-Receiver was granted more than had been granted to any other man before him: he held the Almighty in his arms, and to him were revealed both the Glory and the Way of the Cross of his God: "for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to enlighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of Thy people Israel." [Luke 2:30-32]

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**B**ehold, this Child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed. [Luke 2:34-35] Thus, for the first time, the Most-Holy Mary was forewarned that there would be no end to the thorns and trials of her life, that her Son, while bringing light and spiritual renewal to all peoples, would Himself be so persecuted that “a sword will pierce through your own soul also”...



**S**o we must go out to meet Christ and receive Him, taking Him into the arms of our souls, begging leave for sin to depart from us that we may live our lives in peace and tranquility, free of the agitations of evil. St. Simeon gave us an example of how firmly to follow the path of a righteous life, filled with the expectation of a meeting with the Lord.

*An excerpt from These Truths We Hold, compiled and edited by a monk of St. Tihon's Monastery.*

**O** Sion, adorn thy bride-chamber, and receive Christ the King: greet Mary, who is the gate of heaven: for she beareth the King of the glory of the new light: she remaineth a Virgin, yet beareth in her hands a Son begotten before the morning-star: whom Simeon took into his arms, declaring to the nations that he is the Lord of life and death, and Savior of the world.

*(Antiphon for the procession at the Candlemas celebration)*

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>February 2021</h1>						
<p><i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Mass at 9:30AM</i></p>	<p><b>1</b> St. Ignatius of Antioch, BM, c. 107; St. Bridget, V, 523</p> <p><i>Mass at 7pm</i>     <i>W</i></p>	<p><b>2</b> Presentation of Our Lord: Candlemas</p>	<p><b>3</b> St. Blaise, BM, c. 316; St. Anskar of Hamburg, BC, 865</p>	<p><b>4</b> New Martyrs of Russia, 1917 and following; St. Joseph of Aleppo, M, 1686</p>	<p><b>5</b> St. Agatha, VM, c. 250</p>	<p><b>6</b> St. Photius, BCD, 891; St. Dorothy, VM c. 313</p> <p><i>Vespers at 6pm</i></p>
<p><b>7</b> Fifth Sunday after Epiphany; St. Romuald, Ab, 1027</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>G</i></p>	<p><b>8</b></p>	<p><b>9</b> St. Cyril of Alexandria, BCD, 444; St. Apollonia, VM, c. 248</p>	<p><b>10</b> St. Scholastica, V, 543</p>	<p><b>11</b> St. Gregory II, PC, 731; St. Benedict of Aniane, Ab, 821</p>	<p><b>12</b></p>	<p><b>13</b></p> <p><i>Vespers at 6pm</i></p>
<p><b>14</b> Sixth Sunday after Epiphany; St. Valentine, PrM, 3rd C</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>G</i></p>	<p><b>15</b> Ss. Faustinus &amp; Jovita, Mm, 120</p> <p><i>(President's Day)</i></p>	<p><b>16</b> St. Nicholas of Japan, BC, 1912</p>	<p><b>17</b></p>	<p><b>18</b> St. Simeon of Jerusalem, BM, 1st c.</p>	<p><b>19</b></p>	<p><b>20</b></p> <p><i>Vespers at 6pm</i></p>
<p><b>21</b> Seventh Sunday after Epiphany</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>G</i></p>	<p><b>22</b> Chair of St. Peter at Antioch</p>	<p><b>23</b> Vigil of St. Matthias</p>	<p><b>24</b> St. Matthias, Apostle, 1st c.</p>	<p><b>25</b> St. Walburga of Heidenheim, V, 779</p>	<p><b>26</b> St. Porphyrius of Gaza, BC, 420; St. Ethelbert, KC, 616</p>	<p><b>27</b> St. Raphael of Brooklyn, BC, 1915; St. Alexander, BC, 326; St. Leander, BC, 600</p> <p><i>Vespers at 6pm</i></p>
<p><b>28</b> Septuagesima; St. Oswald of Worcester, BC, 992</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>V</i></p>						