

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

October, 2021 - Volume XXVI, Issue 9

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

A homily by St. Nikolai of Ochrid d. 1956

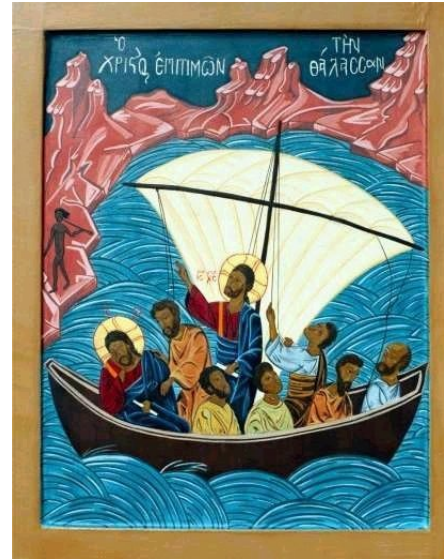
O God, my heart is ready,
my heart is ready. [Ps.
57:7]

Blessed is he, my brethren, who
can say this to his Lord.
Blessed is he whose heart is utterly
ready to follow the will of God.

The preparedness of a man's heart lies in this: his following of the will of God with joy and his being in no way distracted by his own thoughts and desires. The repentant King David first followed his own sinful thoughts and desires, and was like a ship tossed on a stormy sea. When, however, he realized that the storm would drown him, he turned to God with great repentance and tears, and put the ship of his life entirely into God's hands. "My heart is ready, my heart is

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ready", he cries with great peace of soul, for he knows that he has put his ship into the hands of the greatest Steersman. The storm may still rage, the wind and waves may still assail him, but he does not fear, for he is sure that nothing can overturn his ship and that it will sail peacefully to a calm haven.

A heart that is ready means a heart cleansed from pride and humbled before the

majestic power and wisdom of God. A heart that is ready means a heart that is emptied of all worldly desires and fancies, and filled only with aspirations towards God and love for God. A heart that is ready means a heart healed of all restlessness, cares and fears, and strengthened and encouraged by the presence of God's grace. "I will sing and give praise in my glory," thus the Psalmist continues. This shows how truly his heart is ready. He is not proud of his kingly glory, but ascribes it all to God. He abases himself before God as nothing, and his whole joy is to magnify and glorify God. His personal glory is given to him solely as a reason for glorifying his glorious God.

Oh, my brethren, let us strive that our hearts may soon be ready for God - ready to hear the word of God, ready to follow the will of God, ready to glorify the living God.

O Lord God, our immortal Creator, help us to prepare our hearts, that we may be vessels of Thy life-giving grace. To Thee be glory and praise for ever. Amen.

St. Publia, Confessor & Martyr *Feast Day ~ October 9*

How do we speak out against what is wrong? How do we find the words to express the extent of wrongdoing in such a way that it will be understood and may have the desired effect of changing the guilty person's conduct? How do we speak the truth in love? Do we even attempt to do this or do we instead fear the possible consequences and take comfort in our own right way, ignoring the sinful actions of others? St. Publia (or Poplia) of Antioch dared to speak out in the face of wrong despite great danger to herself.

When Publia's husband died, leaving her a young widow to raise their son alone, she devoted all her attention to caring for the child and making certain that he was brought up in the Christian faith. She provided an example of steadfast devotion to Christ and taught the child, John, to love the Church and its teachings. When he reached adulthood, he entered the service of the Church as a priest, and his mother was appointed to be a deaconess, as was the practice in the early centuries of the Church.

Publia now devoted her time to helping other women in whatever ways were needed and she gradually gathered in her house a group of women who dedicated their lives to prayer and helping the poor, forming an early monastic community. These women may have led quiet lives of prayer and service but they were not afraid to speak out against the great evil that was promoted by the Emperor Julian, the Apostate.

During (St.) Constantine's rule as Emperor (306-337), Christianity had been given a time of peace from the fierce persecutions of the past and had begun to flourish. But when Julian became Emperor in 361, he began to revive the old Roman pagan religious beliefs and practices. He had been raised as a Christian



but had rejected the faith of his family while studying Greek and Roman philosophy as a young man. Had his reign lasted longer than three years, Christians may have again experienced real persecution.

The city of Antioch still contained many of the temples to various pagan gods and when he came to reside in that city in the year 363, Julian intended to restore pagan worship in those places. He enraged the Christian inhabitants of the city by accusing them first of interfering with worship in a temple by burying the relics of a bishop near it and he had the bones removed. The Christians responded with a very large procession through the city. Then, when the temple burned to the ground, the Emperor accused the Christians of starting the fire, causing further consternation. The fire was eventually proven to have been an accident, but it was too late to expect the Christian population ever to show respect to an apostate emperor.

When Julian's entourage passed by the house of Publia, she and her fellow nuns spoke out against him in the best way they knew how: they sang a Psalm, using holy Scripture to pronounce judgement against one who had done such wrong. The words of Psalm 115 reached the emperor's ears like an arrow that hit its mark:

Their idols are silver and gold, even the work of men's hands. They have mouths and speak not; eyes have they but see not. They have ears and hear not; noses have they and smell not. They have hands and handle not; feet have they and walk not; neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; and so are all such as put their trust in them.

The infuriated emperor had his accompanying soldiers order the women to keep silence in the presence of the ruler, but the nuns, singing more loudly, began Psalm 68: *Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered.* Then the soldiers seized and beat the abbess violently. Publia suffered this torture with humility, later dying from her wounds. She is thus considered a Martyr for the faith and a Confessor for speaking the truth against wrong.

The story of St. Publia is found in the *Ecclesiastical History*, completed c 450, of Bishop Theodoret of Cyprus (423-457). He said of her beating that “she took the outrage for honour, and returned home, where, as was her wont, she kept up her attack upon him with her spiritual songs, just as the composer and teacher of the song laid the wicked spirit that vexed Saul.”

Would we dare to speak out against those in authority who promote wrong? Could we find a way to do it as did St. Publia? Could we do it as someone like her, who was above reproach because of the truly Christian life she led? Holy Publia, pray for us that we may have such courage and wisdom.

Parish News

October 10 has been designated as the day for assembling health and clean-up kits for International Orthodox Christian Charities at St. Gregory’s. Between our parish and a home-schooling group, we have collected items for inclusion in the kits, which we will put together during coffee hour that day. Monica Burnett has volunteered to take the kits to the collection center in Westminster, MD.

With the exception of a few minor tasks, “Phase 2” of our renovation projects - to make the parish hall completely ADA compliant and to open up the space for better traffic flow - has now been completed and we have received our occupancy

permit from the county. In addition, a new roof has also been installed.



Much of the cost for this work has been covered by a bequest from Owen Johnson, who passed away in 2017 and included St. Gregory’s in his will. Coming to Orthodoxy late in life, Owen was grateful for having found Western Rite Orthodoxy and this parish. At his Chrismation, Owen took as his patron saint St. Ouen (or Audoin, Audoen, or Owen, as it is sometimes spelled), a 7th century bishop of Rouen. Owen had a great interest in genealogy and was proud of his French - and

aristocratic! - heritage, making St. Ouen a perfect choice as intercessor for him. St. Ouen was from an noble Frankish family, served at the courts of Kings Clothar II and Dagobert I, and eventually became a priest and bishop, founding many monasteries. In honor of Owen and in thanksgiving for his gift to us, an icon of St. Ouen has been placed at the entrance to the parish hall. This icon is a print by iconographer Karen Blampied, who created original icons for each of the parish churches on the Isle of Jersey, a British Crown Dependency (another great love of Owen’s was everything British) with considerable French influences. The story of his St. Ouen’s life will be given in the July/August 2022 newsletter.

Our Parish History Continued: 2016-2021

The past five years have been a great mixture of joy and frustration for St. Gregory’s parish. After selling our

Washington, DC building, and before the new building's renovations were completed, we continued meeting in the chapel of the Woods Academy for most services during 2016. The first services in the new chapel were at Christmas of that year, and an occupancy permit in March of 2017 represented the end of "phase 1" of our work to make this a permanent home for St. Gregory's.

While several families moved away at this time, we began to gain other members who live closer to the church. We resumed our liturgical observances of Vespers, Matins, and Mass on Saturday, Sundays and feast days. The parish was able to "rescue" from destruction a historic small organ which provides the perfect accompaniment to the music of our services; and a beautifully carved and gilded dove was given to the parish to use as a tabernacle for the reserved Sacrament. The beautiful grounds give us ample room for processions, the deck (with benches made by Ben Caldwell and friends) provides ideal space for outdoor gatherings, and we have further beautified the outdoors with a Mary garden. The larger parish hall space will make our usual memorable coffee hours and dinners easy to manage.



We were blessed with episcopal visits from Bp. JOHN, who dedicated our new building and ordained Keivan Shahrokhi as Subdeacon in 2017 and again in 2019 (when he tonsured Patrick Woolley as Reader). We were especially honored to host Metropolitan JOSEPH at our Good Friday service in 2018. The first funeral in our chapel was held in 2019 for Matushka Margaret Kunkel, widow of Fr. Joachim Kunkel, who had been homebound for a number of years.

As was true in all our former homes, the sacramental life of the parish through Communion, Baptisms, Chrismations, and Confessions made this place the gate of heaven for us. We continued outreach in the community through our food contributions to the Manna food bank.

In 2019, our pastor, Fr. Nicholas, and his wife, Kh. Becky, bought and renovated the house on the property adjoining that of the church, making more frequent services possible. It is our hope that we will be allowed to gain a church entrance on Randolph Rd., a major thoroughfare, via the driveway to their house.

And then, in the infamous year 2020, the pandemic hit the world and was especially hard on churches. Suddenly, in mid-March, we were told that it was unsafe for groups of people to be together, to touch things that others touched, to sing. Following directives from Metropolitan JOSEPH, state and county officials, and health professionals was very difficult, but we were able to continue the liturgical life of the parish in a limited way - for a while with only 5 people allowed together, with live-streaming services for those staying at home, extra week-day services for some to attend, and zoom coffee hours to stay in touch. Sunday school and catechism classes and parish council meetings became "virtual". Phase 2 of our remodeling work on the parish hall began early that year but soon came to a halt. Most parishioners began working from home. Wearing masks became the norm and life for all of us changed dramatically, but we thank God that no one at St. Gregory's became ill with the virus.

In 2021, county restrictions on gatherings began to loosen so that more people could be in church together; we began having limited coffee hours, and with the completion of the renovation of the parish hall, we hope that we can soon safely resume parish dinners. Even though a 25th anniversary celebration is still not possible, we give thanks to God for his gracious mercy toward our parish in these 25 years and for the intercessions of our patron, St. Gregory the Great.

On Psalm 57

by Fr. Patrick Reardon



The second half of [Psalm 57] is concerned with the praise of God. This praise arises from the heart, which is here described as “prepared” (*hetoime*): *My heart is prepared, O God, my heart is prepared: I shall praise and sing.* The proper praise of God requires such preparation of heart; the life of prayer is inseparable from the sustained efforts to purify our hearts of all that is resistant and inimical to the grace of God. To be

convinced of this truth, one need only note how often we speak, in the psalms of our hearts. *You have put gladness in my heart... my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation... may the meditations of my heart be acceptable in Your sight... Your law is within my heart... a broken and contrite heart You will not despise... incline not my heart to evil... search me and know my heart... incline my heart to Your testimonies*, and so on. The task of praying the psalms includes, then, the work of purifying our hearts, safeguarding our hearts, redirection of our heart, receiving God’s illumination into our hearts, for the pure of heart shall see God, and sing His praise.

Finally, like so many of the psalms, this one also calls on all nations to praise God. The praise of God is a catholic thing, not an individual enterprise. No matter how private the setting of our praying the psalms, the psalms themselves repeatedly speak of their native catholicity: *I will confess You among the peoples, O Lord, I will praise You among the nations.* God has sent His Son and His spirit to catholicize the heart in His praise.

Reprinted from Christ in the Psalms

St. Gregory Orthodox Church
c/o 804 E Randolph Rd
Silver Spring, MD 20904
Address Correction Requested

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>October 2021</h1>					1 St. Remigius of Rheims, BC, c. 530; St. Bavo, C, 659	2 Holy Guardian Angels
3 15 th Sunday after Pentecost <i>G</i>	4	5 St. Placid & his Companions, Mm, 6 th c.	6 St. Faith of Agen, VM, c. 303	7 St. Mark, PC, 336; Ss. Sergius & Bacchus, Mm, 303	8	9 Ss. Denys, BM, Rusticus, & Eleutherius, Mm, 3 rd c. <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
10 16 th Sunday after Pentecost; St. Paulinus of York, BC, 644 <i>G</i>	11 St. Kenneth, Ab, 599	12 St. Wilfred of York, BC, 709; St. Edwin, KM, 633	13 St. Edward the Confessor, KC, 1066	14 St. Callistus, PM, c. 222	15 Our Lady of Walsingham	16 St. Gall, Ab., 646 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
17 17 th Sunday after Pentecost <i>G</i>	18 St. Luke the Evangelist, 1 st c.	19 St. Frideswide of Oxford, V, 735	20 St. Andrew of Crete, BC, 740	21 St. Hilarion of Gaza, Ab., c. 371; Ss. Ursula & comp., Mm, 453	22	23 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
24 18 th Sunday after Pentecost; St. Raphael the Archangel <i>G</i>	25 Ss. Crysanthus & Daria, Mm, 283	26 St. Evaristus, PM, c. 197	27 St. Frumentius of Ethiopia, BC, 4 th c.	28 Ss. Simon & Jude, Apostles, 1 st c.	29	30 Vigil of All Saints (anticipated) <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
31 Christ the King; comm. 19 th Sunday after Pentecost <i>W</i>						<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Mass at 9:30AM</i>