

✠ 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
homily by
St. Peter
Chrysologus
d. 450*

God's law has made it easy for us both to know and not to know what neither human curiosity, nor the laborious study of the ancients, nor worldly wisdom in its long, long seeking were able to discover. What is the origin of evil? Whence comes guilt? Whence the strength of vices, the whirling floods

of crimes, the wars of bodies and the quarrels of minds, the great storm of life, and the shipwreck so cruel that it kills? Man would not know all this unless God's revelation had exposed the Devil.

The Devil is the origin of evil, the source of wickedness, the foe of the world, and ever the hater of successful man. He sets his snares, plans falls, digs ditches, arranges wrecks, stimulates bodies, pricks souls, suggests thoughts, stirs up enmities, makes virtues seem odious and vices attractive,

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tempter came and said to him, 'If thou art the son of God, command these stones become loaves of bread'. [Matt. 4:2, 3]

sows errors, nourishes grudges, disturbs the peace, breaks up affection, tears unity apart, has a great relish of evil and none of good, profanes the things of God and disorders those of men.

Hence, as the narrative goes, the brash tempter made his way even to Christ: *After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the*

Let not those who hear these words turn against God, nor blame nature. They should not insult the Creator, nor accuse the flesh. They should not complain about their soul, nor attack the seasons, nor put the blame upon the stars. They should cease to debase the innocence of the creature. Let them perceive that evil is an accident, not something created; that God is the Creator of good, and the Devil the contriver of evil. Thus, they should ascribe evils to the Devil and good to God. They should avoid evil and do good. In this way they will have as their Helper in good deeds God, who gives the power to do what He commands, and does Himself what He commands. For just as the Devil urges men toward evil, so God leads them toward good.

Therefore, let no one acquiesce in the opinion that his vices have been co-created with himself. Let him not think that what pertains to sin should be ascribed to nature. Rather, let him take up with Christ the arms of fasting, let him drive off the attacks of sin, and raze the very camp of vices. With Christ fighting for him, let him gain a victory over the author of evil. Once the Devil has been overcome, the vices will have no power. Listen to the Apostle saying: *Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of wickedness on high. [Eph. 6:12]*

After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. You see, brethren, that our fasting in Lent is not a human invention; it arises from divine authority. *And the tempter came and said to him 'Command that these stones become loaves of bread!'* O Devil, your cleverness undoes your plans. He who can change stones into bread can also change hunger into satiety. What need of your plan has He whose power is fully sufficient for Him?...He who changes water into wine can also change stones into bread.

But, miraculous signs should be given to foster faith, not wiles. They should be given to a believer, not to a tempter. And they should be worked for the salvation of the one who requests them, not for harm to him who performs them. O Devil, what good are miracles for you? Nothing helps toward salvation for you; everything remains for your punishment. Even miracles contribute to your downfall.

But receive your answer that you may know yourself and be subject to your Creator. *Not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.* [Matt. 4:4] Here is your lesson: The Word of the Father hungers for the words of our salvation, not for bread. He acts that man may live always by the heavenly word, not always by earthly bread - indeed, that man may live for God in such a way as not to heed the toil. For that, indeed, is the true life.

Parish News

We will celebrate the feast day of our patron saint - St. Gregory the Great, Bishop, Confessor and Doctor - on the Eve, Monday, March 11, with Vespers at 6:30 pm, Mass at 7, followed by a pot-luck supper. St. Gregory was pope (patriarch) of Rome with episcopal oversight for the Christians from the far north of



England to north Africa. He organized our liturgy, hence the Mass bearing his name; he composed hymns and made the music of the church a concern, hence the chant bearing his name; he honored the saints of the church with his writings (called the “Dialogues”); and his missionary zeal led him to send monks to Britain to convert the pagan inhabitants to Christianity, hence the title “Enlightener of the English”. We give thanks for the witness of St. Gregory and ask for his intercessions for our parish.

In this month, we move from the season of Epiphany to the three weeks which prepare us for the season of Lent, which is itself a season of preparation for Paschaltide: Septuagesima (March 3), Sexagesima (March 10), and Quinquagesima (March 17). Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, March 20, when we will receive the imposition of ashes at the beginning of Mass. On the Fridays of Lent, beginning on March 29, we will have Stations of the Cross and Litany at 6:30 pm.

Mass for the feast of the Annunciation will be celebrated on Monday, March 25.

During Lent, we are asked to participate in the Orthodox Christians for Life project called “National Orthodox Baby Shower”. We will collect needed items (such as diapers and formula) for the Shady Grove Pregnancy Center. This is in addition to our usual offering for the Archdiocesan Food for the Hungry program.

The Feast of the Annunciation

by a Monk of the Eastern Church

The greatest feast which falls during this period of the year [Lent] is the feast that celebrates the Annunciation of her divine motherhood made by the Angel Gabriel to the Mother of God, the most holy Virgin Mary... The Gospel [Luke 1:26-38] tells of Gabriel's revelation to Mary at Nazareth. Mary's reaction *How shall this be?* is not an expression of doubt, and in this it differs from the reaction of Zacharias, when the birth of John was foretold to him. Mary simply poses a respectful question; and, when the angel explains that the Holy Spirit shall come upon her and shall overshadow her, Mary answers, with the humility and obedience which characterize her whole nature: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.*

There are really two sides to the feast of the Annunciation. One of them turns towards the most holy Mother of God and concerns her glory and our devotion to Mary. The declaration of this glory and the expression of this devotion find their perfect form in the first words of the angel's message: *Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee.* We cannot address the holy Virgin better than by repeating these words, with veneration and tenderness.

The other side of the mystery turns towards men. In the life of every Christian there will be divine annunciations, moments when God lets us know his will and his intention concerning us. But all these annunciations must unite to become the one essential Annunciation: The Annunciation that Jesus can be born in us, can be born through us - not in the same way that he was conceived and brought into the world by the Virgin Mary, for that is a unique miracle that cannot be equaled - but in the sense that the Savior takes spiritual and, at the same, very real possession of our being. And then let us remember that every authentic Annunciation is

immediately followed by a Visitation: the divine favor that has been granted to us must straightaway release an impulse in us to let it flow out to our brothers, which is expressed through some loving word or act.

An excerpt from *The Year of Grace of the Lord: A Scriptural and Liturgical Commentary on the Calendar of the Orthodox Church*

St. Macarius, Bishop of Jerusalem *Feast day ~ March 10*

What must it have been like to live in a time when so many important things happened to change the world! The early fourth century was such a time and St. Macarius, Bishop of Jerusalem, was one who contributed to those important things.

Although nothing is known of his birth and childhood, the historical facts about him after he became bishop are reliably recorded. His episcopate began in 312, only one year after the emperor Galerius had issued an order for tolerance toward Christians, putting an end to the severe persecutions that the followers of Christ had endured under emperor Diocletian. One year later, in 313, emperor Constantine gave full legal status to Christianity and eventually made it the favored religion of the empire. The political and social atmosphere for Christians had completely changed.

But now, the devil turned his attention from government-sanctioned attacks on Christians to discord and turmoil from within. Christological issues which had not been formulated in concrete terms were now the subject for debate and argument. The priest Arius, particularly, persisted in his idea that Jesus Christ was a created being, not co-eternal with the Father, an idea which conflicted with the teachings of the Apostles.

When the emperor called for a church-wide council to settle this and other issues, Bishop Macarius was an important member of the attending group. The 318 bishops who met in Nicaea began to compose what would eventually become the Nicene Creed which has been professed for seventeen hundred years. Bishop Macarius had been warned about Arius in a letter from Bishop Alexander of Alexandria and he argued strongly against Arius' teachings.

According to the church historian Eusebius, Macarius was given a very important "assignment" at the end of the Council. The Emperor Constantine wrote a letter directing him to try to discover all the holy sites connected with the Passion of our Lord in Jerusalem. Constantine's mother, Helena, came to tour Jerusalem around this time and was intent on being a part of this search. Excavations began shortly after the Council.



It was soon discovered that the place of the tomb in which Christ had been laid after the Crucifixion - and, therefore, the place of the Resurrection - had been covered over with a mound of rocks upon which a temple to the pagan god Jupiter (some accounts say to Venus) had been erected. This was dismantled to reveal the original monument which had

been placed to mark this holy site. Bishop Macarius received another letter from the emperor telling him to build a church on this spot and to make certain that it was made of the finest materials: "...as to the columns and marbles, whatever you shall judge, after actual inspection of the plan, to be especially precious and serviceable, be diligent to send information to us in

writing....for it is fitting that the most marvelous place in the world should be worthily decorated." Thus the Church of the Resurrection (or the Holy Sepulchre, as it is also called) was built to welcome pilgrims to venerate this holy site. The church building also extends over Calvary, the site of our Lord's Crucifixion, where the True Cross was discovered.

St. Macarius also helped St. Helena in building a church over the place of the Nativity in Bethlehem, and a third church was erected on the Mount of Olives, the place of Christ's Ascension.

As the bishop of this most important city, St. Macarius was asked to advise Christians of other areas. The Armenians (who had converted as a nation to Christianity in 301), sent questions to him about baptism and the Eucharist as they established the faith in their country.

St. Macarius probably reposed around the year 334, as his successor, Maximus III attended the Council of Tyre in the following year. Relics of St. Macarius can be venerated in a Roman Catholic chapel in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which contains over 5000 relics collected by a wealthy priest who rescued many of these relics from European churches which were being destroyed in the chaos of war-time and social upheaval.

We, too, could be living in a time when important things could change the world. St. Athanasius had referred to St. Macarius as an example of "the honest and simple style of apostolical men." We should learn from St. Macarius to be "honest and simple" Christians, upholding the apostolic faith expressed in the Nicene Creed and to be unafraid to refute any who would try to alter its meaning. May we honor holy things (relics) and places of pilgrimage, and may St. Macarius intercede for us. *Holy Macarius, pray for us.*



Distinguishing Between Evil & Good

by Metropolitan SABA

The human world today tends to accept the disease and change its name, in its quest to embrace the sick. Orthodox Christianity distinguishes between sickness and the patient, between wickedness and the wicked, between the sin and the sinner. It is called upon to liberate the wicked man from his wickedness and to free the sinner from his sin. It is aware that evil lies not in the matter itself but, rather, in one's attitude towards this matter; it lies in the will of man. Accepting the disease with the patient makes the patient worse. Compassion is for the fallen person, not for the fall itself. In order to cure patients from their illness, we must identify the illness and name it.

Orthodox Christian theology unleashes the energies that can transform this world back into what it was made to be. Orthodox theology must be the inspiration for movements of love, peace, service, non-discrimination, alleviating injustice, and caring for the environment - not influenced by movements of a merely human nature.

Christ came to save the world, to establish the earth as a heaven, not to establish a system limited to the parameters of mere earthly life.

The misery of the world, rich and poor alike - spiritual and material misery, which is constantly being exacerbated - is only a sign that Christians have not been sufficiently transfigured by the Holy Spirit, so that the world might be transfigured by them. [The Orthodox French theologian] Olivier Clement says, "If some people become prayer - that is, pure prayer that transcends all measures of the criteria of this world - then they transform the universe by their mere presence, by their mere existence."

Reprinted from *Your Grace Transforms the Universe*

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0Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>March 2024</h1>					1 St. David of Wales, BC, 544	2 St. Chad, BC, 672 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
3 Septuagesima ✓	4 St. Lucius I, PM, 254	5	6 Ss. Perpetua & Felicitas, Mm, 203	7	8	9 St. Gregory of Nyssa, BCD, 394 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
10 Sexagesima; Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, Mm, 320 ✓	11 St. Sophronius of Jerusalem, BC, c. 369 <i>Mass at 7pm</i>	12 St. Gregory the Great, BCD, 604 <i>W</i>	13	14	15	16 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
17 Quinquagesima; St. Patrick, BC, 461; St. Joseph of Arimathea, C, 1 st C ✓	18 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, BCD, 386; St. Edward, KM 979	19 St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin, 1st C	20 Ash Wednesday; St. Cuthbert, BC, 687 <i>Mass at 7pm</i> ✓	21 Repose of St. Benedict, c. 550	22	23 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
24 First Sunday in Lent (<i>Sunday of Orthodoxy</i>); St. Gabriel the Archangel ✓	25 The Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary <i>Mass at 7pm</i> <i>W</i>	26	27 Ember Wednesday in Lent; St. John of Damascus, CD, 749	28	29 Ember Friday in Lent <i>Stations of the Cross at 6:30pm</i>	30 Ember Saturday in Lent; St. John of the Ladder, Ab, 649 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
31 Second Sunday in Lent; St. Innocent of Alaska, BC, 1879 ✓						<i>Sunday services: Matins at 9am Sung Mass at 9:30</i>