

SUNDAY, MARCH 28, 2021
SECOND SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT
SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS

This Sunday was originally dedicated to Saint Polycarp of Smyrna (February 23). After his glorification in 1368, a second commemoration of Saint Gregory Palamas (November 14) was appointed for the Second Sunday of Great Lent as a second “Triumph of Orthodoxy.”

Saint Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica, was born in the year 1296 in Constantinople. Saint Gregory’s father became a prominent dignitary at the court of Andronicus II Paleologos (1282-1328), but he soon died, and Andronicus himself took part in the raising and education of the fatherless boy. Endowed with fine abilities and great diligence, Gregory mastered all the subjects which then comprised the full course of medieval higher education. The emperor hoped that the youth would devote himself to government work. But Gregory, barely twenty years old, withdrew to Mount Athos in the year 1316 (other sources say 1318) and became a novice in the Vatopedi monastery under the guidance of the monastic Elder Saint Nikodemos of Vatopedi (July 11). There he was tonsured and began on the path of asceticism. A year later, the holy Evangelist John the Theologian appeared to him in a vision and promised him his spiritual protection. Gregory’s mother and sisters also became monastics.

After the demise of the Elder Nikodemos, Saint Gregory spent eight years of spiritual struggle under the guidance of the Elder Nicephorus, and after the latter’s death, Gregory transferred to the Lavra of Saint Athanasius (July 5). Here he served in the trapeza, and then became a church singer. But after three years, he resettled in the small skete of Glossia, striving for a greater degree of spiritual perfection. The head of this monastery began to teach the young man the method of unceasing prayer and mental activity, which had been cultivated by monastics, beginning with the great desert ascetics of the fourth century: Evagrius Pontikos and Saint Macarius of Egypt (January 19).

Later on, in the eleventh century Saint Simeon the New Theologian (March 12) provided detailed instruction in mental activity for those praying in an outward manner, and the ascetics of Athos put it into practice. The experienced use of mental prayer (or prayer of the heart), requiring solitude and quiet, is called “Hesychasm” (from the Greek “hesychia” meaning calm, silence), and those practicing it were called “hesychasts.”

During his stay at Glossia the future hierarch Gregory became fully imbued with the spirit of hesychasm and adopted it as an essential part of his life. In the year 1326, because of the threat of Turkish invasions, he and the brethren retreated to Thessalonica, where he was then ordained to the holy priesthood.

Saint Gregory combined his priestly duties with the life of a hermit. Five days of the week he spent in silence and prayer, and only on Saturday and Sunday did he come out to his people. He celebrated divine services and preached sermons. For those present in church, his teaching often evoked both tenderness and tears. Sometimes he visited theological gatherings of the city’s educated youth, headed by the future patriarch, Isidore. After he returned from a

visit to Constantinople, he found a place suitable for solitary life near Thessalonica the region of Bereia. Soon he gathered here a small community of solitary monks and guided it for five years.

In 1331 the saint withdrew to Mt. Athos and lived in solitude at the skete of Saint Savva, near the Lavra of Saint Athanasius. In 1333 he was appointed Igumen of the Esphigmenou monastery in the northern part of the Holy Mountain. In 1336 the saint returned to the skete of Saint Savva, where he devoted himself to theological works, continuing with this until the end of his life.

In the 1330s events took place in the life of the Eastern Church which put Saint Gregory among the most significant universal apologists of Orthodoxy, and brought him great renown as a teacher of hesychasm.

About the year 1330 the learned monk Barlaam had arrived in Constantinople from Calabria, in Italy. He was the author of treatises on logic and astronomy, a skilled and sharp-witted orator, and he received a university chair in the capital city and began to expound on the works of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite (October 3), whose “apophatic” (“negative”, in contrast to “kataphatic” or “positive”) theology was acclaimed in equal measure in both the Eastern and the Western Churches. Soon Barlaam journeyed to Mt. Athos, where he became acquainted with the spiritual life of the hesychasts. Saying that it was impossible to know the essence of God, he declared mental prayer a heretical error. Journeying from Mount Athos to Thessalonica, and from there to Constantinople, and later again to Thessalonica, Barlaam entered into disputes with the monks and attempted to demonstrate the created, material nature of the light of Tabor (i.e. at the Transfiguration). He ridiculed the teachings of the monks about the methods of prayer and about the uncreated light seen by the hesychasts.

Saint Gregory, at the request of the Athonite monks, replied with verbal admonitions at first. But seeing the futility of such efforts, he put his theological arguments in writing. Thus appeared the “Triads in Defense of the Holy Hesychasts” (1338). Towards the year 1340 the Athonite ascetics, with the assistance of the saint, compiled a general response to the attacks of Barlaam, the so-called “Hagiorite Tome.” At the Constantinople Council of 1341 in the church of Hagia Sophia Saint Gregory Palamas debated with Barlaam, focusing upon the nature of the light of Mount Tabor. On May 27, 1341 the Council accepted the position of Saint Gregory Palamas, that God, unapproachable in His Essence, reveals Himself through His energies, which are directed towards the world and are able to be perceived, like the light of Tabor, but which are neither material nor created. The teachings of Barlaam were condemned as heresy, and he himself was anathemized and fled to Calabria.

But the dispute between the Palamites and the Barlaamites was far from over. To these latter belonged Barlaam’s disciple, the Bulgarian monk Akyndinos, and also Patriarch John XIV Kalekos (1341-1347); the emperor Andronicus III Paleologos (1328-1341) was also inclined toward their opinion. Akyndinos, whose name means “one who inflicts no harm,” actually caused great harm by his heretical teaching. Akyndinos wrote a series of tracts in which he declared Saint Gregory and the Athonite monks guilty of causing church disorders. The saint, in turn, wrote a detailed refutation of Akyndinos’ errors. The patriarch supported Akyndinos

and called Saint Gregory the cause of all disorders and disturbances in the Church (1344) and had him locked up in prison for four years. In 1347, when John the XIV was replaced on the patriarchal throne by Isidore (1347-1349), Saint Gregory Palamas was set free and was made Archbishop of Thessalonica.

In 1351 the Council of Blachernae solemnly upheld the Orthodoxy of his teachings. But the people of Thessalonica did not immediately accept Saint Gregory, and he was compelled to live in various places. On one of his travels to Constantinople the Byzantine ship fell into the hands of the Turks. Even in captivity, Saint Gregory preached to Christian prisoners and even to his Moslem captors. The Hagarenes were astonished by the wisdom of his words. Some of the Moslems were unable to endure this, so they beat him and would have killed him if they had not expected to obtain a large ransom for him. A year later, Saint Gregory was ransomed and returned to Thessalonica.

Saint Gregory performed many miracles in the three years before his death, healing those afflicted with illness. On the eve of his repose, Saint John Chrysostom appeared to him in a vision. With the words "To the heights! To the heights!" Saint Gregory Palamas fell asleep in the Lord on November 14, 1359. In 1368 he was canonized at a Constantinople Council under Patriarch Philotheus (1354-1355, 1364-1376), who compiled the Life and Services to the saint.

GREAT VESPERS

LORD I CALL Six stikhera of the Resurrection in tone 1, followed by three stikhera of the Triodion Resurrection, tone 1:

Accept our evening prayers, O holy Lord!
Grant us remission of sins, //
for You alone have manifested the Resurrection to the world.

Encircle Zion and surround her, O people!
Give glory in her to the One Who rose from the dead! //
For He is our God, Who has delivered us from our transgressions!

Come, O people, let us hymn and fall down before Christ,
glorifying His Resurrection from the dead! //
For He is our God, Who has delivered the world from the Enemy's deceit!

Be glad, O heavens!
Sound trumpets, O foundations of the earth!
Sing in gladness, O mountains!
Behold Emmanuel has nailed our sins to the Cross!
Granting life, He has slain death. //
He has resurrected Adam as the Lover of mankind.

Let us praise Him Who voluntarily was crucified in the flesh for our sake.
He suffered, was buried, but rose from the dead.
By orthodoxy confirm Your Church, O Christ. //
Grant peace for our life as the gracious Lover of mankind.

We stand before Your life- bearing tomb unworthily, O Christ God,
offering glory to Your ineffable compassion.
You have accepted the Cross and death, O sinless One//
to grant Resurrection to the world as the Lover of mankind.

Triodion, tone 2:

What hymns of praise shall we sing to honor the holy bishop?
He is the trumpet of theology, the flaming mouthpiece of grace,
the chosen vessel of the Spirit, the unshakeable pillar of the Church,
the great joy of the inhabited earth,
the river of wisdom, the candlestick of the Light,//
the shining star that has made all creation bright.

What garlands of song shall we weave for the holy bishop?
He is the champion of true worship, the foe of ungodliness,
the fervent defender of the faith,
the great guide and teacher, the well-tuned harp of the Spirit,
the golden tongue, the fountain flowing with healing for the faithful//
the great and wonderful Gregory.

How shall we who dwell on earth praise the holy bishop?
He is the Church's teacher, the herald of the Uncreated Light,
the initiate of the Trinity's heavenly mysteries,
the adornment of the monastic life,
renowned alike in action and contemplation//
Gregory, the pride of Thessalonica;

GLORY... Triodion tone 6:

O thrice-blessed saint, most holy father,
good shepherd, disciple of Christ the Chief Shepherd.
Like Him you gave your life for your sheep.
By your intercessions, O God-bearing Father Gregory//
may great mercy be granted to our souls!

NOW AND EVER...Dogmatikon in tone 1:

Let us praise the Virgin Mary!
The gate of heaven, the glory of the world!

The song of the angels, the beauty of the faithful!
She was born of man, yet gave birth to God!
She was revealed as the heaven,
as the temple of the godhead!
She destroyed the wall of enmity!
She commenced the peace; she opened the Kingdom!
Since she is our foundation of faith,
our defender is the Lord Whom she bore!
Courage! Courage! O People of God!
For Christ will destroy our enemies//
since He is all powerful.

APOSTIKHA: All stikhera of the Resurrection in tone 1:

We have been freed from sufferings by Your suffering, O Christ.
We have been delivered from corruption by Your Resurrection//
O Lord, glory to You!

Let creation rejoice!
Let the heavens be glad!
Let the nations clap their hands with gladness,
for Christ our Savior has nailed our sins to the Cross.
Slaying death, He has given life//
He has resurrected fallen Adam as the Lover of mankind.

As King of heaven and earth,
You were voluntarily crucified in Your love for mankind.
Hell was angered when it met You below.
Adam rose seeing You, the Creator, under the earth.
O Wonder! How has the Life of All tasted death?
You enlightened the world which cries://
“O Lord, Who rose from the dead, glory to You!”

The myrrhbearing women came with haste to Your tomb,
bearing myrrh and lamenting.
Not finding Your most pure body,
they learned from the angel of the new and glorious wonder.
They told the Apostles//
“The Lord is risen, granting the world great mercy.”

GLORY... Triodion, tone 8:

Your tongue, watchful in teaching,
rings in the ears of our hearts,
and awakens the souls of the slothful.
Your words are inspired by God;
they are a ladder leading us from earth to heaven.

O Gregory, pride of Thessalonica,
do not cease to intercede before Christ our God//
to illumine with His Divine Light those who honor you!

NOW & EVER... Resurrection Theotokion in tone 8:

O unwedded Virgin,
who ineffably conceived God in the flesh,
O Mother of God most high,
accept the cries of your servants, O blameless One!
Grant cleansing of transgressions to all!//
Receive our prayers and pray to save our souls!

TROPARIA

Resurrection, tone 1

When the stone had been sealed by the Jews;
while the soldiers were guarding Thy most pure Body;
Thou didst rise on the third day, O Savior,
granting life to the world.
The powers of heaven therefore cried to Thee, O giver of Life:
Glory to Thy Resurrection O Christ!
Glory to Thy Kingdom!
Glory to Thy dispensation, O Thou who lovest mankind.

Saint Gregory, tone 8

O light of Orthodoxy, teacher of the Church, its confirmation,
O ideal of monks and invincible champion of theologians,
O wonderworking Gregory, glory of Thessalonica and preacher of grace,//
always intercede before the Lord that our souls may be saved!

Resurrectional Dismissal Theotokion, tone 8

For our sake You were born of the Virgin
and endured crucifixion, O Good One, destroying death by death.
Revealing the Resurrection as God, do not despise the work of Your hand!
Reveal Your love for man, O Merciful One, and accept the Theotokos praying for us,//
and save the despairing people, O our Savior!

