



Simply Orthodox



THE SUNDAY OF ST GREGORY PALAMAS

Sermon published on 'Orthodox England on the `net`'

Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia: Diocese of Great Britain and Ireland

Sayings from the Fathers:

"God requites us according to the measure of our love for Him, and he who loves the Son is loved by the Father; and becomes a place for them both to dwell — secretly living within him and going about with him, as the Lord promised (*cf. John 4:21-23*). But who could love the Son more than His Mother — who did not just bear Him as her only Child, but gave birth alone to Him without a husband; such that her parental love was twice as strong, since it was not shared with a spouse?"

St Gregory Palamas
on the Most Holy Theotokos and
Ever Virgin Mary
<http://orthodoxwisdom.com/?p=79>

Church Schedule

Vesper Service
Saturday 7pm

Divine Liturgy
Sunday 10am

Church Address:
6 Oxford Street
Collingwood VIC
(Melway 44 B6)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Why do we fast? Why do we make sacrifices? Why do we stand at long services? Why do we pray? To those of us who are beginning to doubt and waver after only two weeks of the Fast, the Church brings us an answer today. This answer is in the person of St Gregory Palamas, the fourteenth-century Archbishop of Salonica in Greece to whom this Sunday is dedicated.

To many of you Salonica may seem far away. Not to me, because exactly twenty-five years ago I lived and worked there for a year. And as regards St Gregory Palamas, I saw two things.

Firstly, I noticed how the feast of St Gregory is still celebrated there today, with his relics taken through the city in procession, escorted by sailors and policemen. We may wonder why his earthly remains are still held in such honour.

Secondly, I went to visit a place up in the hills behind the town of Kavalla near Salonica. There you can still see a cave in the rocks - this was the home of Gregory Palamas before he was consecrated Archbishop. It was in that cave that he spent years in fasting and prayer. And there, not caring for his body, and instead cultivating and caring for the purity of his heart and therefore his mind, he received gifts of the Holy Spirit, he came to know God.

Now at the same time as St Gregory was living in extreme fasting and prayer, there lived a clever philosopher, also a Greek, a Hellenist, whose name was Barlaam. He said that, logically, it was impossible to know God, indeed God was by definition unknowable and inaccessible to the human mind. On hearing and studying Barlaam's philosophy, St Gregory recognized in the so-called logic of Barlaam a blasphemy, a heresy. He recognized that Barlaam lacked purity of heart and therefore mind and that his logic was the logic of the godless who only trusted in his own mental powers and imagination, the mental powers of the created, not of the Creator.

For if Barlaam were right, then all of Christ's work for us, from His Conception and Birth as a man, His Circumcision, His Presentation in the Temple, His Baptism, His Crucifixion, His Resurrection, His Ascension, to His Sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, are futile, they are all in vain. Unlike Barlaam, St Gregory said that since Christ the Creator had become man and part of creation, He had made human nature potentially holy - like His own human nature. By

sending down the Holy Spirit, He had given us all access in our human nature to holiness. Just as the Sun is known to us through its energies of heat and light, so God can be known to us through the uncreated energies of the Holy Spirit.

Quite simply, if we reject the teaching of St Gregory on this, we reject all the work of Christ and therefore also reject the coming of the Holy Spirit. Barlaam's philosophy would mean that we cannot know God, that there is no purpose in fasting and prayer. In fact, Barlaam's philosophy was a denial of God and therefore the foundation-stone of the last century's atheism and disbelief with all its massacres and genocides with their hundreds of millions of victims. Indeed, Barlaam's philosophy is the basis of all those recent ideas which said that there is no God, that man stands alone and lonely at the head of the Universe, for there is nothing greater than man - that he quite magically created himself in an empty and godless Universe.

St Gregory asserted the opposite to Barlaam. He affirmed that man carries in himself two tendencies, one for good, the other for evil. However, the tendency for good can only be developed in man through acquiring the grace of God, the divine energy sent to us from God, accessible insofar as our hearts and minds are pure enough to receive that grace. But this grace which enlightens and brightens us can only come to us if we repent, if we accept the process of fasting and prayer, tears and self-sacrifice.

It is vital for us to understand that the thoughts of St Gregory, expressed in detail in his writings, are not just thoughts, not just another philosophy like Barlaam's, but they were based on his experience, they were divinely inspired. He was not talking about an idea, but about the reality which he had experienced as an ascetic in that cave which you can still visit today. And the fact is that it is the wonder-working relics of St Gregory which go in procession through the streets of Salonica today, not the graceless dust of the bones of Barlaam.

This is the reality of the Church, this is the grace of the energies of God, this is holiness, the experience and knowledge of God, not imagined, not the fruit of fantasy and the studies of the mind, but the reality of God known to and experienced by those who are pure in heart and mind. For as it is written: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'. And this precisely is the aim of all true Christian hearts and minds.

Holy Father Gregory, pray to God for us! Amen.

orthodoxengland.org.uk/sermstgr.htm

The Scripture Readings and Commemorations

Sunday, March 15th, 2009

Second Sunday of Great Lent



EPISTLE READING

The Reading is from Hebrews 1:10- 2:3

¹⁰ And: "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. ¹¹ They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; ¹² Like a cloak You will fold them up, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not fail." ¹³ But to which of the angels has He ever said: "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"? ¹⁴ Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? ^{2:1} Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. ² For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him.

GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from Mark 2:1-12

¹ And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. ² Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them. ³ Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. ⁴ And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. ⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you." ⁶ And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ⁷ "Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ⁸ But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? ⁹ Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'?" ¹⁰ But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic, ¹¹ "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." ¹² Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

New King James Version sourced from www.biblegateway.com

The Lives of Saints Commemorated:

Sunday 15th March, 2009

Martyr Agapius and seven with him (303)

These holy Martyrs contested during the reign of Diocletian 284-305), in Palestinian Caesarea. All eight were very young; only Agapius was a baptized Christian. Urbanus, the governor of the region, observed a pagan festival by having some Christians publicly tortured and executed: some by fire, others on the gallows, some by being thrown to wild beasts in the arena. Six of the youths (Timolaus, Dionysius, Romulus, Plesius, and two named Alexander), seeing the patience and serenity with which the Christians endured their torments, were reached by the Holy Spirit and, tying their own hands, presented themselves to Urbanus saying "We too are Christians!" They were immediately cast into prison. A few days later Agapius, a prominent Christian in that town, also presented himself along with a second Dionysius. All eight were beheaded together at Caesarea. Their martyrdom is recorded in Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History.

Holy Martyr Alexander (270-275)

"He was from the town of Side in Pamphylia. The Emperor Aurelian's governor asked him who he was, to which Alexander replied that he was a pastor of the flock of Christ. 'And where is this flock of Christ', further enquired the evil and suspicious governor. Alexander replied: 'Over the whole world live the people whom Christ the Lord created, among whom those who believe in Him are His sheep, but those who have fallen away from their Creator, who are enslaved to creation and the work of men's hands, to dead idols, such as you, are strangers to His flock, and at the Dreadful Judgement of God will be put to the left with the goats.' The wicked judge first commanded that he be whipped with iron flails and then thrown into a burning furnace. But the fire could in no way harm him. Then he was flayed and after that thrown to the wild beasts. But the beasts would not touch him. At last the governor ordered that he be beheaded. But as soon as the judge pronounced the sentence, an evil spirit took hold of him and made him rabid. He was led howling to his gods, the idols, but on the way the evil spirit wrested his wicked soul from him. St Alexander suffered between 270 and 275.' (Prologue)

compiled by John Brady www.abbamoses.com/months/march.html

Fr Igor will celebrate the Divine Liturgy at **St Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, Ballarat**

fourth Saturday of the month
commencing 10am.

Contact Spiro 53347439 or spirot@iprimus.com.au

Church Address:

116 Humffray St, BALLARAT



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