

Before creating us our Maker brought this whole universe into being from nothing for the sustenance of our bodily existence.

But as for improving our conduct and guiding us toward virtue, what has the Lord in His love of goodness not done for us?

He has made the whole of this perceptible universe a kind of mirror of heaven, so that by spiritual contemplation of the world around us we may reach up to heavenly things as if by some wonderful ladder.

He has implanted in us the natural law, as an inflexible rule, an infallible judge and an unerring teacher: this is our conscience.

If we look deep within ourselves, then, we shall need no other teacher to show us what is good, and if we look outside ourselves we shall find the invisible God visible in the things He has made, as the Apostle says.

Saint Gregory Palamas



**Sunday 8 March 2015 is the
Sunday of Saint Gregory Palamas**

Matins Gospel: Luke 24:36-53

Epistle: Hebrews 1:10-14; 2:1-3

Gospel: Mark 2:1-12

Resurrectional Apolytikion

Angelic powers were above Thy tomb, and they that guarded Thee became as dead. And Mary stood by the grave seeking Thine immaculate Body. Thou hast despoiled Hades and wast not tried thereby. Thou didst meet the Virgin and didst grant us life. O Thou Who didst arise from the dead, Lord, glory be to Thee.

Apolytikion of the Sunday of Saint Gregory Palamas

O Gregory the Miracle Worker, light of Orthodoxy, support and teacher of the Church, comeliness of monastics, invincible defender of theologians, the pride of Thessalonica, and preacher of grace, intercede forever that our souls may be saved.

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Hebrews 12:1-10; Matthew 20:1-16
40 Martyrs of Sebastia; Caesarios the Righteous

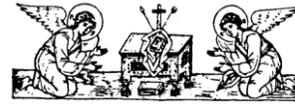
Tuesday: Isaiah 9:9-10:4; Genesis 7:1-5; Proverbs 8:32-9:11
Martyr Quadratus of Corinth and the 5; Anastasia of Alexandria

Wednesday: Isaiah 10:12-20; Genesis 7:6-9; Proverbs 9:12-18
Sophronius, Pat. Of Jerusalem; Theodora the Righteous

Thursday: Isaiah 11:10-12:2; Genesis 7:11-8:3; Proverbs 10:1-22
Theophanes the Confessor; Symeon the New Theologian

Friday: Isaiah 13:2-13; Genesis 8:4-21; Proverbs 10:31-11:12
Nicephorus, Pat. Of Constantinople; Pouplios the Martyr, Bishop of Athens

Saturday: Hebrews 10:32-38; Mark 2:14-17
Benedict of Nursia; Euschimonus the Confessor



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

8 March 2015

Your Sins are Forgiven

Today, on the second Sunday of Great Lent, which is also the Sunday of St Gregory Palamas, we hear Saint Mark's account of the healing of a paralytic man. We are told how this man was brought to Jesus by his friends and, because of the crowds in the house where Jesus was, had to be lowered into the house through the roof. We are told that Jesus Christ responded to the faith of the man's friends by telling the paralytic that his sins were forgiven – something that angered the scribes, for it is only God who can forgive sins – and later instructing him to get up and walk.

As we continue on our Lenten journey, the Church gives us this reading to remind us that we are all sick and in need of healing. The entrance of sin into the world, and the loss of Paradise, which we were reminded of at the beginning of the fast, has meant that our human nature has become corrupted and sick. The repentance that we are called to is most fundamentally a means whereby we can be healed by Christ who is the Divine Physician.



It is worth noting that this paralytic man was brought to Jesus Christ by his friends. He was not able to come on his own and it was in response to their faith that Christ healed him. We too need others to help us to approach Christ, to help us to acknowledge our own need for healing, and to cry out to him. We cannot do this on our own. The services of the Church in this Lenten period, and the means to repentance that she offers us, are not there to simply add one more burden to our lives, or to make us feel important about our own ascetical efforts. Rather, they are there to help us to repent, to help us to come to a place where – not only in words but in the depths of our hearts – we realize our own need for healing and so are able to open ourselves to the Divine Physician who longs to heal us.

Restore me from death to life and cleanse me by fasting as I weep
unceasingly and cry to You: Take pity on me, Christ my Master, in Your great
and abundant mercy.

From Vespers of Sunday Evening

The Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit

A series on the meaning of Chrismation

We saw last week that Baptism is immediately followed by the Mystery, or Sacrament, of Chrismation. Just as we share in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ through our Baptism, so we also share in His anointing with the Holy Spirit at His Baptism, and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, through our Chrismation.

Chrismation means that we are anointed to share in the Body of Christ and to follow Christ in our daily life. We are given power to be Christ's disciples, to participate in the life of the Church, and to witness to the Kingdom of God. Saint Ambrose of Milan writes:



...the post-baptismal anointing consecrates you to share in the priesthood of the faithful. The whole body of the Church is anointed to exercise a priestly function, to offer a spiritual sacrifice of praise, just as Saint Peter tells us in his first letter. "You are a chosen race," he says, "a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God, who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9)... All of you ... have been anointed by the Holy Spirit to share in the Kingdom of God as well as in the priesthood of the faithful.

During the rite of Chrismation, the priest repeats the words, "The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit," as he anoints the different parts of the body. This seal consecrates the organs of our senses to the Lord and dedicates them to His service.

A seal also designates ownership, so the act of sealing our senses places Christ's seal on them, showing that they belong to Him. The early Christians used the term "to keep the seal," which meant to remain faithful to Christ and to respect this ownership.

Finally, a seal is the guarantee that God's promises to us will be fulfilled. As Saint Paul writes:

In Him you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

But it is God who ... has put His seal upon us and given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. (2 Corinthians 1:21-22)



First you were anointed on the forehead, to be freed from the shame which the first man, after his sin, carried with him everywhere, – to be freed so completely that you may be able to contemplate the glory of God with open face, as in a mirror; then on the ears with which to hear the divine mysteries; then on the nostrils so that, perceiving divine perfume, you may say: We are the pleasant perfume of Christ.

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem

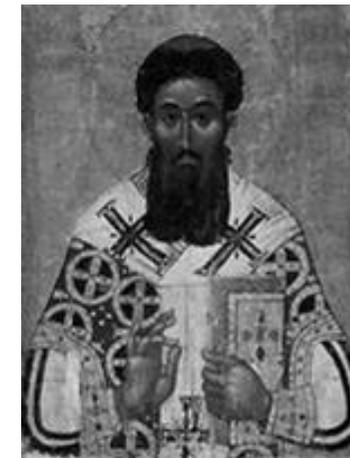
The Sunday of Saint Gregory Palamas

Today, we commemorate St Gregory Palamas and in a way this forms a direct continuation with the Triumph of Orthodoxy that we celebrated last week. For, in recognizing the role of St Gregory Palamas in defeating the heresies of the fourteenth century, we celebrate a renewed triumph of Orthodoxy against a threat to the faith.

St Gregory was born in 1296. After early secular studies, he embraced the monastic life on Mount Athos, the flourishing centre of monasticism. Although he is known for his contribution to the theology of hesychasm, or silent prayer, his contribution to the Church is far broader than this. Indeed, he stressed the integration of the private prayer of the monk with the public worship of the Church.

After about twenty years as a monk, St Gregory became involved in defending the traditional faith of the Church against a certain Barlaam who had been influenced by western Renaissance ideas. Barlaam claimed that we cannot know God and this evoked a strong response from St Gregory. He argued that although God is unknowable, He does reveal Himself. By becoming Incarnate, Christ has granted us a supernatural knowledge. Moreover, St Gregory's defence of the hesychasts, which was soon widely accepted by the whole Church, provided a theological foundation that clarified the theological foundation of monasticism and integrated it into the liturgical life of the Church.

In 1347 St Gregory became Archbishop of Thessalonika and was known for his great pastoral zeal. His sermons from this time are remarkable for their pastoral simplicity and their focus on the centrality of Christ.



What hymns of praise shall we sing in honour of the holy bishop? He is the trumpet of theology, the honoured vessel of the Spirit, the unshaken pillar of the Church, the great joy of the inhabited earth, the river of wisdom, the candlestick of the light, the shining star that makes glorious the whole creation.

From Vespers for the
Sunday of St Gregory Palamas

Humility is the chariot by which we ascend to God, like those clouds which are to carry up to God those who would dwell for endless ages with Him... Humility is the same as such a cloud. It is formed by repentance, releases streams of tears; brings out the worthy from among the unworthy and leads them up to unite them with God, justified by His free gift for the gratitude of their free disposition.

Saint Gregory Palamas