

You see very clearly that it is extremely difficult, and without God's grace and your own fervent prayer and abstinence, impossible, for you to change for the better. You feel within yourself the action of a multitude of passions: of pride, malice, envy, greediness, the love of money, despondency, slothfulness, fornication, impatience, and disobedience; and yet you remain in them, are often bound by them, whilst the long-suffering Lord bears with you, awaiting your return and amendment; and still bestows upon you all the gifts of His mercy.

Be then indulgent, patient, and loving to those who live with you, and who also suffer from many passions; conquer every evil by good, and, above all, pray to God for them, that He may correct them—that He may turn their hearts to Himself, the source of holiness.

Do not help the devil to spread his kingdom. Hallow the name of your Heavenly Father by your actions; help Him to spread His Kingdom on earth. 'For we are labourers together with God.'

Be zealous of the fulfilment of His will on earth, as it is in heaven. Forgive them that trespass against you with joy, as a good son rejoices when he has a chance of fulfilling the will of his beloved father.

Saint John of Kronstadt

**Sunday 16 March 2014 is the
Sunday of St Gregory Palamas**

Matins Gospel: Luke 24:13-35

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

Gospel: Mark 2:1-12

Apolytikion:

Light of Orthodoxy, pillar and teacher of the Church, adornment of monastics, invincible champion of the theologians, O Gregory thou wonderworker, boast of Thessalonica, herald of grace: ever pray that our souls be saved.

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Isaiah 8:13-9:7; Genesis 6:9-22; Proverbs 8:1-21
Alexis the Man of God; Patrick, Enlightener of Ireland

Tuesday: Isaiah 9:9-10:4; Genesis 7:1-5; Proverbs 8:32-9:11
Cyril, Abp. Of Jerusalem; Trophimos & Eukarpion, Monk-martyrs

Wednesday: Isaiah 10:12-20; Genesis 7:6-9; Proverbs 9:12-18
Martyrs Chrysanthus and Daria; Demetrios the New Martyr

Thursday: Isaiah 11:10-12:2; Genesis 7:11-8:3; Proverbs 10:1-22
Fathers of the Monastery of St. Savas; Cuthbert the Wonderworker

Friday: Isaiah 13:2-13; Genesis 8:4-21; Proverbs 10:31-11:12
James the Confessor; Thomas, Pat. Of Constantinople

Saturday: Hebrews 10:32-38; Mark 2:14-17
Hieromartyr Basil of Ancyra; Kalliniki & Vassilisa the Martyrs



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

16 March 2014

Your Sins are Forgiven

Today 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 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 Thee: Take pity on me, Christ my Master, in Thy great and abundant mercy.

From Vespers of Sunday Evening

A Mercy of Peace, a Sacrifice of Praise

An introduction to the Divine Liturgy (continued)

As we move into the most sacred part of the Divine Liturgy in the Holy Anaphora or Oblation, we have seen that we are called to “stand with awe,” for we are coming to share in the life and communion of the Holy Trinity. Central to this prayer is the theme of thanksgiving. The priest urges us, “Let us give thanks to the Lord,” and we respond, “It is right and fitting.”



The Great Thanksgiving

The words “it is right and fitting” then introduce the prayer that the priest offers on our behalf, in which he outlines the fundamental acts of our salvation.

The word “Eucharist” means thanksgiving and the eucharistic Divine Liturgy is most fundamentally about lifting up our hearts in thanksgiving to God for all that He has done for us. Our original sin is ultimately a failure to give thanks to God, and to acknowledge Him for who He is and for what He has done. The restoration of communion with God is through thanksgiving which is made possible by what God has done for us in Christ.

In the prayer that follows, the priest recounts all that God has done for us:

You brought us out of non-existence into being, and when we had fallen you raised us up again, and left nothing undone until you had brought us up to heaven and had granted us your Kingdom that is to come.

For all these things we give thanks to you, and to your only-begotten Son and your Holy Spirit; for all the benefits that we received, known and unknown, manifest and hidden.

In the Liturgy of Saint Basil, which we use during Lent and at some other times during the year, the Anaphora is considerably longer and goes into more detail. However, it is making the same point, namely, that God has reached out to us in love to save us and bring us back to Himself. He has got involved in our messy human history and, in Jesus Christ, has taken the consequence of our disobedience upon Himself, enduring death for our sake, so that He might conquer death and enable our return to God.

We need to be reminded of these events so that we do not take them for granted. For if we are truly aware of them, then they can only evoke in us an attitude of great thanksgiving.

The terrible Mysteries which are celebrated at every assembly of the faithful, and which accord abundant salvation, are called the Eucharist [literally, “Thanksgiving”] because they are the recollection of many benefactions, they show us the culmination of divine Providence, and in every way they prepare us to give thanks to God ... That is why, at the time when this Sacrifice is being made, the priest exhorts us to give thanks to God for the whole world, for the past and the present, for all that has taken place, and for all that will take place in the future. This thanksgiving of ours liberates us from earth and transports us to heaven.

Saint John Chrysostom

The Sunday of St Gregory Palamas

Today, on the second Sunday of Great Lent, the Church commemorates St Gregory Palamas. In a way this forms a direct continuation with the Triumph of Orthodoxy that we celebrated last week. For, in recognizing the role of Saint Gregory Palamas in defeating the heresies of the fourteenth century, we celebrate a renewed triumph of Orthodoxy against a grave threat to the faith.

St Gregory was born in 1296. After early secular studies, he embraced the monastic life on Mount Athos which had become the flourishing centre of Orthodox 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, and 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 who argues that although God is unknowable, He does reveal Himself and that 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 was consecrated as 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.



It is clear that the Light of Tabor was a Divine Light. And the Evangelist John, inspired by Divine Revelation, says clearly that the future eternal and enduring city “has no need of the sun or moon to shine upon it. For the Glory of God lights it up, and the Lamb will be its lamp” (Rev 21:23).

Is it not clear, that he points out here that this Lamb is Jesus, Who is divinely transfigured now upon Tabor, and the flesh of Whom shines, is the lamp manifesting the Glory of divinity for those ascending the mountain with Him?

John the Theologian also says about the inhabitants of this city: “they will not need light from lamps, nor the light of the sun, for the Lord God will shed light upon them, and night shall be no more” (Rev 22:5).

But how, we might ask, is there this other light, in which “there is no change, nor shadow of alteration” (Jas 1:17)? What light is there that is constant and unsetting, unless it be the Light of God?

Saint Gregory Palamas