

SOBORNOST

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SERVICES

American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese
ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Wed: Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts 6 PM | Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM
Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM | Sunday School 9:30 AM
Great Vespers 5:00 PM | Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM



March 12, 2023 – 2nd Sunday of Lent | St. Gregory Palamas

By Protopresbyter Fr. George Metallinos

Revered fathers, beloved brethren! The commemoration of Saint Gregory Palamas is concurrent with the 14th of November. The Synod of 1368, however, which proclaimed the holiness of Saint Gregory Palamas to the world due to the miracles he performed, and not because of his education nor his writings, which were of the highest standard of his time and in accordance with the holy patristic theological tradition, moved the commemoration of Saint Gregory Palamas to the Second

Sunday of Great Lent. It is a symbolic and decisive act, because in our day he is honored by Orthodox throughout the world as an extension and continuation of the Sunday of Orthodoxy. The victory of the Church as the Body of Christ and a society of Christ against error continues. It is not a victory of one person against other persons, nor the victory of one faction against another faction, but it is the victory of Faith. The triumph of Faith as a way of thinking, a way of life and a holy spiritual experience, that can lead man to theosis. It is thus a victory of salvation, which was introduced into history by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who was fleshless in the Old Testament and incarnate in the New Testament.

To understand the importance of Saint Gregory Palamas, who in tonight's speech we call a Father of the Ninth Ecumenical Synod, I wanted to delineate the components of this title.

The Personality of the Saint

Saint Gregory was born in Constantinople in 1296 and studied Philosophy, especially Aristotelian Philosophy, so much that when he took his exams at the age of sixteen at the University of Constantinople, the great scholar Theodore Metochites enthusiastically told him: "My child, not even Aristotle could have expressed himself in a better way."

Saint Gregory studied Theology in the Theological School of the Orthodox Church. It wasn't a state institution, because the monastery was the Theological School, the communal monastery. It was within the monastery that Saint Gregory became a Theologian, through asceticism and the spiritual life. He lived his austere ascetic life in Mount Papikion, between Macedonia and Thrace, in Mount Athos and in Beroia. Five days a week he remained isolated as an anchorite in asceticism, and the other two days he went to discuss with the monastic body his problems, that is, he participated socially in the life of the Holy Spirit with his fellow monastics.

Saint Gregory became a great Theologian of the Church, because he was in the right conditions. He was a Theologian of asceticism and repentance, not a Theologian of diplomas and theological degrees. Please allow me to say the following: I say this now at the last stage of my life, because I don't know how long God will allow me to remain in the world, as I approach seventy. I often say, no matter how many degrees we may have, God does not make us worthy by these to become Theologians. By the Grace of God, I have five university degrees, three degrees and two "doctorates", a PhD in Theology and in Philosophy-History from a foreign University. Why do I say this? In order to repeat what I often say: All these titles and degrees mean nothing, nothing and even below nothing. What I need, especially as a Cleric, is a ray of the Grace of God. I need a little bit of the Grace of God in order to respond to the requirements of my ministry and office,

and to this I think all my respected colleagues in Christ who stand at the Holy Altar will agree.

With such Theology he therefore continued in the tradition of the Holy Fathers, as a Theologian par excellence of the tradition. Saint Gregory Palamas was part of a relay race of the Holy Spirit, that began with the Apostles, then the Apostolic Fathers, first Saint Ignatius of Antioch, then Saint Irenaeus, Saint Cyprian, all the way until Athanasius the Great, the Cappadocian Fathers, Cyril of Alexandria, Cyril of Jerusalem, and this relay continued with Maximus the Confessor, Photios the Great in the ninth century, and it culminated in the fourteenth century with Saint Gregory Palamas, and then with the Holy Kollyvades Fathers, the hesychasts of the eighteenth century.

On the other hand, Photios, Gregory Palamas and Mark the Evgenikos are on an even line of the delivery of this tradition, which situated the Holy Fathers, their thoughts and lives, opposite the innovations and perversions of Western Christianity. Nevertheless, Saint Gregory Palamas became a confessor of the Faith, which God allowed in order to strengthen him. He was charged as an innovator and even as a heretic. This was the crisis of the fourteenth century.

After the Penthekti Ecumenical Synod (691/2) we have such examples within the life of the Church, from the late seventh century onward. The Saints were seen as innovators, the Saints were seen as heretics, because they were not in agreement with a political Theology, which was widespread among Hierarchs and Theologians, who were trying to have it all go well with those in authority and power, in order to reap earthly and temporary benefits. In 1343 Saint Gregory Palamas was imprisoned in the prison of the palace, and in 1344 he was sentenced to excommunication! Synods had previously condemned Saint John Chrysostom (think about it, even the divine Chrysostom!) twice to exile, so that he would die in exile. Similar Synods condemned Saint Gregory Palamas, because he was not willing to serve the interests of those in power, whether ecclesiastical or political. This was not unusual, dear brethren, for Synods that are considered Orthodox to acquit the guilty and condemn the Saints. This phenomenon, which is a perversion of tradition, reveals the secularization of the ecclesiastical space, and it will continue as long as sin continues, along with terrible apostasy, behind the cassocks of the clergy....

Saint Gregory was released in 1343, and from 1347 until 1359, which is when he reposed, he was the Archbishop of Thessaloniki. In 1368, as I said, a Synod of the Patriarchate for the first time in history intervened and proclaimed his holiness. Thus they did not make him a Saint, which is a Frankish concept, as the Church does not make saints. It did this based on what was existing and demonstrable, not because of his books, but because of his miracles.

The Institution of the Ecumenical Synods

In the title we spoke of the Ninth Ecumenical Synod. What is the Ninth Ecumenical Synod that connects us with Saint Gregory Palamas? It is known from history that we officially have Seven Ecumenical Synods. The Ecumenical Synod is the supreme criterion of ecclesiasticity. For us Orthodox, the highest form of ecclesiastical polity is the Ecumenical Synod. Our pinnacle is not a man, such as the Pope - which is our core dispute with the papacy. Protestants abolished everything, because they did not want to keep anything from the tradition of the Church and they distort it. The papacy replaced the Ecumenical Synod with the Pope and made Ecumenical Synods an institution of the papacy, a handmaid of papal plans.

In Orthodoxy there exists and will exist until the end of history, the Ecumenical Synod as the supreme institution in its life. By "ecumenical" is meant a synod of the entire state. According to Xenophon and Greek Byzantium, or Greek Romania, the term "ecumenical" essentially meant the state (ecumenical teacher, ecumenical father, etc.). An Ecumenical Synod, therefore, is a Synod of the entire state, and it addresses major problems of faith and order within the Church. Ecumenical Synods require a crisis in the Body of the Church, which means that salvation is threatened. Then the mouth of the Church, the Ecumenical Synod, proclaims, in every instance, salvific Truth, in accord with the Fathers, the Apostles, the Prophets and the Mothers of all ages. As an example we have the First and Second Ecumenical Synods of 325 and 381, which dealt with the problem, or rather the scourge, of Arianism and the Trinitarian problem. In 381 we thus have the confession of faith, known as the "Creed", which we recite during the Divine Liturgy and in many other services. The Creed is a confession of faith that saves, that leads to theosis, based on the heresies arising from Arianism. It is not the entire faith of the Church.

Last Sunday we read part of the Synodikon of Orthodoxy. The Synodikon is the sequel to the Symbol of Faith, that is, the Creed. It began to be written at the Synod of 843, when the restoration of the Holy Icons took place, and was completed in the fourteenth century, during the time of Saint Gregory Palamas, and it included also all the subsequent heresies after 843. The Synodikon of Orthodoxy is an extension of the Creed. The late Koraes, who wanted to reform Greek life, would say: "I accept the Symbol of Faith, therefore I am Orthodox!" But the Protestants and the Papists, even with the small change, which is of great importance, namely the Filioque, accept the Creed. What characterizes Orthodoxy is the sequel to the Symbol of Faith, and to this belongs the text of the Synodikon of Orthodoxy.

From the Third until the Seventh Ecumenical Synod in 787, our Saints addressed the Christological problem. It dealt with the relationship between the two natures

and wills of Christ, the divine and human, culminating in the problem of depicting God the Word in images. Was it possible for God the Word, "who was incarnate for us men and for our salvation", to be depicted in images? Here we have the collision between the Greek spirit which accepted images, and the Asian spirit, with all the ramifications of forbidding this portrayal, especially in the Old Testament. And the decision, or rather proclamation of the Holy Fathers (at the Seventh Ecumenical Synod of 787 and the Synod of 843) is that, since God the Word took upon Himself the fullness of humanity, soul and body, and in Christ we have perfect man and perfect God, then God the Word can be depicted in His human nature. And so we can have Jesus Christ in icons and venerate His divine nature through His human nature. This is a great achievement of the Church, as well as of the Greek spirit which offered this tradition, to express, strengthen and declare Orthodoxy throughout the world.

If Jesus Christ circulated among us today (of course He chose to enter history as the God-man), we could capture His form with a movie camera or photographic camera, just as He would appear among us. I repeat, this is a huge victory for Orthodoxy and the solution to the Christological problem.

But there is also the Eighth Ecumenical Synod of 879 during the time of Photios the Great. The known dogmatist and our teacher, John Karmiris, would say at the Theological School of Athens, that the Synod of 879 at the time of Photios the Great was the last General Synod of the Ancient Church prior to the Great Schism, and it had all the attributes of an Ecumenical Synod. This Synod condemned the alienation of the West in the wording of the Filioque, which dealt with the procession of the Holy Spirit, not only from the Father, as Christ says in the Gospel of John 15:26 ("Who proceeds from the Father"), but also "from the Son"....

The Synod of 879 is the Eighth Ecumenical Synod, which condemned the Filioque, and its addition to the Creed, especially those who introduced this addition to the Creed, namely the Frankish world and its leadership.

The Dimensions of East and West

But there is also the Ninth Ecumenical Synod. This is the Synods of the period of the explosion of the problem concerning Hesychasm. It was not a "hesychastic dispute"; the Franks taught us to call it a "hesychastic dispute". It was an explosion of resistance against the hesychasts, namely the Orthodox, from papal and scholastic challenges.

These Synods took place in 1341, 1347 and 1351, with the conclusion of the Synod, as we previously mentioned, in 1368. The occasion for these arose from the problems created by the collision of two traditions, East and West. Also, scholastics of Byzantium, namely of Romania, became Latinized, and threw oil on

the fire. These people, who brought the errors of the diaspora to the Orthodox East, as you know, were Barlaam the Calabrian and Gregory Akindynos, or Polykindynos [Greek for "very dangerous"], as his disciple called him.

Barlaam and Akindynos, as well as other followers of theirs, brought western innovations to the East. Already in the West there was another Christianity, which through secularism had changed the essence of Christianity in the West, and this secularization was peaked and culminated with the creation of the papal state....

Hence the West introduces what it introduces, beating on the heart of Orthodoxy, which is hesychasm. Hesychasm is asceticism, practical spirituality, and it has accompanied humanity since the beginning of Creation. The restoration of Adam and Eve comes about through the spiritual life, just as the fall was the result of the denial of the spiritual life, or rather life in the Holy Spirit. Hesychasm, with the purification of the heart, with the illumination of the heart by the uncreated Grace of God, with theosis, overturns error, our sins, it overturns our tragedy. The theological identity of Saint Gregory Palamas was Hesychasm. It continues and expresses the Holy Fathers, but Saint Gregory primarily understood the issue as an alienation of the West. It was a West that our own scholastics wanted to be in conversation with and be a companion of.

The Theology of Theosis

Saint Gregory Palamas, on this point, continues the work of Photios the Great. The first to become aware of the alienation of western Christendom - that it is something else, beside the Christianity of the Fathers - was Saint Photios, in his famous work "On the Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit", which until today is a source for the teachings and writings of all the Theologians on the Holy Spirit. Saint Gregory Palamas opened the road even further. With the challenges of Barlaam the Calabrian, he captured the complete alienation of western Theology. What is the essence of the teaching of Saint Gregory, who continued in the tradition of the Holy Fathers? Saint Gregory Palamas recapitulates the Holy Fathers of all ages, and he restates and re-expresses this faith with the means given to him by his era. Saint Gregory Palamas expresses the same Orthodoxy, in his own language, in his own way, yet remained faithful to the theological confession of the Fathers of the previous centuries. First he makes the distinction between the essence and energies of God, which he calls the "distinction of the divine-befitting and the unspeakable", which is the condition of theosis.

If we deny, as scholasticism does, namely the theology of the papacy, the distinction between essence and energies, then the issue of theosis stands in the margins. How are we deified? The ultimate purpose and destiny of every human being, not only Christians, is theosis. "God desires all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 4:2). The "knowledge of the truth" is theosis,

to be united with the uncreated Grace of God. There is no possibility of union with the essence of God. We unite with the uncreated Grace and energies of God, so that if this energy does not exist, or if it is created - the great blasphemy of the Filioque assumes that Grace is created, thus giving God created energies -, then salvation is impossible.

Created energy entails that it has a beginning and an end. How can something that has a beginning and an end save? The energy of the Holy Trinity has neither beginning nor end. It is without beginning and without end, like the essence of God. Therefore, if we cannot partake in the essence of God, then we partake in His energies. Grace, energy, kingdom (or reign) of God, power, kingdom (or reign) of heaven - all these imply uncreated energy, which proceeds from the Holy Trinity.... Saint Gregory Palamas, speaking of the distinction between the essence and energies of God, just as Basil the Great and the other Holy Fathers did, saves Faith with the ability of contemporary people to achieve theosis.

He speaks also of the essence of the Taboric Light. In his discussions with the scholastics and with Barlaam, the issue of the Taboric Light was raised. What is this Light? Is it created or uncreated? Saint Gregory says that in Sinai, Tabor and on Pentecost we have the uncreated energies of God as uncreated Light....

Barlaam the Calabrian came from Magna Grecia (Great Greece) in Calabria. He came to Constantinople and became a professor, receiving great honors. Indeed, he even represented Orthodoxy in one Synod at the beginning of the fourteenth century in Avignon of France, where the popes in their conflicts were exiled. Palamas immediately diagnosed the heretical way of thinking of Barlaam. To understand what it means to be a Saint and Father of the Church, a certain monk gave Saint Gregory a text written by Barlaam concerning the Holy Spirit, which was against the Filioque. Because of this, everyone believed he was at the pinnacle of Orthodox faith and tradition. As soon as Saint Gregory read a few lines, he said: "This is a heretical text." Though Barlaam presented himself as anti-papist, but the method which he followed gave off a dependence on the fall of the papacy by scholastic philosophy. His thought was based on human syllogisms and not on the revelation of God through Jesus Christ in the Old and New Testaments and the Fathers of the Church. For Barlaam, philosophy had a redemptive character, a redemptive significance, and sought more or less the philosophication of the faith. According to Barlaam, one had to be a philosopher in order to be saved. This is an "elitism" in the area of faith, in the area of soteriology. Saint Gregory replied that the God of all people wants everyone to be saved, whether literate or illiterate. We have another education in our hearts, the "education and admonition of the Lord". We do not rely on human letters. Now do you understand why I condemned all my degrees earlier, which I received by the Grace of God. But they mean nothing,

even below nothing in matters of salvation. The Grace of God and the opening of the heart towards this Grace is what brings salvation, not letters, not the demonstration of knowledge. All these things can be beneficial in practical matters, such as to be a better preacher, to use a higher form of language, but most of the time these secular qualifications become the cause of our fall. Because man becomes "puffed up". A person acquires a certain swagger, when they base themselves on earthly knowledge.

Saint Gregory Palamas thus became a defender of monasticism, a monasticism of the patristic tradition, which Barlaam fought against. The West has lost authentic monasticism, just as it lost true theologizing. True theologizing passes through the ascetic reality and practice, that is, Theology is the fruit of asceticism, which exposes a person to the Grace of God. Theology is not an intellectual matter. When I was studying in the West, I learned the phrase "*tavolo da lavoro*" which means the work of the table or desk. This is not Theology. Theology is born within the heart of man, through the illumination of the Grace of God. Otherwise we will write good texts, but these will not lead to Theology, because they are not the fruit of the experience in the Holy Spirit.

Saint Gregory Palamas is a Theologian of Divine Grace. The Grace of God, he says, is uncreated, not created, *gratia creata*. Authenticity is in the deified, not in texts. This was first supported by a Theologian from Asia Minor, who became a Father of the Church in central Europe, Saint Irenaeus of Lyon, in the second century. He said that authenticity in the Church cannot be found in texts, but in the deified, the saints. This is authenticity: the Prophets, Apostles, Fathers and Mothers of all ages. They are those who attained theosis. The Theologians of the Church, therefore, are God-seers, whom the Prophets of the Old Testament called "Seers", from the Hebrew word *Chozeh* which means "one who beholds in a vision". Prophets are visionaries. What do they see? The uncreated Grace of God. (Our revered and beloved co-struggler, His Eminence Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, has an important book on this subject titled *The Seer*.) Thus, Theologians are God-seers. Theologians are those who see the uncreated Light, those who reach the vision of God.

And something else. Saint Gregory Palamas, unlike Barlaam who sought the philosophication of the faith and especially emphasized philosophical knowledge as an agent in the salvation of humanity, was a hierarch of wisdom education. We are taught secular worldly wisdom education that we learn in schools, but internal wisdom education we receive from the spiritual struggle. It is this which passed into the Synodikon of Orthodoxy, on the occasion of the condemnation of John the Italian and other cheaters of the faith. The famous line says: "Those who accept Greek lessons alone for their education, and maintain these vain opinions and

believe them to be true, anathema!" An "anathema" is not, as many believe, a curse. "Anathema" means *separation*. The anathematized do not belong to the Body of Christ, and rightly we must all cry out: "To all heretics, anathema!" Words do not save us. The problem lies in thinking that the study of physics and astrophysics can save. Human education is one thing (as defined by Gregory the Theologian in the fourth century), and salvation and our eternity is another issue. Saint Gregory Palamas distinguishes between two wisdoms, two sources of knowledge, just as all do who follow in the tradition of the Apostle Paul and the Apostle James the Brother of God all the way until Evgenios Voulgaris. It accepts that revelation can be seized. It accepts the revelation of God is the true Word of God. I will tell you something that will leave some of you sour. We usually say that the Bible, Holy Scripture, is the Word of God. The Bible is not the Word of God, but it is a record of the Revelation of God in the hearts of the Saints, Prophets and Apostles. God does not communicate with human language. God does not communicate with texts. God communicates by coming through His uncreated Light within the heart of the person who attains the receptivity of the Grace of God. Therefore the Bible in itself is not the Word of God, but it is "words about the Word of God" (Fr. John Romanides). It presumes the Revelation of its recording, the writing of the Bible. I hope I am understood on this matter. This is where Saint Gregory Palamas leads us. We continuously speak of Scripture as the Word of God, but it is "words about the Word of God." The Word of God is the manifestation of the Grace of God within the hearts of the Prophets, the Apostles and all the Saints.

Conclusion

Beloved brethren, the Synods of the fourteenth century record the Theology of Divine Grace. Orthodox tradition accepts these Synods as the Ninth Ecumenical Synod, and it is accepted as such in a Pan-Orthodox manner by known Theologians. This Synod, like the Eighth Ecumenical Synod of 879, radically differentiates the Orthodox Church, in its patristic continuation, from the Christianity of the West. The Theology of Saint Gregory Palamas, therefore, is a fruit of the presence of the Holy Spirit in his illumined heart by the Holy Spirit, and he is the Father of the Ninth Ecumenical Synod.

Understanding, then, the Saints, such as Saint Gregory Palamas, raises the problem of the acceptance of the language of the Saints. The language of the Saints is the expression of the Orthodox Tradition. With these thoughts I conclude and pray that Saint Gregory Palamas will accompany us in our lives. May the rest of the Arena of Great Lent be good for you and a Good Resurrection to all! (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 1:10-2:3 EOB

Brethren, of the Son he says, "You, Lord, in the beginning, laid the foundation of the earth. The heavens are the works of your hands. They will perish, but you continue. They all will grow old as a garment; as a mantle, you will roll them up, and they will be changed; but you are the same. Your years will not fail. Indeed, to which of the angels did he ever say, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet? Are the angels not all ministering spirits, sent out to serve for the sake of those who will inherit salvation? Therefore, we should pay greater attention to the things that we were taught, for fear that we may drift away. Certainly, if the word spoken through angels proved reliable and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation! It was first announced by the Lord himself, and it is confirmed to us by those who heard him.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Mark 2:1-12 EOB

At that time, when Jesus returned to Capernaum, it was heard that he was in the house. Immediately, many people gathered so that there was no more room, not even around the door. As Jesus was preaching the word to them, four men came, carrying a paralytic to him. Since they could not come near Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof where he was. When they had broken it up, they let down the mat which the paralytic was lying on. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you." But there were some of the scribes sitting there, and they reasoned in their hearts, "Why does this man speak blasphemies like that? Who can forgive sins except God alone?" Immediately, Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were reasoning within themselves in this way. He asked them, "Why do you reason these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to tell the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed, and walk?' But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" - he said to the paralytic - "I tell you, arise, take up your mat, and go to your house!" The man arose, and at once took up the mat, and went out in front of everyone. The people were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Brethren and fathers, I often call your way of life blessed, not by way of flattery but truth; nor do I wish to call those in the world unhappy, but I aim to make you more fervent. Since too you know the sort of things that take place in the world, drinking bouts and drunkenness, revels and intoxication, shouts and caperings, and all the other things, *whose condemnation is deserved*, as it is written, which are the

results of the activity of the evil one. But our manner of life is not like this. But what is it? Night and day we praise the Lord according to the legislation which has been handed down to us by our holy fathers. Psalmody succeeds psalmody, reading reading, prayer prayer. Government of thoughts in accord with the mind, in the heart meditation of divine words, timely stillness, fitting speech. We serve one another, we keep close to one another, everything is ordered with stability and measure, and if there is need for some bodily consolation at the feast, that is not discordant; for hear what the Lord says to Judas, *What you are doing, do quickly. Not one of those at table knew why he said this to him. For some thought that, because Judas held the purse, Jesus was telling him, 'Buy what we need for the feast', or that he should give something to the poor.* Do you see that among them the consideration both of the feast and of the poor was a matter for concern? Which we also, lowly as we are, as you see, try to achieve. But blessed is God, who has granted us to be admitted to such a way of life, *not because of any works of justice that we have done*, for we have done nothing good upon earth, but according to his mercy the call is freely given. So then each one of us is a debtor, to say always with a contrite heart, *Who am I, O Lord, my Lord, and what the house of my father, that you have loved me?* And such is ours; while rarely are such things found in the world. Because day succeeds night with the care of this age, the deception of wealth, with the other concerns, so that a person is unable to draw breath. People bring trouble on each other, they wrangle with one another, *Adultery and theft and cursing and lying have been poured out upon the earth*, to speak like the Prophet, and all those other things which it is not easy to detail. With all this in mind the blessed Chrysostom has already said, *The majority of the world is hardly to be saved.* It is a fearful word, but nevertheless it is true. For this reason one must grieve and be sad for one who is truly conscious that he is under this sentence. For are we not all one another's brothers? Are we not of one blood? Are we not of the same dust? Is not someone who sees a beast of burden being carried over a precipice seized with pity? How much more then for brothers and fellow believers. Hence the blessed Apostle wept for *the enemies of the Cross of Christ*, praying with *unremitting grief of heart*. Hence the Prophet Jeremy lamented over Israel and left behind various lamentations in writing. Hence the great Moses cried to God, *If you will forgive them their sin, forgive; if not, wipe me out of your book of life.* And indeed each of the saints had the same sympathy and made entreaty for the others. Should not we then, if want to walk in their footsteps, not simply have in view what concerns ourselves, but also pray on behalf of the world, having mercy and pity for those who are living in the distraction of life, those who are in the grip of heresies, those who have been led away into error, those in the darkness of paganism, in brief all mankind, according to what we have been commanded by the Apostle *to make supplications and prayers*. For thus we shall profit ourselves

before the rest, being filled with compunction and cleansed of passionate habits; and delivered from which may we be granted to reach eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and might, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and always and to the ages of ages. Amen.

– St. Theodore the Studite, *Catechesis* 52

.St. Theophanes the Confessor

Theophanes appeared as a faithful protector, honored as faithful to you with a peaceful end. On the twelfth Theophanes perished and departed from life.

Saint Theophanes the Confessor was born in 759 at Constantinople into a pious and renowned family. His father Isaac was a relative of the Emperor Constantine V Copronymos (740-775). Three years after Theophanes was born, his father died, leaving him and his mother Theodote under the care of the emperor himself.

Theophanes grew up at the court and became a dignitary under the emperor Leo IV the Khazar (775-780). His position obliged him to enter into marriage, which he did at the age of twelve, but he persuaded his bride to live with him in virginity due to his love for the monastic way of life.

In 799, after the death of his father-in-law, Theophanes and his wife separated with mutual consent to embrace the monastic life after traveling to various monasteries. Theophanes met the Elder Gregory Stratigios, who predicted to Theophanes' wife that her husband would earn the crown of martyrdom. She chose a convent on an island near Constantinople, while he entered the Polychronios Monastery, located on Mount Sigriane, near Cyzicus on the Asian side of the Sea of Marmara. Later, he built a monastery on his own lands on the island of Kalonymos in the Sea of Marmara. With the blessing of his Elder, Theophanes founded the Kalonymon Monastery and secluded himself in his cell, transcribing books. Theophanes attained a high degree of skill in this occupation.

Later, Saint Theophanes founded another monastery on Mount Sygriane, at a place called the Megalos Agros or Great Field, and became its abbot. He participated in all the work of the monastery, and was an example to all in his love for labor and ascetical struggle. He received from the Lord the gift of wonderworking, healing the sick and casting out demons.

The Seventh Ecumenical Synod met in Nicaea in 787, which condemned the heresy of Iconoclasm. Saint Theophanes was also invited to the Synod. He arrived dressed in his tattered garments, but he revealed his wisdom in affirming the veneration of the holy icons.

At the age of fifty, Saint Theophanes fell grievously ill and he suffered terribly until the day he died. Even on his deathbed, the Saint continued to work. Among

his works he wrote his *Chronicle*, a history of the Christian Church covering the years 285-813. This work has remained an invaluable source for the history of the Church.

During the reign of the emperor Leo the Armenian (813-820), when the Saint was advanced in age, the Iconoclast heresy returned. They demanded that Saint Theophanes accept the heresy, but he firmly refused. His Great Field Monastery was put to the torch. Theophanes was cast into prison and for two years suffered cruel treatment. After his release, he was banished to Samothrace in 818, where overwhelmed with afflictions, he lived only seventeen days. He is credited with many miracles that occurred after his death. After the death of the impious emperor Leo the Armenian, the Great Field Monastery was restored and the relics of the holy confessor were transferred there. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

An Interpretation of the Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian

O Lord and Master of my life, give to me Your servant a spirit of humility.

Remember that the commandment of humility is the first commandment of the beatitudes, and if the first, then the most important. Have you ever heard the word of God, proclaimed by the Prophet Isaiah: “Thus says the High and Exalted One, who lives forever – His name is Holy. I live on high in heaven and in the sanctuary, with the contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and revive the hearts of the contrite” (Is. 57:15).

Don't you want God Himself to live within you? If so, remember well: He Himself says that He lives in the heart of the humble and revives their hearts, but how much we need the quickening of our hearts! Don't you want God to look upon you? If so, know and remember that God looks down on the humble in heart. Remember also the words of the Apostle James: “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6) Do you want the Lord to resist you, don't you want to receive grace? If so, remember what humility is, what a holy virtue it is that is so pleasing to God, for which God lives within us and looks down on upon us.

This is the opposite of pride. The humble are the poor in spirit, remembering their shortcomings, directing their gaze into the depths of their hearts, they always tirelessly observe the movements of their hearts, they follow any impurity that they see in their hearts. The saints, who always kept the commandments of Christ, loved Christ, and always had the Lord on their minds, constantly remembered humility and always prayed for it.

Christ says: "Learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29). The Lord commands to learn humility from Him, the Lord commands to imitate Him in humility. Humility was manifest throughout the Lord's earthly life. It began from

His very birth, for He was born as the humblest, simplest, most inconspicuous person, He was born in a den for cattle, was laid in a manger. And then all His life, didn't He give countless examples of humility? When Herod burned with rage, wanted to kill the Newborn Savior and sent his soldiers to slaughter the Bethlehem babies, couldn't the Lord send one legion of angels from the legions that were always at His disposal, couldn't He strike Herod? Of course He could, but He preferred to show humility and fled to Egypt from the wrath of Herod.

And then how much humility He showed in His life, walking 200 kilometers on foot to Jerusalem, at the first call of those in need of His help, not having where to lay His head. Didn't He set a perfect, extraordinary example of humility by washing the feet of his disciples? This represents the epitome of humility. And about the humility that He showed before the court and after the court, when He was led to Golgotha, crucified on the cross - human lips do not dare to speak about it, it is so immeasurable, so great.

The Lord tells us to learn humility from Him. And who now remembers humility? Humility is a quality of the human soul, which the proud stigmatize with contempt, for these people do not believe in Christ, they chose not the path of Christ, but other paths: they say that this is the spirit of slavery, that the humble are slaves, deprived of the quality of the most necessary, deprived of the spirit of protest, resistance by force to the grave calamities of mankind. Is there any truth in this? None, not a trace. It is necessary to say about the humble not what the slanderers say, but something completely different: that they are not slaves, subject to evil and violence, but the only conquerors of evil and violence. It must be said that only they are waging a real fight against evil, for they eradicate the very sources of evil from their hearts and the hearts of other people. They do not believe that the cause of evil lies only in the imperfection of social relations.

The humble is a true warrior of Christ, not a slave. But how little there is of humility, infinitely little now! The vast majority of people despise humility, strive for primacy and predominance in this world. It is almost impossible to find truly humble people, they do not think about humility; humility is forgotten, completely forgotten. Those who walk with all their hearts along the path of Christ, who learn humility from Him, think about humility. Only saints are truly humble. It may seem strange how saints, who surpass other people to a great extent in moral virtues, in the height they have reached, can consider themselves completely sincerely lower than all others. The basis of their holiness is that they do not exalt themselves over anyone, but condemn their hearts. The saints with extraordinary vigilance watched every movement of the heart and saw the slightest impurity in it, and if they saw it, they always remembered this impurity and therefore considered themselves unworthy before God.

People who are proud and daring dare to judge everything that is most lofty and holy; the humble are devoid of insolence, modest, quiet. We find many examples of this in Holy Scripture and in the lives of the saints. Who is greater before God than the righteous Abraham, who heard great promises and is called the friend of God, and this Great One never ceased to call himself dust and ashes. Who is greater before God than David, the prophet and king, and he said about himself: "I am a worm, and not a man - a reproach among people" (Ps. 21:7). These were his completely sincere words. Who was greater before God in his labors than the Apostle Paul? And he calls himself the first among sinners, he was so alien to impudence and exaltation: he was timid, not impudent, he spoke of himself that he was among the Corinthians "in weakness and fear and great trembling" (1 Corinthians 2:3). This deep humility is an example for all of us, who are infinitely far from it.

We need to diligently always think about humility and ask God for it. We cannot acquire this virtue by any of our own efforts. Humility - a great gift of God - is received by those who love God with all their hearts and strive to fulfill the commandments of Christ. Only to them will the Lord give this great gift. Their heart is humble, and when a person's heart is humble, the Holy Spirit dwells in him. See what a great happiness it is to be humble, see how difficult it is to be humble. Have hope and know that every step along the path of Christ brings you closer to holy humility. If you frequent such steps, like the apostles and saints, by this you will draw closer to God.

The Lord Jesus Christ told the disciples: "Let the greatest of you be a servant to all, for whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matt. 23:11-12). How infinitely often these words of Christ come true, how many proud, striving to rise above all, then fall below all. How many were humble, insignificant, born in a beggarly family, who lived in poverty at the beginning of their lives, and then became great people. Such is the story of the great Moscow saints. Many, many others also came from the lowest social background and were exalted by God for their great, immeasurable humility. The Lord says: "Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first" (Mt. 19:30). This is how it happens in our life, this is how it will be at the Last Judgment. The first will be the last, and the last, the insignificant, the despised, will be the first. A lot of work is needed in order not to forget humility, a lot, a lot of work in order to acquire it.

We must remember the words of the Apostle Peter: "All the same, being subject to one another, clothe yourself with humility of mind, for God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5). Remember, God opposes the proud, and only gives grace to the humble. Remember that even before the death of the cross,

the Lord Jesus Christ humbled Himself. We need to strive for humility, constantly ask God for it: "Lord and Master of my life, bestow on Your servant a spirit of humility!" Know and remember that if a person constantly keeps these holy words in mind, he will receive from God the deep virtue of humility. Amen.

- St. Luke the Surgeon of Simferopol (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

St. Paul Aurelian

Saint Paul Aurelian, a Romano-Briton prince who was educated at St. Illtyd's ([6th November](#)) monastery and school (Cor Tewdws), in present-day Llantwit Major, Glamorgan, Wales with Saints David ([1st March](#)), Gildas the Wise ([29th January](#)), Illtyd ([6th November](#)), and Samson ([28th July](#)). After his time at Cor Tewdws, St. Paul, along with twelve other monks, went to Brittany where they established a monastery at Porz-Pol on the Isle of Ouessant. Later St. Paul was convinced to accept elevation to the Bishopric of Ouismor, now known as Saint-Pol-de-Léon, Brittany, France. St. Paul reposed circa 575. (*from drjohnhutchisonhall.com*)

Also Commemorated Today

St. Alexander confessor priest (1933).

New Hieromartyr John priest, New Hieromartyr Vladimir (1938).

New Hieromartyr Sergius priest (1943).

Righteous Phineas, grandson of Aaron (1500 B.C.).

St. Gregory the Dialogist, pope of Rome (604).

Venerable Symeon the New Theologian (1022) and his elder Symeon the Reverent of the Studium (987).

The Lydda Icon of the Mother of God Not-Made-by-Hands (1st c.).

Righteous Aaron the High Priest, brother of Prophet Moses the God-Seer.

Venerable Cyrus, monk of Alexandria (6th c.).

St. Alphege the Bald, bishop of Winchester, England (951) (Celtic & British).

St. Nicodemus of Mammola in Calabria (990).

St. Demetre the Devoted, King of Georgia (1289) (Georgia).

St. Theoctistus Dragutin of Serbia (1316).

St. Mura McFeredach (Muran, Murames, Muranus, Muru), Abbot of Fathinis (Fahan) (c. 645)

Martyr Maximilian of Rome (unk)

Martyr Maximilian of Thebeste (N. Africa)(295)

St. Peter the Deacon, secretary of St. Gregory the Dialogist (c. 605)

St. Innocent, pope of Rome (417)

St. Mabon (Mabbon), bishop of St-Pol-de-Leon (650)(Brittany)

St. Tanguy (Gurguy), abbot of Le Relecq Gerber in Leon (c. 600)

St. Vindicien Bullecourt, bishop of Cambrai and Arras (712)

Social Team for March 19

Team 2 is up next week - Dewey, Carrie LaMere, Heather Shear, Ezra Dotson, Connell. Thank you!

Upcoming Lenten Retreats



Did you know that there are Orthodox Christians trying to practice their faith in prison? Or that there are non-Orthodox prisoners who are ready to repent of their crimes and embrace the fullness of Orthodoxy?

Brokenness and Healing on the Road to Pascha

The Very Rev. John Kowalczyk
Director of Training and Spiritual Care for OCPM, prison chaplain at S.C.I. Waymart's Forensic Treatment Center, and the Director of Field Education and Senior Lecturer in Ethics at St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary.

also featuring

Mark Santana
Church Programs Manager for OCPM
Special Guest Speaker TBA



Saturday, April 1, 2023
3:00 PM

Ss. Peter and Paul Antiochian
Orthodox Christian Church
10620 River Rd
Potomac, MD 20854



Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry
276 5th Avenue, Ste. 704-3183
New York, NY 10001

WWW.THEOCPM.ORG

347-868-6957
info@theocpm.org



Healing Our Relationships On the Path Toward Pascha

Lenten Retreat

Speaker Dr. Philip Mamalakis

Everyone is Welcome!

A Children Program During
the Retreat *will* be available
so Parents can Attend

March 25th
1:00-4:30 pm

Author of: Parenting Toward the Kingdom:
Orthodox Christian Principles of Child-Rearing

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Twitter: <https://twitter.com/acrodnews>

You Tube: <https://youtube.com/acroddiocese>

In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri & Mt. Kenya, Bennett family, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Luke & Marlena Cooper, Roberta Corson, Jon Church, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Marlene Doukas, Linda A. Georgiev, Sandi Hebel, Howl family, Helen P. Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Helen, Brian, Luke and Mia Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & family, Nicholas Pavlik, Weston Perry & family, John Reece, Mary Reed, Marge Rusnak, Rose Song, Fr. Nectarios & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the suffering people of Ukraine, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)