

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

Wed: Reader Vespers 6:30 PM

Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM

Vespers 5 PM

Sunday: Matins 8:45 AM

Sunday School 9:30 AM

Divine Liturgy 10 AM

November 17, 2024 – 21st Sunday After Pentecost (9th

**Sunday of Luke) | St. Gregory the Wonder-worker,
Bishop of Neocaesarea**

Oration by St. Gregory of Nyssa

Both our essay and the congregation assembled here have one aspiration, namely, to reflect upon the great Gregory. For my part, it seems best to consider the fortitude of his virtue and wonderful achievements and by invoking his help, such an outstanding example may assist us in how we should conduct our lives. Indeed, this is a gift from the Spirit who provides a living example and testimony, thereby affirming each person with unflagging dedication. Since the Spirit's power is the foundation which enables such a radiant and admired life to flourish, prayer upholds us when we must speak of it. We should not scorn this praise because this man's memory demonstrates in the present his witness which had been manifested through his deeds....

No person instructed by divine wisdom should seek a contrived form of acclaim from pagan customs since he is praised in a spiritual fashion. We do not judge



others by a similar reason about the good nor should we have opinions with regard to those distinguished persons who live according to this world. They possess a certain surpassing dignity, wealth, lineage, glory, earthly authority, stories from their ancestors related to victories, battles and the evils of war. In our opinion there is one fatherland, one heavenly city founded upon living stones, whose maker and founder is God. This splendid race which enjoys fellowship with God neither has its natural roots in this world nor bears the natural consequences common to its inhabitants; rather, only free choice can create it. The divine voice says, "[God the Father] has given the power to whomever receives [Christ] to be children of God" [Jn 1.12]. What can be more splendid than this noble birth? On the other hand, demons are responsible for inventing deceitfully contrived stories. However, they have no place in our [heavenly] fatherland.

Anyone who contemplates heaven and its beauty and sees all creation with the soul's eye has the ability to grasp what we have related concerning our fatherland. Yet instead of the fatherland, we now have a community which we have colonized from that more lofty life because we have forsaken this transitory world. We should consider this community, its city, beauty, rule and the happiness which belongs to its inhabitants. For if these manifestations of creation surpass praise, why should we consider what transcends it which no eye can grasp nor can be judged by hearing or the mind? The divine law of praise excludes by reason of spiritual praise those attributes as nonsense and judges those persons as disgraceful who are so honored because they belong to the earth. If any worldly person is fascinated by material happiness, let him get his praise from individuals who possess either cattle, are greedy with an abundance of fish or who pile one stone on top of another to construct a lovely edifice. But for anyone contemplating the life above, wealth consists in purity of soul where poverty is wealth, the fatherland is virtue and the city is the kingdom of God which holds earthly honors in contempt. We therefore reject such reverence and do not attribute these praises to the fatherland which belongs to the great Gregory. Neither do we claim that they belong to our forefathers knowing that they have no part in such praise. However, we add that what is indeed permanent can never be taken away....

Acquisition of virtues begins with wisdom united to temperance much like a foal over which self-control presides. Humility and discretion attend them by holding money in contempt, and does not give birth to pride, disrespect nor contribute to avarice. Similarly, the patriarch Abraham studied Chaldean philosophy and became skilled in it. He also pondered the stars' position, harmony and motion which acted as a ladder for him to contemplate the good above. If [Abraham] grasped them by his senses, even though they transcended the senses, and

happened to attain what he sought from pagan wisdom, he surpassed it and moved on to what was loftier.

Thus [Gregory] became great by his acquaintance and attention to pagan philosophy which augments Greek [wisdom] and leads to an understanding of Christianity. Having forsaken the erroneous religion of their ancestors, he sought the truth, for such foreign teaching is not in harmony with regard to Greek beliefs. Since [Gregory] knew that philosophy concerning the divinity was two-fold, Greek and barbarian, he pondered over these conflicting teachings and attempted to confirm each by close attention to their words. He abandoned them to their own devices as though they were engaged in civil war and apprehended the firm position of faith minus logical, convoluted technical tricks; rather, he honored every person who understood them by using simple words while he himself had faith which transcends knowledge. For if human reason could grasp his words, it would not differ from Greek wisdom which, if they had strength to absorb it, would express their own opinions. Since comprehension of [God's] transcendent nature cannot be fathomed by human reasoning and intelligence, faith takes its place and fosters it. Therefore just as Scripture says that Moses was "instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians", so was that man [Gregory] great who was familiar with Greek education and knowledge. By experience he realized the deficiency and insubstantial nature of their teachings since he followed the Gospel. Before his initiation through a mystical and incorporeal birth, he conducted his life in order to be cleansed of sin's filth.

When he dwelt in the city of Alexandria, Egypt, to which assiduous young men flocked to study philosophy and medicine, the youthful [Gregory] was an irksome sight to his peers because he was adorned with a restraint unlike anyone else in the city, and the esteem surrounding his integrity irritated such corrupt individuals. Because of this, some undisciplined characters sought to make all sorts of excuses if no one went along with them. They maintained that this great man's life was tainted with a certain flaw and hatched a plot to release from prison a harlot notorious for shameful behavior. But following the conduct of learned and responsible men accustomed to philosophical speculation, [Gregory] approached the woman in a nonchalant and unassuming manner while pretending to agree with everything she said and did. He then said that she was cheated of her wage and was refused the payment she had sought. When they who acknowledged the quality his life became outraged at the woman, their anger neither troubled him nor did he claim that this humiliation had slandered his reputation. [Gregory] neither summoned witnesses on his behalf, nor did he repudiate the disgrace by swearing an oath nor respond to the evils brought against him; rather, in a calm, subdued voice he replied as to a friend, "He who paid money to this woman should no

longer be distressed at having caused such trouble." When they learned of the harlot's accusation who had sought money from him and he readily accounted for everything, the plot to smear his self-control by accusations of licentious conduct came to an end. Now that this attempt to dishonor him fell back upon them, with God's help the youth's control and the reproach of his comrades became evident. Having received the money, an evil spirit at once tormented her, and she bellowed out a loud animal sound. This woman presented a dreadful sight in the midst of the assembly by taring out her hair, rolling her eyes and emitting foam from her mouth. But before the demon suffocated her, she earnestly besought God almighty.

These events are worthy of that great youth and were confirmed right from the beginning of his life. If no further words were added to this miracle, it would alone attribute no small praise with regard to those persons who excel in virtue. For example, a wealthy youth living abroad in a densely populated city freely indulges in pleasures, and his purity turns into disgrace from associating with his peers who lack chastity through self-control. He has no solicitous mother and father to correct his life through mastery of passions and to make him strive for virtue that he may provide an example of strength for eluding a slanderous woman's evil attack. Can anyone offer a greater reason for praise? How does this commendable instance offer tribute? Why should we be astonished at a person who has subjugated his youthful nature to reason as a tame animal, has mastered all natural passions, rejects jealousy which clings closely to anything beautiful and has transformed himself for the better? He was not moved by his friends' plot for vengeance; although his good deeds were reduced to ridicule, he chose prayer to liberate himself from demonic affliction....

All training in pagan philosophy transpires in Phirmilianos of Cappadocia which is famous for noble families and their particular style of life. This is also evident by [Gregory's] life whom the church of the Kaesarians had honored and whose conduct of living which always was in accord with God was manifest to his friends. The diligence associated with his passion was renowned since he forsook interest in pagan philosophy. A certain man named Origen associated with him who at the time was the instructor of philosophy for Christians. He was celebrated for his writings, and his position demonstrated not only his love for study and enthusiasm for work, but also his instinctive moderate behavior. [Origen] was endowed by such wisdom and did not disdain to put other teachings at the service of theology. Having spent time studying under this teacher, many exhorted [Gregory] during his sojourn to remain with them instead of returning to his native country. They hoped that he would prefer their land to which, like a merchant, he had brought the wealth of wisdom and knowledge and had imported pagan learning which won the favor of distinguished men.

If anyone judges justly, he does scorn that praise which befits the entire city. Neither does he share the enthusiasm of all who have been chosen because their actions outlast any form of human endeavor nor the city's leaders whose goal is to be a distinguished authority and legislator on virtue. But fleeing in every possible way those occasions for vanity and knowing that passion holds in contempt many things because it is in accord with an evil life, [Gregory] took up a quiet life in his homeland much like a ship entering a harbor. Every nation desires such a lifestyle and aspires to facilitate erudition in common gatherings and to earn the fruit of blessed endeavors which the people hold in esteem. That great man realized that authentic philosophy should be placed at the city's service and did not allow ambition to wound his soul. The praise of those who listen to it is poignant and inflames the soul's vitality by vanity and love of honor.

[Gregory] therefore manifested his erudition through silence and withdrew from the tumultuous crowd and hustle of the city. He retired into solitude so he could converse with God and held the entire world in disdain by shunning imperial affairs, not scrutinizing magistrates and by turning a deaf ear to official matters. Instead, [Gregory] refined his soul by attending to virtue which directed his life and behavior. This is reminiscent in our times of another Moses who rivals him in the performance of miracles. Both Moses and Gregory separated themselves from this life's upheaval and confusion, each attending to their respective private lives, while a theophany manifested to them the advantage of living purely. While Moses united married life with philosophy, Gregory wedded himself to virtue alone. Therefore both men had the same goal in mind: separation from society to contemplate divine mysteries with the soul's pure eye. This permitted them to judge what is best for meditating upon virtue and to attain a life free from passion. One gravitated towards a legitimate share of pleasures, whereas the other surmounted it and did not dedicate himself to the transitory pleasure of material creation.

At that time Phaidimos presided over the church of the Amasenians and earnestly applied himself to foresee the future as divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit. He invested the great Gregory with leadership so that such a good might not be unfruitful and that his life might not go unnoticed. Having perceived this enticement to the priesthood, [Gregory] strove to conceal it while pursuing another form of solitude. Once he had experienced this trial, the great Phaidimos employed every means available which were unsuccessful in leading him to the priesthood. With many eyes upon him, he took precautions which were futile in persuading him to assume this office. Both men strove intensely: one desired to make a proper selection and the other wanted to take flight. One knew how to present himself as an offering pleasing to God, whereas the other was apprehensive that the

priesthood's responsibility might hinder him from pursuing philosophy. Therefore Phaidimos was divinely inspired to undertake a journey of three days' distance which separated him from Gregory. Instead, he looked to God and said that God had at that time honored both himself and [Gregory]. Clutching Gregory's word instead of his hand, he consecrated him to God although he was not physically present and assigned the city to him. At that time the deceit of innumerable idols gripped the city so that both in it and the surrounding area no more than seventeen were present who committed themselves to the faith. Therefore [Gregory] submitted to the yoke of priestly office and once all the religious rites were completed, he was soon obliged to carefully attend to mystery [of faith] after his summons to the priesthood. As the Apostle says, he should no longer be attached to flesh and blood but should seek to manifest the hidden things of God and not proclaim it before the truth was revealed in him. At night he beheld the foundation of the faith. Various thoughts troubled him, for certain people perverted true teaching and often obscured it through persuasive, clever attempts.

As he laid awake, there appeared to him in a vision an aged person in human form adorned with solemn raiment and whose countenance was striking by great virtue and kindness in addition to the integrity his form. [Gregory] was struck by fear at this sight and rising up from bed, realized who he was and why he came. After quieting his fear, he said in a soft voice that a divine order bade him to appear, the reasons of which were obscure to [Gregory], in order to reveal the truth of correct belief and to encourage him to speak while gazing upon him with both joy and respect. Then the old man suddenly extended his hand and with his finger pointed to something which appeared near him which was a splendid female form instead of a male one. Once again [Gregory] was terrified and turned his face away, unable to bear its sight. The vision was especially amazing since the night was gloomy, for it resembled something like a light illuminated by another light. Since he could not look upon this spectacle, he heard from those who appeared to him speaking in detail about what he was seeking. Not only was he revered with regard to true knowledge of faith but recognized the names of each man who appeared when they called each other by their respective names. It is claimed that this vision of a female form told [Gregory] that the evangelist John was exhorted to manifest the mystery of truth to a young man, saying that she was chosen to be the mother of the Lord whom she cherished. He also said that this fitting vision had vanished again from his sight. He was immediately ordered to write down this divine revelation and later proclaim it in the church. In this way it became for others a divinely given legacy through which the people might repulse any evil of heresy. The words of that revelation are as follows:

One God, Father of the living Word (who consists of wisdom, power and who is the eternal pattern), perfect Begetter of who is perfect, Father of the Only Begotten Son. One Lord alone from him who is alone, God from God, pattern and image of the divinity, mighty Word, wisdom which encompasses everything, true Son of true Father, unseen [Son] of the unseen [Father], immortal [Son] of the immortal [Father], and eternal [Son] of the eternal [Father]. One Holy Spirit whose life is from God and who was made manifest through the Son (as well as to men), perfect image of the perfect Son, living source of those who are alive, holy provider of sanctity in whom God the Father appeared who is above all and in all, and God the Son who is in all. Perfect Trinity to whom belongs glory, eternity and kingship which can never change. (Thus the Trinity is not created, has anything else which claims to be first, nor is there anything which exists that can be introduced later. Similarly, the Son neither lacks the Father nor does the Spirit lack the Son; rather, the Trinity forever remains immutable and constant.)

Let anyone whoever desires to believe this listen to the Church which proclaims its message and which perseveres these signs of blessedness by that hand even to the present. Is it not evident that these divinely made tablets rival the magnificence of grace? I believe that such tablets are the ones in which are inscribed the intentions of the divine will. Concerning Moses, Scripture says that when [God] who transcends visible reality and who constitutes the invisible sanctuary within the soul (for darkness implies this), it is for teaching the divine mysteries to all the people through his knowledge about God. In the same way the office of this great man contains no perceptible mountain but consists in the loftiness of desire for true teachings which is a dark vision unable to be approached. The soul is the tablet; in place of letters upon a tablet voices appears which reveal the mysteries for anyone who has undergone initiation.

After that vision had filled him with confidence and courage much like an athlete who competes in a contest after having acquired stamina from a trainer, he strips himself for the stadium and prepares for the struggle. In similar fashion, so [Gregory] exercised himself and the assistance of grace which appeared to him anointed his soul and made it worthy to undergo the contest. (For all the labors and struggles related to the priesthood follow this example where faith overcomes every adverse power). After leaving his solitude, [Gregory] at once hastened to the city where he felt obliged to establish a church for God. He knew that the whole region was under the grip of demons and that the temple of the true God was not yet constructed; the entire city and surrounding area was filled with pagan altars, sacred places and all the people were devoted to images. They adorned the temples

and sacred places with images and the madness of idolatry with processions; their defilement gave substance to rites and ceremonies. Just as a noble commander routs the enemy in combat by the strength of his battle order, so that great man's valor set an example against the demons. How did he accomplish this?

Upon arriving in the city at evening from the countryside, a violent rainstorm forced [Gregory] into the temple. This place was renowned because one of the demons revered there was accustomed to manifest himself to the temple's custodians, and a certain prophet was empowered to utter oracles. Once [Gregory] entered the temple with several companions, one of the demons was petrified at the invocation of Christ's name. Having purified the air with the figure of the Cross which had been defiled, he spent the entire night in prayer and singing hymns according to his usual custom. In this way [Gregory] transformed the place into a temple of prayer which had been profaned by unclean sacrifices and images [cf. Is 56.7, Mk 11.17]. After completing night prayer, he resumed at daybreak, but when the temple's custodian began to perform his rites to the demons at sunrise, he claimed that he could not approach the temple because [Gregory] blocked the way. The custodian then attempted to invite demons into the temple using sacrifices of purification and sacred rituals. However, his endeavors were ineffectual because the demons were not accustomed to respond to this enticement. Overcome with a furious rage, the custodian seized that great man and threatened him with various intimidations and to bring him to the leaders. He wanted to lay hands upon him and reveal his audacity to the king because a Christian who was hostile to the gods had the effrontery to enter the temple. His admission to temple for performing services was refused, and he could no longer visit places where oracles were made to demons. The custodian's harsh anger was enkindled at [Gregory's] splendid resolve, and he hurled all kinds of threats against the blessing offered by the true God. He alleged to have more fortitude than his opponent and had the privilege of entering those places anytime he wished as well as being able to prove this. The temple keeper was so struck with admiration at [Gregory's] ability to perform wonders that he again invoked the demons to enter the temple. Having learned about this, the great man suddenly snatched a piece of the book and gave it to the temple keeper while angrily commanding the demons. The words of this epitaph read as follows: GREGORY TO SATAN: ENTER.

When the temple keeper received this little book to place on the altar according to custom, he offered burnt sacrifices and various types of unclean rites and again beheld what he had seen before the demons were ejected from the temple which contained the idols. Having accomplished this, he realized that Gregory was endowed with divine power which made him stronger than the demons. Before leaving the city, he promptly grasped Gregory in order to learn about his secret and

about God who had vanquished the demons. When the great man gave a brief account about the mystery of piety, a certain temple guardian approached him who was in all likelihood uninitiated into divine matters. He was inclined to believe that it was too inconsequential for God to appear to men in the flesh. But when Gregory said that these miracles are possible not by reason but by faith, the temple keeper begged to see a miracle which would strengthen him in the faith. Right then and there it is said to everyone's surprise that Gregory performed a great miracle. After the temple guardian found a huge stone which in his eyes seemed unmovable by human means but only through the power of faith, Gregory ordered it transferred to another place. That great man at once charged the large stone which seemed endowed with life to move to that place designated by the temple's keeper. Once this was accomplished, the man immediately believed and forsook his entire family, household, wife, children, friends, the priesthood and possessions. In their place he requested to participate in [Gregory's] greatness, accomplishments, divine philosophy and teaching.....

Thus that great man [Gregory] prevailed against the demons' strength and paraded the temple guardian as a victory trophy, a sight which filled the people with awe. With faith and courage he triumphantly entered the city not with chariots, horses, asses and boasting in the number of supporters but attended by the full array of virtues. The town's entire populace gathered to learn about this the novel wonder, and everyone desired to see that man called Gregory. They considered him a god who exercised authority and did whatever he wished against the demons in order to subject them. Having vanquished their patron to his authority and despising the honor which was formerly theirs, he changed their way of life and everything which pertained to it.

Such was the judgment of all who welcomed [Gregory] into the city since everyone who observed him attentively thought he passed by as if he were a lifeless piece of wood. He did not acknowledge anyone while advancing straight to the city; rather, his appearance was so startling that it surpassed their report. His first entry into the great metropolis lacked precedent when, for example, the populace surged about him. Instead, he proceeded in a solitary fashion and seemed withdrawn while not turning to those who thronged about him. This sight seemed more wondrous than what he had done with regard to the stone. Therefore [Gregory] was one of those few people who had accepted the faith before assuming office, and the entire city which accompanied him acknowledged the honor of his priesthood upon his entry....

If history offers any unsubstantiated claims about [Gregory], our account pays little attention to such fabrications in light of his accomplishments. Those who judge honestly must not magnify through their inventiveness insignificant testimony with

regard to the miracles of him whom we hold in memory. Instead, remembrance of his deeds should offer perfect praise since innate beauty adorns his person without any form of embellishment. After several persons have received preliminary instruction before the end of day, they hastened to a first meeting at sunset so that the multitude of people might worthily comprise a body of believers. At daybreak men, women, children, the old and young, and whoever was afflicted by demons or bodily affliction gathered at the door. In their midst [Gregory], who shared the Spirit's power, was in the process of amiably preaching, reflecting, admonishing, teaching and curing.

His preaching greatly influenced the people because in his person both those who saw and heard him were united, and through both he illumined the people by revealing God's power. Both those who heard and saw him were struck with wonder at the miracles he performed among the sick. The sorrowful person was consoled, the youth was corrected and the old person was healed by his appealing words. Slaves were taught to be obedient to their masters, those who ruled were urged to respect their subjects and the poor were encouraged to have virtue as their one treasure, a reward which everyone was permitted to abundantly acquire. [Gregory] admonished everyone endowed with wealth to dispense it and not hoard it; that women act in a becoming manner, that children fulfill their obligation, that fathers discharge their duties in an appropriate manner and that everyone carry out their respective obligations. In this way the Spirit might help everyone and urge them to construct the temple which remains to the present day by contributing support through money and material. That great man immediately established the church by using his own priesthood as a foundation through divine inspiration and with this help, he soon fulfilled this task. When in our lifetime the city suffered a severe earthquake and almost every public and private dwelling was completely destroyed, the temple alone remained unscathed and unshaken, thereby testifying to that great man's strength and vigor.

Later on [Gregory] often gave witness to the power which God bestowed upon him. All the inhabitants of the city and surrounding areas were therefore astounded at such wonders which were reminiscent of the Apostles. They believed his words and actions came from God's power, for the court which was responsible for settling temporal controversies among the people considered his testimony to be more reliable. He resolved judgments and delicate situations by taking counsel with them. As a result, good order and common peace influenced each situation, and much progress was made in the good while no evil frustrated harmony in both private and public spheres. None of his decrees were recalled as being inopportune so that according to the saying, all our robes were known by their hems....

Because the Spirit prospered every decision of that great man, it would be timely to give an account of his journey so that the grace bestowed upon one man might inspire everyone. It was clear that [Gregory] had a special zeal for learning in addition to consoling persons in need. Once two Hebrew men either seeing gain or wishing to disgrace someone who could be easily deceived, closely watched his arrival. One of them pretended to be dead by lying on his back in the road while the other feigned sounds of lamentation. He cried out to that great man who was passing by, "Suddenly death forced this miserable, naked man to lie down without preparations for burial." He besought the great man not to neglect the reverence due but to take pity on his poverty and to look upon the extreme condition of his body. After imploring [Gregory], he did not delay to donate his double cloak and continued on his way. After he passed by, the two men mocked him while the impostor changed his lamentation to derision and exhorted his friend to rise, laughing aloud over the pleasure of their deception at having made a dishonest gain. However, the man who shared the same pretense did not realize [Gregory's] words. He spoke louder and touched with his foot the friend lying down who did not speak nor feel the blow; instead, he just laid there in the same position which he had used as a ruse. This man was certainly dead, and had the same covering used for a truly dead person which they had used to dupe the great [Gregory]. Indeed the man of God who freely gave away his cloak was not deceived.....

After these events an outdoor meeting took place in that region, and everyone admired the way [Gregory] presented his teaching. A certain youth cried out to the assembly that they should not speak about his own teacher but tear apart his words because he was under the sway of some other [demonic] power. When the assembly adjourned, the youth was lead to the great man who was compelled to say that this lad had not yet been purified from demonic influence. Taking the linen vestment off his shoulders, he blew at the youth. Immediately the young man became afraid, cried out, fell down, cast himself about and suffered all sorts of demonic afflictions. Then the holy man extended his hand and once the demon ceased his violence, the boy returned to health and no longer maligned the holy man. The great healing miracle accomplished by this holy man should not be taken lightly; rather, his breath puts demons to flight and heals bodily afflictions through the power of his linen [i.e., priestly] vestment. But all the other great miracles he performed surpass written accounts and reports; however, I will recall one or two attributed to him.

In every place, city and neighboring area to which the divine preaching extended, it changed pagan altars to the devout faith of [Gregory's] teaching. It overturned sacred places and their idols and liberated people from the iniquity of images and the pollution of burnt sacrifices. Once defilement from blood upon altars and the

deseccration of animal sacrifices were washed away, all such places were transformed into fervent houses of prayer in Christ's name....

Having zealously directed the church's affairs... before his death, [Gregory] wished to see everyone converted from idolatry to the faith which saves. He had foreseen his own death and eagerly searched all the cities and surrounding areas wishing to learn if there were any persons who had been deprived of the faith. Since he knew that no more than seventy persons persisted in the ancient error, he angrily said to God that the number of those who had been saved was not complete. However, this was worthy of God's kindness because those who had remained idolaters later became Christians when another person was appointed to succeed his governing of the church. He prayed for those who now believed to grow in perfection and for the conversion of unbelievers that they might turn towards God, claiming that these blessings assuaged the threat of the grave....

Even until the present the great Gregory's other miracles are remembered, however, we have not added further words in a desire to spare unbelieving ears who may believe that a multitude of words defile the truth. (*abridged from lectio-divina.org*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians 2:16-20 EOB

Brethren, knowing that no one is justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, we believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law. But if, even though we desired to be justified in Christ, we were found to be sinners, does that mean that Christ is a servant of sin? Certainly not! Indeed, if I build up again those things which I [once] destroyed, I show that I am breaking the law. For I, through the law, died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. I now live this life in the flesh, but I live [it] by faith in the Son of God who loved me and who gave himself up for me.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 12:16-21 EOB

At that time, Jesus told them a parable, saying, "The ground of a certain rich man produced in abundance. He thought to himself, 'What will I do? I do not have room to store my crops!' Then the man said, 'This is what I will do: I will pull down my barns, build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. Then I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods stored up for many years. Take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry!"' But God said to him, 'You fool! Tonight your soul is demanded of you. The things which you have prepared, to whom will they belong?' This is how it is when someone amasses treasure for himself but is not rich toward God."

Homily on the Gospel for the Ninth Sunday of Luke

By St. Luke, Metropolitan of Simferopol

A small short parable of Christ, but what depth, bottomless depth of thought and truth in these short words! Our Lord Jesus Christ always spoke in short words. He taught us not to be verbose, and we are all prone to verbosity, this is because it is incomparably more difficult to speak briefly, vividly and strongly than verbosely.

In this short parable, everything that is necessary for us is said: it is said about the two paths that people follow, it is said about those whom Holy Scripture calls carnal people, who are the vast majority among people; it is also said about those who are incomparably fewer: it is said about spiritual people. Two paths of life are indicated: the path of serving one's flesh, one's lusts, and the path of serving the spirit.

Delve into this parable, amazing in its power, depth and brevity. What did this unfortunate rich man think when a huge amount of crops was yielded? He was thinking: "What should I do? I have nowhere to gather my fruits." And he said, "This is what I will do." O cursed one! O fool! You have nowhere to gather your crops? You don't know what to do? Don't you see how many hungry and poor people around you have nothing? You did not think about them, you thought only about yourself, you decided to do something wise in your eyes: to break down the barns and build new, much larger ones, to collect all your goods there. For what, why? To say to your soul absurd, insane words: "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."

O unfortunate one! He did not know anything better than to overeat and get drunk with wine, he did not know anything higher than joy, insignificant, empty, earthly joy. He directs all the powers of the soul to collecting more wealth, securing contentment, a luxurious, well-fed life. O unfortunate one!

He probably never heard other words of Christ, did not hear what the Lord said to all of us: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal " (Matt. 6:19-20). How often the treasures we have collected perish, how often they are destroyed unexpectedly, completely unexpectedly for us, and then the soul of a person, full of covetousness, plunges into despair, gloomy, black despair.

And once again the Lord spoke a great and deep word about the same: "Whoever is not with me is against me; and whoever does not gather with Me, he squanders " (Matt. 12:30). O Lord, You command us not to gather earthly goods, You command us to gather together with You and not squander. What does it mean to

be with you? What does it mean not to squander, but to gather with You? To be with You means to be close to You, to be among those whom You called Your friends, it means to think as You thought, to want what You wanted and taught us to want. You wanted us to gather, not squander. When do we squander? When we act like this mad rich man, who directed all the powers of his soul, all his life, towards this, and only towards gathering as many earthly blessings as possible. Why, why?!

So that on the same night his soul was taken away, and no one knows who got what he gathered. When a person gathers wealth, often in unclean ways, does he not squander it? He squanders what is dearest of all, what constitutes the only true treasure of the soul, he squanders all the good that was in his soul. For when a person devotes himself wholly to the care of wealth, about ample food, about living in luxury and bliss, then they fall asleep, and not only fall asleep, but all deep, spiritual, pure aspirations completely disappear in his soul, for they are supplanted by base aspirations.

If a person has collected wealth and says to his soul: "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry " - then what, isn't this a carnal person? Does he not serve his lusts, his passions, his belly? Does he rise much above all foolish creatures, above animals that know no other pleasures than the delight of the stomach?

Oh, how insignificant, oh how unfortunate is this man! And the more base passions grow in his soul, the desire to please his flesh, the more he squanders all the spiritual, all high aspirations that have ever been in him. For spiritual treasures are incompatible with what a person who serves entirely his flesh does: he squanders, he loses the good that he ever had, that the Lord Jesus Christ taught us to gather.

This is what the words of Christ mean about those who squander. And what is the meaning of the words about those who gather together with Him? Who gathers what needs to be gathered in order to be with Him? We must be laborers of the highest order: we must gather what is precious in the eyes of God, and not waste it.

It is necessary to gather the fruits of the fulfillment of the commandments of Christ; one must become poor in spirit, humble, weeping, one must acquire the great gift of tears, which is characteristic of so few; it is necessary to acquire meekness instead of pride, rudeness and self-exaltation; one must hunger and thirst with all one's heart for the truth of God; one must acquire the treasures of mercy, become pure in heart, be peacemakers; one must be persecuted for faith in Christ; if the Lord sends such blessing, it is necessary that the words of the last commandment of beatitude apply to us: "Blessed are you, when they reproach you

and deceive you, and they say all kinds of evil words against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."

Now, if a person directs all his aspirations, all the strength of his soul to purify his heart, to become in everything pleasing to God, then these great treasures of spiritual goodness will accumulate in his heart more and more, then he will gather with Christ. And when his death hour comes, then the angels of God will carry ahead of him on golden platters all the good that he has done: all deeds of love, deeds of mercy, all good words, words of truth, high and pure aspirations - they will carry, they will carry. And it will be good for such a person. He will not be in the position of the unfortunate rich man to whom God said: "Fool! this night your soul will be required of you. "

Oh, how we must remember these last words of Christ! After all, this applies to each of us. Don't you know how often people die quite unexpectedly? I have just received a notice of the death of my old comrade in medical work. He was healthy and cheerful, went to bed - and never woke up again.

When you enter a railroad car or on the deck of a steamship, are you sure that you will be alive, that you will not perish along the way, that what is not waiting for you, instead of further life, is the bottom of the sea or blood on the rails? And if so, shouldn't we remember, always remember the words of Christ: "Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning"?

When people go on a long journey or to hard work, they gird themselves tightly. When people walk in darkness, they take lamps with them and make sure that they are always burning. Thus, throughout your life, you must gird your spiritual loins tightly, you must always be ready, you must carry your lamps always burning, you must be careful not to be left without oil for them, like the five foolish virgins in the parable of the Gospel.

We must always be ready for death. It is necessary to go to bed and get up from sleep to think, will this not be my last night, my last day? Will I fall under a tram on the street today? Will I die in some other way? If we are so disposed, then these words of God will not apply to us: "Fool! this night your soul will be required of you." Let us gather, gather with Christ, gather only what is pleasing to Him! And most people gather what is not at all pleasing to Him.

I told you that the majority of people are carnal people, thirsting only for earthly comforts, earthly pleasures. There are few spiritual people, few who devote their whole lives to serving God, who spend their whole lives purifying their hearts, watching it, always striving to increase love in themselves, increase faith, and increase humility. But there are people of a much higher order than those who are like this unfortunate man about to build new granaries.

There are people who live by spiritual demands, often deep ones. They devote their entire lives to the study of human wisdom, they endlessly read books, read one after another and acquire great knowledge and sometimes great thought. What shall we say about them: shall we count them among those who gather together with Christ? No, we will not call them carnal, but we will not count them among those who gather with Christ, because one can gather human wisdom without Christ, without calling on His help, without even believing in Him. Such people live by their mind, their will, their understanding of life. They set themselves their life tasks, despising those set by the Lord Jesus Christ. They seek perfection in human wisdom. But are there sources of love in the books of human wisdom? They are not there; there are no sources of faith, humility, meekness, mercy. This means that the one who does this does not gather these spiritual treasures. And we, the humble sheep of Christ's flock, may we always remember this short parable of Christ about the foolish rich man who placed all his hope in himself and in his wealth.

Let us strive to be with Christ, for whoever is not with Him is against Him. Is it possible that such a terrible misfortune will happen to any of us, so that the angels of heaven call us enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ?! Let it not be! Let it not be! Let it not be! (*trans. John Sanidopoulos*)

Homilies on the Lord's Prayer, also Known as the "Our Father"

by Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and Agiou Vlasiou

(*continued from last week*) "But Deliver Us From The Evil One"

As we saw in the previous request of the Lord's Prayer, temptations are prompted and caused by the devil, who is characterized here by Christ as evil, and with this request Christ asks us to supplicate God our Father to redeem us from the evil one.

The devil is not an abstract force, he is not a personification of evil, as humanistic philosophers and ethicists teach, but he is a specific person who was once an angel and lost his communion with God, thereby becoming a dark spirit. Christ came into the world in order to loose the works of the devil (1 Jn. 3:8). The devil appeared in the desert to tempt Christ, he creates many obstacles, and he was seen by many saints who confronted him with the power of Christ.

In this request of the Lord's Prayer the devil is characterized as evil (*πονηρός* or *ponēros*). This word denotes many meanings. The original meaning of the word *πονηρός* is one who suffers in their body due to labors, because the adjective derives from the verb *πονέω* or *πονώ* (I hurt). Later the word *πονηρός* described someone who was miserable, wretched, evil, unworthy, dastardly and crafty or cunning. This is the meaning behind the characterization of the devil as *πονηρός*,

particularly with the definition as someone who is cunning and devises everything to make man distance himself from God. Christ also calls the devil *πονηρός* in the Parable of the Good Sower: "When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one (*πονηρός*) comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart" (Matt. 13:19). The Apostles also call the devil *πονηρός*: "I write unto you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one (*πονηρός*)" (1 Jn. 2:13), and "We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one (*πονηρός*) cannot harm them" (1 Jn. 5:18).

That the devil is called "evil one" shows that wickedness is not an integral part of our nature, but it is the result of our free will. Man was not fashioned by God to be evil, but evil came as a result of sin, through our disobedience to the good God and our obedience to the evil devil. Wickedness is a characteristic of the devil, because he has much malice and without us wronging him he fights us constantly. Because the devil is evil in his nature this is why he cannot repent and accept the love of God.

Christ, after this, with this characteristic of the devil as evil, teaches us that we should not resent people for what they have caused us, as it is not they who attack us, but the cause of the evil is the devil. It is he who motivates people to hurt us and that is why we should transfer our hatred towards the devil.

The wickedness of the devil is great. He is wily and resourceful to make us sin and distance us from God. Already what we know from the Old Testament is that the first-formed he threw into sin with a good thought, with the prospect of deification. That is, he pretended to be concerned for their deification and showed them another way, different from what was shown to them by God. The devil is a theologian, but he perverts things, so he is a bad theologian. Before getting them to commit the sin he indicates to man that God is a lover of man and will forgive the sin they commit, but after committing the sin he makes them think God is cruel and will not forgive them, and in this way he tries to throw them into hopelessness and despair. Also, he fights man through human passions, through thoughts, fantasies, desires and the events of life together with all the situations that come to man. In each situation he adjusts to the appropriate method to throw man into indifference and despair.

The greatest war of the devil against man, in which he shows his wickedness, is the war with thoughts. Precisely for this reason man learns through the Church the methods to overcome these thoughts, and this is what asceticism consists of. In the ascetic books of the Church, such as the *Philokalia*, the *Gerontikon* and the works of the Holy Fathers man can find the ways to fight against the devil. Of course, at

this point a significant role is played by an experienced spiritual father. Generally, thoughts are treated either with contempt, which comes with faith in God, or with pursuit, which comes through prayer, especially the prayer "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God have mercy on me, the sinner", and with the development of good thoughts for each issue and each person.

With this request of the Lord's Prayer Christ teaches us to ask God to redeem us from the evil one. And this is because the devil has great power and much experience, we could say he is a soldier of the ages, while man is weak and powerless. Hence, only God can help us in this war, since Christ conquered the devil and gave man the ability, with the power of Christ, to conquer him. The wickedness of the evil one is confronted with the wisdom of the wise and powerful God. *(to be continued next week) (Translated by John Sanidopoulos)*

A Word From the Holy Fathers

We worship the God of the Christians, whom we reckon to be one from the beginning, the maker and fashioner of the whole creation, visible and invisible; and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who had also been preached beforehand by the prophets as about to be present with the race of men, the herald of salvation and teacher of good disciples. And I, being a man, think that what I can say is insignificant in comparison with His boundless divinity, acknowledging a certain prophetic power, since it was prophesied concerning Him of whom now I say that He is the Son of God. For I know that of old the prophets foretold His appearance among men.... [We assemble] where each one chooses and can: for do you fancy that we all meet in the very same place? Not so; because the God of the Christians is not circumscribed by place; but being invisible, fills heaven and earth, and everywhere is worshiped and glorified by the faithful.... Through prayer we can be saved on account of our Lord Jesus Christ, even when we have been punished [through scourging and beheading], because this shall become to us salvation and confidence at the more fearful and universal judgment-seat of our Lord and Savior.

– from the *Martyrdom of Justin the Philosopher*

St. Hilda, Abbess of Whitby

St. Hilda (Hild) is one of the most venerated female saints in England and is also known as "The Abbess of the English People." She was born in 614 in the north of what is now England, where her parents lived in exile in the small British kingdom of Elmet in the north of Yorkshire.

When Hilda was still an infant, her mother once had a dream in which she found a most precious necklace under her clothes that filled the whole England with the glory of its brilliance. This dream was indeed fulfilled in her daughter Hilda, who

gained great holiness and became a true light and living example for many pious people. Hilda was baptized by the holy Bishop Paulinus of York when she was very young. Her family was related to the holy King Edwin of Northumbria, and she was most probably brought up at the royal court of Northumbria during his reign. Beyond a doubt, she spent the first half of her life among her close relatives.

At the age of 33 she became a nun and in 647 she entered the convent of Hartlepool (its name means “a stag by the sea”) on the River Tees near the city of Durham (now in County Durham). Her spiritual father for a long time was the holy Bishop Aidan of Lindisfarne. Hilda visited the kingdom of East Anglia and was about to leave for Gaul to live there in the convent of Chelles, but St. Aidan called his spiritual daughter back to Northumbria where he allotted her a small parcel of land on the north bank of the River Wear. Here the future saint, together with several other devout nuns, was taught the traditions of the Irish monasticism that had been brought to England by St. Aidan. Soon after that, Hilda was appointed the second abbess of the double monastery of Hartlepool after St. Hieu¹. The new abbess organized the life in this community after the pattern of Irish monasteries.

In 655, before the battle with the huge army of the pagan King Penda of Mercia, King Oswiu prayed fervently to God and vowed that if he were victorious he would bestow lands throughout the whole kingdom for the foundation of monasteries. A miracle happened; Penda was killed in battle and his army suffered a crushing defeat. Fulfilling his promise, Oswiu bestowed twelve estates for the establishment of monastic houses. Hilda obtained about 1200 acres in the town of Whitby (its original name was Streneshalc; the modern name “Whitby”, which means “white town”, came about in the twelfth century) in the east of the present-day county of North Yorkshire. Here the abbess in 657 founded a double monastery (with separate communities for monks and nuns, but all praying together in the common church) and began to care for it. The Lord granted a great future to this foundation.

These lands obtained by Hilda could not boast of picturesque scenery. On one side of the monastery there were the Yorkshire moors, while on the other side there was the endless ocean whose waves constantly crashed against the cliffs that protected the monastery. Thanks to St. Hilda, Whitby became famous as a model for monastic life, a great spiritual and intellectual centre, whose glory spread all over England and far beyond. Literature and the arts, spiritual and secular sciences, and various crafts developed in Whitby and, above all, a strict monastic life was practised. Under St. Hilda's patronage, St. Caedmon (†c. 680, commemorated February 11/24), an English poet of that time, who composed many fine poems on Christian themes, was tonsured in the monastery. With the active participation of St. Hilda, the vital Synod of Whitby was held in 663-664; here it was decided to

follow the Roman and Orthodox method for calculating the date of Easter and to accept the Roman form of monastic tonsure in the English Church.

St. Hilda was an able, active and extremely energetic abbess; the most important duties of monks and nuns who were in her care were to study the Holy Scriptures thoroughly and to do good works. St. Hilda herself collected rich libraries, taught priests and other clerics Latin and literature. The wisdom and prudence of this holy woman were held in such high esteem that even kings and bishops asked for her advice. Many Church figures and scholars, rulers and ordinary folk—everybody, greatly venerated St. Hilda and considered her their spiritual preceptor. Venerable Hilda took special care of the poor and the oppressed, for which she was revered and loved as “the mother of her country”.

St. Hilda's holy life, authority, popularity, and influence played a considerable role in the unification of the Church and the spread of Christianity in the second half of seventh-century England. The example of St. Hilda demonstrates that monasticism and the education of women in early England were at a very high level; indeed England produced not only numerous holy, wise and gifted abbots and spiritual fathers, but also numerous abbesses and spiritual mothers. Five monks who had been educated at Whitby later became bishops and four of them are venerated as saints, these are: St. John of Beverley, Wonderworker; St. Wilfrid the Younger, Bishop of York; St. Bosa, Bishop of York; and St. Hedda, Bishop of Winchester.

The fame of the monastery of Whitby, “a great monastery, famous for its strict rules and holy life of its monks and nuns, a smithy of saints and a school of future bishops”, as well as its Venerable Abbess Hilda spread all over England very quickly. St. Hilda was a great supporter of the activities of St. Theodore, the only Greek Archbishop of Canterbury, who was in fact to unite the whole English Church and English State. According to a legend, in the region of Whitby St. Hilda turned all the snakes into stones by her prayers—it is said that some of these stones can be seen to this day! The details of St. Hilda's life can be found in the book of Venerable Bede of Jarrow, *The History of the English Church and People*.

For the last six years of her life, St. Hilda suffered from a certain grave and chronic ailment. It is supposed that it may have been some form of fever. However, her physical suffering by no means affected the power of her spirit or shook her zeal as abbess and mentor. It is said that the saint wished to depart this life at the convent of Hackness (now the village with the same name in North Yorkshire), which she had founded not long before her death—but this was not to happen. Having taken Holy Communion for the last time, Hilda reposed peacefully on 17 November 680 at the age of sixty-six. The repose of this great woman-saint was accompanied by miracles. At the very moment when her holy soul left her body, bells miraculously

began to ring in the monastery of Hackness—just thirteen miles from Whitby—and the night before Hilda's repose a saintly nun called Begu saw angels carrying the saint's soul to the heavenly dwellings. A sister at the Whitby monastery had the same vision as well.

Many miracles occurred at St. Hilda's relics and pilgrims flocked to them over the centuries. Among the successors of St. Hilda as Abbess of Whitby were the talented and wise Abbesses St. Enfleda and St. Elfleda. Some 25 years after Hilda's repose the earliest life of St. Gregory the Great (known in the East as Gregory the Dialogist), the Pope of Rome and organizer of the mission to England, was composed in Whitby. It should also be mentioned that the Whitby Monastery was for a long time the main monastery in Northumbria and was closely connected with the royal family, and was the burial place of the royal family of Deira.

From the very end of the eighth century on, the pagan Danes began to raid the monasteries of England. In 867 the monastery at Whitby was destroyed, but St. Hilda's relics were rescued. It was recorded that part of her relics were translated to Glastonbury under Edmund I (939-946), and portions of her relics were also kept at St. Peter's monastery in Gloucester and at the monastery in Durham. In 1078 the Norman, Roman Catholic monastery of St. Peter and St. Hilda was built on the site of St. Hilda's original foundation. This existed until its dissolution during the Reformation in 1539. St Hilda was venerated throughout England, but especially in the north of the country. No fewer than fifteen ancient churches are dedicated to her.

Today, the small and pretty town of Whitby, standing on the North Sea coast, with the well-preserved Abbey ruins, the ancient church of St. Mary the Virgin, two churches in honour of St. Hilda (one Anglican and one Catholic) and other churches, is visited by pilgrims of various Christian denominations. Another attraction of Whitby is its famous 199 steps which are already over 600 years old. They lead from the "lower part of the town" to the east cliff, or "the upper part" where the abbey ruins are located. Most tourists use precisely these ancient steps to reach the Abbey.

St. Hilda is and always has been venerated as a patroness of education, learning, culture and poetry. Schools and colleges for girls in many countries are named in honour of Hilda. In England the College of St. Bede and St. Hilda in Durham and St. Hilda's College in Oxford are named after her. Churches dedicated to St. Hilda can be found in the USA and Canada. "Hilda" is still a baptismal name for girls in England and in Germany. According to tradition, the head of St. Hilda is kept at Durham Cathedral to this day. Holy Abbess Hilda, pray to God for us! (from orthochristian.com)

Also Commemorated Today

Venerable [Nikon](#), abbot of Radonezh, disciple of St. Sergius (1426).
Venerable [Lazarus](#) the iconographer of Constantinople (857).
Martyr [Gobron](#) (Michael) and 133 soldiers of Georgia (914) (Georgia).
Venerable [Longinus](#) of Egypt (4th c.).
St. Maximus (Maximian), patriarch of Constantinople (434).
St. [Maximos](#) III, patriarch of Constantinople (1482)
+-St. [Gennadius](#), [Patriarch](#) of Constantinople (471)
Venerable [Gennadius](#), steward of Vatopedi, Mt. Athos (14th c.).
St. Gregory, bishop of Tours
Venerable Aredius, abbot of Limoges
Venerable Vulfoaic, stylite of Trier (Gaul).
Venerable [Justin](#)
St. [John](#) the Branded (Dermokaitis) of Olympos in Bythnia (10th c)
++Venerable [Hilda](#), abbess of Whitby (680) (British).
Martyrs [Zachariah](#) the Cobbler and his wife, Mary (3rd c.) (Greek).
Hieromartyr Basil, bishop of Hamah (282).
Martyrs Gregory, Victor, and Geminus of Heracleon in Thrace (304).
150 philosophers converted by St. Catherine, and who suffered in Alexandria (305).
St. John the Cobbler of Olumba, Cairo, and Sinai (7th c.).
Saints Acisclus and Victoria of Cordoba (4th c.)
St. [Sebastian](#) (Dabovich) of Jackson, missionary to America (1940)

Social Team for November 24

Team 4 is up next week – Carol V., Joseph Frey. Thank you!

Commemoration of the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple

On Wednesday evening, November 20, St. Thomas will be celebrating one of the 12 great feasts of the Church, the commemoration on Nov. 21 of the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple. According to the tradition of the Church, the Theotokos was brought to the Temple at three years of age, where she was consecrated to God and spent her days until she was fourteen or fifteen years old; and then, as a mature maiden, by the common counsel of the priests (since her parents had reposed some three years before), she was betrothed to Joseph. If you can, please come celebrate with us. Observe at least a three hour fast if you wish to receive the Eucharist.

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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, Tina Crull, Marlene Doukas, Linda A. Georgiev, Sandi Hebel, Howl family, Helen P. Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Johnson family, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Helen, Brian, Luke and Mia Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, 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 & the Holy Land, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)