



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205
Church Tel. 205-930-9681 / 205-907-9447

Visit stsymeon.com

March 12, 2017

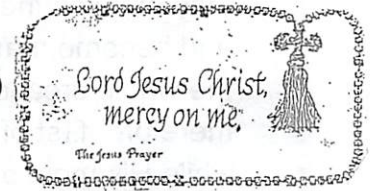
St. Gregory Palamas (1359)

St. Symeon the New Theologian (1022)

St. Gregory Dialogos, Pope of Rome (604)

Third Week of Great Lent

Let us honor in hymns
the divine harp of the Spirit,
the trumpet that plainly
proclaimed the mysteries
of the Lord,
the Bishop of Thessalonica,
the tongue that spoke of God.



- ✠ Wed. Mar. 15 ~ 6:30pm – Presanctified Liturgy
- ✠ Friday, Mar. 17 ~ 6:30pm - Presanctified Liturgy (*Potluck Lenten Supper*)
- *Many Years! Newly Illumined Child Emilia Akhrymuk!*



Baptism next Saturday, March 18, 3:00pm – Andrew McIntosh, John Chambers, Aquilina Miller

St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica



This Sunday was originally dedicated to St Polycarp of Smyrna (February 23). After his glorification in 1368, a second commemoration of St Gregory Palamas (November 14) was appointed for the Second Sunday of Great Lent as a second “Triumph of Orthodoxy.”

Saint Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica, was born in the year 1296 in Constantinople. St Gregory’s father became a prominent dignitary at the court of Andronicus II Paleologos (1282-1328), but he soon died, and Andronicus himself took part in the raising and education of the fatherless boy. Endowed with fine abilities and great diligence, Gregory mastered all the subjects which then comprised the full course of medieval higher education. The emperor hoped that the youth would devote himself to government work. But Gregory, barely twenty years old, withdrew to

Mount Athos in the year 1316 (other sources say 1318) and became a novice in the Vatopedi monastery under the guidance of the monastic Elder St Nicodemus of Vatopedi (July 11). There he was tonsured and began on the path of asceticism. A year later, the holy Evangelist John the Theologian appeared to him in a vision and promised him his spiritual protection. Gregory’s mother and sisters also became monastics.

After the demise of the Elder Nicodemus, St Gregory spent eight years of spiritual struggle under the guidance of the Elder Nicephorus, and after the latter’s death, Gregory transferred to the Lavra of St Athanasius (July 5). Here he served in the trapeza, and then became a church singer. But after three years, he resettled in the small skete of Glossia, striving for a greater degree of spiritual perfection. The head of this monastery began to teach the young man the method of unceasing prayer and mental activity, which had been cultivated by monastics, beginning with the great desert ascetics of the fourth century: Evagrius Pontikos and St Macarius of Egypt (January 19).

{ Go to p. 3 }

Our Holy Father Symeon the New Theologian

Adam and the First-Created World, Homily 45

Inasmuch as the God of everything existing, our Lord Jesus Christ, came down to earth and became man in order to re-create and renew man and to bring down blessing upon the whole creation which had been subjected to the curse for the sake of man, therefore, first of all He brought to life the soul which He had received, and deified it, while His most pure and divine body, although He made it divine, nevertheless He bore corruptible and crudely material. For the body which eats food, drinks, is labored, sheds sweat, is bound, is beaten, is nailed to the Cross, is evidently corruptible and material, because everything that has been mentioned is the property of a corruptible body. Therefore also it died, and was placed in the grave as dead; and after the Lord's third-day Resurrection, His body also was resurrected incorruptible and divine. Therefore, when He came out of the tomb He did not violate the seals which were on the tomb, and later He came in and went out through closed doors.

But why, together with His soul, did He not immediately make His body incorruptible and spiritual? Because Adam, after transgressing the commandment of God, in soul died immediately, but in body he died only after so many years. Corresponding with this, the Lord and Savior also first resurrected, brought to life, and deified the soul which immediately after the transgression of the commandment had borne the penance of death; and afterwards God was pleased to arrange that His body also might receive the incorruptibility of resurrection, just as in Adam after many years it had received the penance of death. But Christ did not do only this; He also descended even to hell, delivered from eternal bonds and brought to life the souls of the Saints who were confined there; but their bodies He did not resurrect then, but left them in the tombs until the general Resurrection of all.

And this mystery, made evident for the whole world in the way we have related, which occurred at the time of the economy of the incarnation of Christ, afterwards also was accomplished and is accomplished in every Christian in the same way. For when we receive the grace of Jesus Christ our God, we become participants of His Divinity (II Peter 1:4), and when we eat His most pure Body, that is, when we receive communion of the Holy Mysteries, we are of one body with Him, and in truth akin to Him, as also the divine Paul says, For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones (Eph.5:30), and as again the Evangelist John says, that of His fullness we have all received (John 1:16). Thus by grace we become like unto Him, our man-loving God and Lord, and in soul are renewed from being old, and brought to life from being dead as we were.

† † †

Later on, in the eleventh century **St Symeon the New Theologian (March 12)** provided detailed instruction in mental activity for those praying in an outward manner, and the ascetics of Athos put it into practice. The experienced use of mental prayer (or prayer of the heart), requiring solitude and quiet, is called "Hesychasm" (from the Greek "hesychia" meaning calm, silence), and those practicing it were called "hesychasts."

During his stay at Glossia the future hierarch Gregory became fully imbued with the spirit of hesychasm and adopted it as an essential part of his life. In the year 1326, because of the threat of Turkish invasions, he and the brethren retreated to Thessalonica, where he was then ordained to the holy priesthood.

St Gregory combined his priestly duties with the life of a hermit. Five days of the week he spent in silence and prayer, and only on Saturday and Sunday did he come out to his people. He celebrated divine services and preached sermons. For those present in church, his teaching often evoked both tenderness and tears. Sometimes he visited theological gatherings of the city's educated youth, headed by the future patriarch, Isidore. After he returned from a visit to Constantinople, he found a place suitable for solitary life near Thessalonica the region of Bereia. Soon he gathered here a small community of solitary monks and guided it for five years.

In 1331 the Saint withdrew to Mt. Athos and lived in solitude at the skete of St Sava, near the Lavra of St Athanasius. In 1333 he was appointed Igumen of the Esphigmenou monastery in the northern part of the Holy Mountain. In 1336 the Saint returned to the skete of St Sava, where he devoted himself to theological works, continuing with this until the end of his life.

In the 1330s events took place in the life of the Eastern Church which put St Gregory among the most significant universal apologists of Orthodoxy, and brought him great renown as a teacher of hesychasm.

About the year 1330 the learned monk Barlaam had arrived in Constantinople from Calabria, in Italy. He was the author of treatises on logic and astronomy, a skilled and sharp-witted orator, and he received a university chair in the capital city and began to expound on the works of St Dionysius the Areopagite (October 3), whose "apophatic" ("negative", in contrast to "kataphatic" or "positive") theology was acclaimed in equal measure in both the Eastern and the Western Churches. Soon Barlaam journeyed to Mt. Athos, where he became acquainted with the spiritual life of the hesychasts. Saying that it was impossible to know the essence of God, he declared mental prayer a heretical error. Journeying from Mount Athos to Thessalonica, and from there to Constantinople, and later again to Thessalonica, Barlaam entered into disputes with the monks and attempted to demonstrate the created, material nature of the light of Tabor (i.e. at the Transfiguration). He ridiculed the teachings of the monks about the methods of prayer and about the uncreated light seen by the hesychasts.

St Gregory, at the request of the Athonite monks, replied with verbal admonitions at first. But seeing the futility of such efforts, he put his theological arguments in writing. Thus appeared the "Triads in Defense of the Holy Hesychasts" (1338). Towards the year 1340 the Athonite ascetics, with the assistance of the Saint, compiled a general response to the attacks of Barlaam, the so-called "Hagiorite Tome." At the Constantinople Council of 1341 in the church of Hagia Sophia St Gregory Palamas debated with Barlaam, focusing upon the nature of the light of Mount Tabor. On May 27, 1341 the Council accepted the position of St Gregory Palamas, that God, unapproachable in His Essence, reveals Himself through His energies, which are directed towards the world and are able to be perceived, like the light of Tabor, but which are neither material nor created. The teachings of Barlaam were condemned as heresy, and he himself was anathemized and fled to Calabria. But the dispute between the Palamites and the Barlaamites was far from over. To these latter belonged Barlaam's disciple, the Bulgarian monk Akyndinos, and also Patriarch John XIV Kalekos

(1341-1347); the emperor Andronicus III Paleologos (1328-1341) was also inclined toward their opinion. Akyndinos, whose name means "one who inflicts no harm," actually caused great harm by his heretical teaching. Akyndinos wrote a series of tracts in which he declared St Gregory and the Athonite monks guilty of causing church disorders. The Saint, in turn, wrote a detailed refutation of Akyndinos' errors. The patriarch supported Akyndinos and called St Gregory the cause of all disorders and disturbances in the Church (1344) and had him locked up in prison for four years. In 1347, when John the XIV was replaced on the patriarchal throne by Isidore (1347-1349), St Gregory Palamas was set free and was made Archbishop of Thessalonica.

In 1351 the Council of Blachernae solemnly upheld the Orthodoxy of his teachings. But the people of Thessalonica did not immediately accept St Gregory, and he was compelled to live in various places. On one of his travels to Constantinople the Byzantine ship fell into the hands of the Turks. Even in captivity, St Gregory preached to Christian prisoners and even to his Moslem captors. The Hagarenes were astonished by the wisdom of his words. Some of the Moslems were unable to endure this, so they beat him and would have killed him if they had not expected to obtain a large ransom for him. A year later, St Gregory was ransomed and returned to Thessalonica.

St Gregory performed many miracles in the three years before his death, healing those afflicted with illness. On the eve of his repose, St John Chrysostom appeared to him in a vision. With the words "To the heights! To the heights!" St Gregory Palamas fell asleep in the Lord on November 14, 1359. In 1368 he was canonized at a Constantinople Council under Patriarch Philotheus (1354-1355, 1364-1376), who compiled the Life and Services to the Saint.

-
- † Man is tested in an alien world, and if he passes the test, he enters into his own world; if, however, he fails the test, who will give him his world? Man's real world, his homeland, is the heavenly sublime, divine world. The earthly world, however, is the world of coarseness and deterioration; an alien world for man. But man is sent into this foreign world to complete a test for that, his true world; for his heavenly homeland. **St. Nikolai of Serbia**

Gossip ~ NOBODY'S FRIEND

My name is Gossip. I have no respect for justice.

I maim without killing. I break hearts and ruin lives.

I am cunning and malicious and gather strength with age.

The more I am quoted, the more I am believed.

My victims are helpless. They cannot protect themselves against me because I have no name and no face.

To track me down is impossible. The harder you try, the more elusive I become.

I am nobody's friend.

Once I tarnish a reputation, it is never the same.

I topple governments and wreck marriages.

I ruin careers and cause sleepless nights, heartaches and indigestion.

I make innocent people cry in their pillows.

Even my name hisses. I am called Gossip. I make headlines and headaches.

Before you repeat a story, ask yourself:

Is it true? Is it harmless? Is it necessary? If it isn't, don't repeat it ...

The Theology of the Uncreated Light

Elder Sophrony of Essex (+1991), *On the Union of the Churches*

We mentioned before that the Fathers who wrote the "Synodikon of Orthodoxy" condemned philosophy and its method, as well as those who follow the ancient philosophies and accept their doctrines. But correspondingly they acclaim the holy Fathers, who accepted the truth of the Church and expressed it in their time through their teaching and confession in the Council. I shall not refer to all these topics, but I especially want to emphasize what relates to the theology of the uncreated Light and the distinction between God's essence and energy, because this was one of the most central and basic points in the Councils of the fourteenth century (1341, 1347, 1351).

Barlaam, a real scholastic theologian of that time, who made use of philosophy at the expense of the vision of God and gave central place to his reasoning and conjecture, as is seen from the tome of the year 1341, maintained that philosophy is superior to theology and to the vision of God. He said that the Light on Mt. Tabor was not unapproachable, nor was it the true light of divinity, nor more holy and divine than the angels, "but even inferior to and lower than this intellect of ours".

He said that since that Light falls through the air and strikes the sensory power etc., all the concepts and understandings "are more holy than that light". That light comes and goes, because it is imagined, divided and finite. According to Barlaam, "we rise from such a light (rational) to concepts and visions, which are incomparably better than that light".

Therefore he said that anyone who maintains that the Light of the Transfiguration is beyond conceiving and is true and unapproachable "is completely mistaken... irreverent, and so is introducing very pernicious doctrines into the Church".

Barlaam said these things because he had been saturated with the scholastic theology of the West, since he certainly did not even know the theology of the Orthodox Church. At the same time Barlaam was fighting against the distinction between essence and energy in God, and especially against the teaching of the holy Fathers that God's energy is uncreated.

The orthodox teaching on this subject is set out in the "Synodikon of Orthodoxy". It is said that God has essence and energy and that this distinction does not destroy the divine simplicity. We confess and believe that "uncreated and natural grace and illumination and energy always proceed inseparably from this divine essence".

And since, according to the saints, "created energy means created essence as well, but uncreated energy characterizes uncreated essence", therefore God's energy is uncreated. Indeed the name of divinity is placed not only upon the divine essence, but "also on the divine energy no less".

This means that in the teaching of the holy Fathers, "this (the essence) is completely incapable of being shared, but divine grace and energy can be shared".

Likewise in the "Synodikon of Orthodoxy" the truth is presented that the Light of the Transfiguration is not a phantom and a creation, it is not something which appears and then disappears, but it is uncreated and a natural grace and illumination and energy. That is to say, it is the natural glory of divinity. And this Light, which is God's uncreated energy and comes forth indivisibly from the divine essence, appears "through God's benevolence towards those who have purified their nous".

So this uncreated light is "light unapproachable. . . and boundless light and incomprehensible nature of divine radiance, and ineffable glory, and Divinity, supremely perfect glory and beyond perfection, and timeless glory of the Son, and kingdom of God, and true beauty, and lovely in its divine and blessed nature, and natural glory of God, the Father and Spirit flashing forth in the Only-begotten Son, and divinity..."

The holy Fathers are acclaimed who confess "the divine energy proceeding from the divine essence, proceeding undividedly, and because of this proceeding, the ineffable distinction of the things present, but because of the 'undividedly', the marvelous union of the things shown".

And finally the heretics who accept such erroneous views, opposed to the teaching of the holy and God-bearing Fathers, are anathematized. By contrast, the holy Fathers who express unerringly the teaching of the Catholic Orthodox Church are acclaimed and pronounced blessed. **Specifically St. Gregory Palamas, Bishop of Thessaloniki, is praised. He is praised for two reasons. One because he successfully confronted and defeated the heretics, who were teaching erroneous ideas about these crucial theological subjects and were attempting to introduce into the Church of Christ "the Platonic ideas and those Greek myths"**.

The other reason is because he set forth the Orthodox teaching on these subjects, using all the holy Fathers from Athanasius the Great to his time as interpreters. So here St. Gregory Palamas is presented as a successor to the holy Fathers and champion of the teaching of the Orthodox Church, and for this reason his name is given special and particular mention in the "Synodikon".

The tome of the Synod of 1347 A. D. writes something very important about the value and authority of St. Gregory Palamas and all those monks who follow his teaching. It characterizes him as most worthy. And since it anathematizes all who do not accept his teaching and oppose him, it says "at the same time that if anyone else is ever caught either thinking or speaking or writing against the authority of the said very worthy priestmonk Gregory Palamas and the monks with him, and still more against the holy theologians and this Church, we cast our vote against him, whether he be a priest or a layman". That is to say, whoever speaks against St. Gregory Palamas and his teaching receives excommunication by the Synod. And indeed it is written that **we hold St. Gregory Palamas and the monks who agree with him to be not only superior to those against him, or still more, to those sophistries against the Church of God. . . , but we state that they are protectors of the Church and contenders for the right faith and procurers and helpers of it"**.

It is necessary for a Christian to fast, in order to clear his mind, to rouse and develop his feelings, and to stimulate his will to useful activity. These three human capabilities we darken and stifle above all by 'surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life' (Luke 21:34). ~ **St. John of Kronstadt**

On the Jesus Prayer – St. Barsanouphios of Optina, (+1911) *Talks with Spiritual Children*

During the time of well-known Optina elder Fr. Leonid, one monk, who had been doing the Jesus Prayer for twenty-two years, fell into despondency because he didn't see any favorable results of his labor. He went to the elder and expressed his sorrow: "Father, I've been doing the Jesus Prayer for twenty-two years, and I don't see any profit.

"What kind of profit do you want to see?" asked the elder.

"What do you mean, Father?" continued the monk. "I've read that many who do this prayer acquire spiritual purity, have wondrous visions, and attain total dispassion. But I, the wretch, sincerely admit that I'm the greatest sinner, and I see all my filth. Pondering this, walking on the road from the monastery to the skete, I often tremble, that the earth might open and swallow up such an impious man as I am."

"Have you ever seen how a mother holds her children by the hand?"

"Of course I've seen it, Father, but what does that have to do with me?"

"Here's what. If a child is attracted to fire, and even cries for it to be given to him, will a mother allow her child to be burnt because of his tears? Of course not. She'll carry him away from the fire. Or let's say that a woman goes out in the evening with her children for a breath of fresh air, and one of the little ones is attracted to the moon and cries for her to give it to him to play with. What does his mother do to console him? After all, it's impossible to give him the moon. She should take him back to their cabin, put him in his cradle, and rock him: 'Hush, hush, be quiet!' This is what the Lord does, my child. He's good and merciful and could, of course, give a man whatever gifts he wants-but if He doesn't do it, then it's for his benefit. A feeling of penitence is always beneficial, while great gifts in the hands of an inexperienced man not only might bring him harm, but might destroy him once and for all. The man might become proud, and pride is worse than any vice: God resisteth the proud (I Pet. 5:5). Every gift needs to be gained through suffering, then you can have the use of it. Of course, if a king gives you a gift, you can't throw it back in his face. You have to accept it with gratitude, but try to use it advantageously. The Lord sometimes gives special spiritual gifts even to those with little experience, because of their persistent requests, but He says, 'Be circumspect!' There have been cases when great ascetics, having received special gifts, fell into the depths of destruction because of pride and judging others who didn't have such gifts.'

"All the same, it would be nice to have a little present from God. Then it would be more peaceful and joyful to labor."

"And do you think that it's not God's mercy to you that you truly acknowledge yourself to be a sinner and that you labor, doing the Jesus Prayer? Continue doing the same thing, and if it's pleasing to God, He will give you prayer of the heart, too:'

A few days after this conversation, by the prayers of Fr. Leonid, a miracle was performed. One Sunday, when that monk was at his obedience-giving food to the brothers-he set the bowl on the table and said, as usual, "Brethren, accept this obedience from me, the lowly one." All at once he felt something special in his heart, as though a grace-filled flame had suddenly set it on fire. From his ecstasy and trepidation the monk's face changed and he reeled. The brothers, noticing this, raced over to him.

"What's happened to you, brother?" they asked him in astonishment.

"It's nothing - my head's started hurting."

"Have the fumes from your stove gotten to you?"

"Yes, probably. For the Lord's sake, help me get to my cell!"

They took him. He lay on his bed and totally forgot about food - he forgot about everything in the world. He only felt that his heart was aflame with love for God and his neighbor. What a blessed state! From that time on, his prayer was no longer vocal, as before, but prayer of the heart - that is, prayer that never ceases, about which the Holy Scripture says, I sleep, but my heart is awake (Song of Songs 5:2).

However, the Lord doesn't always send prayer of the heart. Some people pray with oral prayer their whole lives and die with it, without ever feeling the delights of prayer of the heart. But such people ought not to despond. Spiritual delights will begin for them in the next life and will never end. They'll keep increasing with each moment, like the delights of the Seraphim, who with each moment attain greater and greater perfections of God, and in trepidation cry out, "Holy holy, holy!" † † †

Then the brother said to him, "Look, Abba, I meditate, and there is no compunction in my heart because I do not understand the meaning of the words." The other said to him, "Be content to meditate. Indeed, I have learned that Abba Poemen and many other Fathers uttered the following saying, 'The magician does not understand the meaning of the words which he pronounces, but the wild animal who hears it understands, submits, and bows to it. So it is with us also; even if we do not understand the meaning of the words (of the Jesus Prayer) we are saying, when the demons hear them, they take fright and go away.'"

"The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers," by Benedicta Ward

The Jesus Prayer is a work common to the angels and to men. With this prayer, men quickly approach the life of the Angels.

The Prayer is the source of all good deeds and virtues, and drives far away from man the dark passions. In a short time, it makes man worthy to obtain the grace of the Holy Spirit. Obtain it, and before you die, you will obtain an angelic soul. The Prayer is divine rejoicing.

There is no other spiritual weapon that can so efficiently hinder the demons. It burns them like fire burns the brush.

- St. Paisios Velichkovsky (18th C)

To the question that should we argue with thoughts that perturb us, I will answer: Don't argue, because the enemies precisely want this to happen and seeing our altercation, will not cease their attack. It is better if you prayed to the Lord, opening your feebleness before Him and He will not only drive out these thoughts but will eradicate them completely.

Sts. Barsanuphius and John of Gaza (6th C)

As the flesh is nourished by food, so is a human being supported by prayers. ~ St. Augustine of Hippo