

St Gregory Palamas /

The Second Sunday of Great Lent

18 / 31 March

The Second Sunday of Great Lent. St. Gregory Palamas, Troparion, Tone VIII— Light of Orthodoxy, pillar and doctor of the Church, adornment of monks, invincible champion of theologians, O Gregory the wonderworker, praise of Thessalonica, preacher of grace, ever pray that our souls may be saved.

Kontakion, Tone II — Organ of wisdom, holy and divine, bright clarion of theology, we praise thee in harmony, O divine speaker Gregory: But as a mind standing before the First Mind, direct our mind to Him, father, that we may cry: Rejoice, preacher of grace!

Kontakion of the Sunday, Tone IV — Now is the time for action, judgement is at our doors. So let us rise and fast, and let us offer tears of compunction with almsgiving, crying: We have sinned more than the sand of the sea. But forgive us all, O Creator, that we may receive incorruptible crowns.

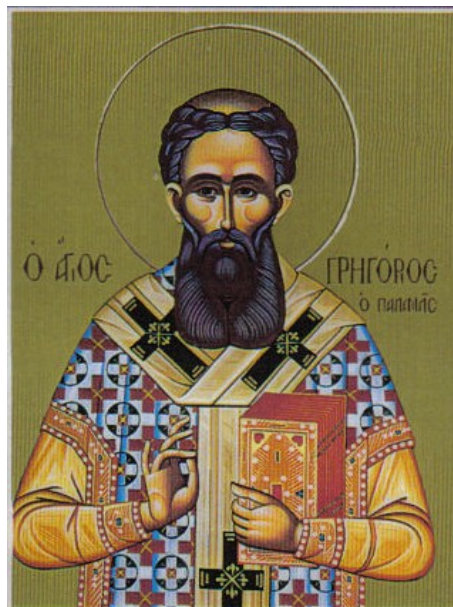
Troparion of the Sunday, Tone II — When Thou didst descend to death, O Life immortal, / Thou didst slay hell with the splendor of Thy Godhead! / And when from the depths Thou didst raise the dead, / all the powers of heaven cried out: / O Giver of life, Christ our God, glory to Thee!

Hymn to the Theotokos, Tone II — All beyond thought, all most glorious, / are your mysteries, O Theotokos. / Sealed in purity, preserved in virginity, / you were revealed to be the true Mother who gave birth to the true God. / Entreat Him to save our souls.

Kontakion of the Sunday, Tone II — Hell became afraid, O Almighty Savior, / seeing the miracle of Thy Resurrection from the tomb! / The dead arose! Creation, with Adam, beheld this and rejoiced with Thee! / And the world, O my Savior, praises Thee forever.

Kontakion, Tone I — With thy tongue and through divine inspirations/ didst thou enlighten thy people to honor the One Trinity/ indivisible in essence and divided as to Persons./ Wherefore, rejoicing, we celebrate thine all-holy memory, // setting thee before God as an intercessor.

St. Gregory Palamas — Gregory's father was an eminent official at the court of the Emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus. The gifted Gregory, completing his secular studies, did not want to go into imperial service at court, but withdrew to the Holy Mountain and became a monk, living in asceticism at Vatopedi and the Great Lavra. He waged war against the heretic Barlaam, and finally overcame him. He was consecrated Metropolitan of Salonica in 1347, being glorified both as an ascetic and a theologian, both as a hierarch and a wonderworker.. He was the defender of the Hesychasts. He upheld the doctrine that the human body played an important part in prayer, and he argued that the Hesychasts did indeed experience the Divine and Uncreated Light of Tabor. To explain how this was possible, St. Gregory developed the distinction between the essence and the energies of God. He set Hesychasm on a firm dogmatic basis, by integrating it into Orthodox theology, and by showing how the Hesychast vision of Divine Light in no way undermined the doctrine that God can not be comprehended. His teachings were confirmed by the local councils held in Constantinople in 1341 and 1351. St. Gregory began by reaffirming the Biblical doctrine of man and of the Incarnation; i.e. the whole man, united in body and soul, was created in the image of God, and Christ, by taking a human body at the Incarnation, has 'made the flesh an inexhaustible source of sanctification'. The Hesychasts, so he argued, in placing emphasis on the body's part in prayer, are not guilty of a gross materialism but are simply remaining faithful to the Biblical doctrine of man as a unity. Christ took human flesh and saved the whole man; therefore it is the whole man that prays to God. How is it possible for man to know God and, at the same time, affirm that God is by nature unknowable? St. Gregory answered this question by quoting St. Basil the Great who said "We know our God from His energies, but we do not claim that we can draw near to His essence. For His energies come down to us, but His essence remains unapproachable". St. Gregory added "God is not a nature, for He is above all beings.... No single thing of all that is created has or ever will have even the slightest communion with the supreme nature, or nearness to it". Even though God's essence may be remote from us, He has revealed Himself through His energies (or grace). These energies do not exist apart from God, but are God Himself in His action and revelation to the world. It is through these



energies that God enters into a direct and immediate relationship with us. When we say that the saints are 'deified' by the grace of God, we mean that they have a direct experience of God Himself through his energies (or grace), not in His essence. The vision of Light that Hesychasts receive is the same Light that surrounded Christ on Mount Tabor. It is a true vision of God in His divine energies.

Matins Gospel X

Epistle: St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews 1:10 - 2:3.

10 And: "You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands; 11 They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; 12 Like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail." 13 But to which of the angels has He ever said: "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool?" 14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?

HEBREWS 2: 1 Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him.

HOW SHALL WE ESCAPE IF WE NEGLECT SO GREAT A SALVATION

By the grace of Christ I will instruct you. He who always keeps his own sins in mind and constantly looks forward to the coming Judgment, and fervently repents and weeps, will overcome them all at the same time. As he is lifted up by repentance he "is more than a conqueror" (Rom. 8:37). Not a single passion of those that I have mentioned will be able to reach his soul and touch it in its flight. But unless our mind is borne aloft by penitence and tears and by the humility of spirit that results from them to the height of mastery of the passions, we shall not have the strength to become free from all those we have mentioned. At one time we shall be stung by one passion, at another time by another one, and thus we shall not cease from being devoured by them as if by wild beasts. After death, since we shall have lost the kingdom of heaven because of them, we shall in turn be eternally punished by such [passions] as these.

For this reason, my spiritual fathers and children, I urge you all, and I shall never cease to urge your charity, that no one of you neglect his own salvation (Heb. 2:3), but that you in every way endeavor to be lifted up even but a little from the earth Should this wonderful thing happen, which would astound you, that you should float up from the earth into the air (1 Thess. 4:17), you would not at all want to descend to the earth and stay there! But by "earth" I mean the fleshly mind, by "air" the spiritual. Once the mind is set free from evil thoughts and through it we contemplate the freedom that Christ our God has bestowed on us (Gal. 5:1), we shall never again be willing to descend to our former slavery to sin and the fleshly mind. In accordance with the voice of Christ we shall not cease to watch and pray (Mt. 26:41; Mk. 14:38) until we depart for the bliss that lies beyond and obtain the promised blessings, by the grace and loving-kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom all glory is due forever and ever. Amen.

St. Symeon the New Theologian. Discourse 5.25.

For the Hierarch: St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews 7:26 - 8:2

The Gospel According To St. Mark 2: 1-12

1 At that time Jesus entered into Capernaum after some days, and it was noised that he was in the house. 2 And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door; and he preached the word unto them. 3 And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. 4 And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. 6 But there were certain of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 7 Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? 8 And immediately, when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? 9 Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed and walk? 10 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) 11 I say unto thee,

Arise, take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. 12 And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

SON, THY SINS BE FORGIVEN THEE.

There are indeed some who say that this man was healed merely because they who brought him believed; but this is not the fact. For when He saw their faith refers not merely to those who brought the man but also to the man who was brought. Why so? Is not one man healed, you say, because another has believed? For my part I do not think so unless owing to immaturity of age or excessive infirmity he is in some way incapable of believing. How then was it you say that in the case of the woman of Canaan the mother believed but the daughter was cured? And how was it that the servant of the centurion who believed rose from the bed of sickness and was preserved. Because the sick persons themselves were not able to believe. Hear then what the woman of Canaan says: My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil Matthew 15:22 and sometimes she falls into the water and sometimes into the fire: now how could she believe whose mind was darkened and possessed by a devil, and was never able to control herself, not in her sound senses? As then in the case of the woman of Canaan so also in the case of the centurion; his servant lay ill in the house, not knowing Christ, himself, nor who He was. How then was he to believe in one who was unknown to him, and of whom he had never yet obtained any experience? But in the case before us we cannot say this: for the paralytic believed.

Whence is this manifest? From the very manner of his approach to Christ. For do not attend simply to the statement that they let the man down through the roof: but consider how great a matter it is for a sick man to have the fortitude to undergo this. For you are surely aware that invalids are so faint-hearted and difficult to please as often to decline the treatment administered to them on their sick bed, and to prefer bearing the pain which arises from their maladies to undergoing the annoyance caused by the remedies. But this man had the fortitude to go outside the house, and to be carried into the midst of the market place, and to exhibit himself in the presence of a crowd. And it is the habit of sick folk to die under their disorder rather than disclose their personal calamities. This sick man however did not act thus, but when he saw that the place of assembly was filled, the approaches blocked, the haven of refuge obstructed, he submitted to be let down through the roof. So ready in contrivance is desire, so rich in resource is love. For he also that seeks finds, and to him that knocks it shall be opened (Luke 11:10).

The man did not say to his friends What is the meaning of this? Why make this ado? Why push on? Let us wait until the house is cleared and the assembly is dissolved: the crowds will withdraw, we shall then be able to approach him privately and confer about these matters. Why should you expose my misfortunes in the midst of all the spectators, and let me down from the roof-top, and behave in an unseemly manner? That man said none of these things either to himself or to his bearers, but regarded it as an honour to have so many persons made witnesses of his cure. And not from this circumstance only was it possible to discern his faith but also from the actual words of Christ.

For after he had been let down and presented Christ said to him, Son! Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you. And when he heard these words he was not indignant, he did not complain, he did not say to the physician What mean you by this? I came to be healed of one thing and you heal another. This is an excuse and a pretence and a screen of incompetence. Do you forgive sins which are invisible? He neither spoke nor thought any of these things, but waited, allowing the physician to adopt the method of healing which He desired. For this reason also Christ did not go to him, but waited for him to come, that He might exhibit his faith to all. For could He not have made the entrance easy? But He did none of these things; in order that He might exhibit the man's zeal and fervent faith to all. For as He went to the man who had been suffering thirty and eight years because he had no one to aid him, so did He wait for this man to come to him because he had many friends that He might make his faith manifest by the man being brought to Him, and inform us of the other man's loneliness by going to him, and disclose the earnestness of the one and the patience of the other to all and especially to those who were present.

For some envious and misanthropical Jews were accustomed to grudge the benefits done to their neighbours and to find fault with His miracles, sometimes on account of the special season, saying that He healed on the sabbath day; sometimes on account of the life of those to whom the benefit was done, saying if this man were a prophet He would have known who the woman was who touched Him: (Luke 7:39) not knowing that it is the special mark of a physician to associate with the infirm and to be constantly seen by the side of the sick, not to avoid them, or hurry from their presence — which in fact was what He expressly said to those murmurers; They that are whole have no need of a physician but they that are sick (Matthew 9:12).

Therefore in order to prevent their making the same accusations again He proves first of all that they who come to Him are deserving of a cure on account of the faith which they exhibit. For this reason He exhibited the loneliness of one man, and the fervent faith and zeal of the other: for this reason He

healed the one on the Sabbath, the other not on the Sabbath: in order that when you see them accusing and rebuking Christ on another day you may understand that they accused him on the former occasion also not because of their respect for the law, but because they could not contain their own malice.

But why did He not first address Himself to the cure of the paralytic, but said, Son! Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you? He did this very wisely. For it is a habit with physicians to destroy the originating cause of the malady before they remove the malady itself. Often for example when the eyes are distressed by some evil humour and corrupt discharge, the physician, abandoning any treatment of the disordered vision, turns his attention to the head, where the root and origin of the infirmity is: even so did Christ act: He represses first of all the source of the evil. For the source and root and mother of all evil is the nature of sin. This it is which enervates our bodies: this it is which brings on disease: therefore also on this occasion He said, Son! Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you. And on the other He said, Behold! You are made whole, sin no more lest some worse thing happen unto you, intimating to both that these maladies were the offspring of sin.

St. John Chrysostom. Homily on the Paralytic Let Down Through the Roof.

For the Hierarchy: St. John 10: 9-16

Saints of the Week

18 / 31 March — St. Cyril, Archbishop of Jerusalem - Born in Jerusalem in the time of Constantine the Great, he died in 386, in the time of Theodosius the Great. He was ordained priest in 346, and in 350 succeeded the blessed Patriarch Maximus on the patriarchal throne of Jerusalem. He was three times deposed from his throne and sent into exile; until in the end, in the time of Theodosius, he did not return but lived a further eight years in peace and gave his soul to the Lord. He had two great struggles: one against the Arians, who became strong under Constans, Constantine's son, and the other in the time of Julian the Apostate, with this renegade and with the Jews. In a time of Arian domination, at Pentecost, the sign of the Cross, brighter than the sun, appeared stretching over Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives and remaining several hours from nine o'clock in the morning. A letter was sent to the Emperor Constans about this happening, which was seen by all living in Jerusalem, and this served for the strengthening of Orthodoxy against the heretics. In the time of the Apostate, another sign took place. In order to humiliate the Christians, Julian arranged with the Jews for them to rebuild the Temple of Solomon. Cyril prayed to God that this should not happen. And there was a terrible earthquake which destroyed all that had been newly-built. The Jews began again, but again there was an earthquake, that destroyed not only the new building but also the old stones that were still in place beneath the earth. And so the words of the Lord came true: 'Not one stone shall remain on another.' Of this saint's many writings there has been kept his 'Catecheses', a first-class work, which sets out the faith and practice of Orthodoxy to the present day. A rare arch-pastor and a great ascetic, he was meek, humble, worn out by fasting and pale of face. After a life of great labour and knightly battle for the Orthodox faith, he entered peacefully into rest and went to the eternal courts of the Lord.

Aninus the Wonderworker - born in Chalcedon. He was of short stature as was Zacchaeus of old but great in spirit and faith. He withdrew from the world in his fifteenth year and settled in a hut near the Euphrates river where he prayed to God and atoned for his sins, at first with his teacher Mayum and, after his death, alone. Through the power of his prayers, he replenished a dry well with water, healed the sick of various maladies and tamed wild beasts. A trained lion accompanied him and was at his service at all times. He discerned the future. When Pionius, a stylite, was attacked and badly beaten by robbers some distance away from Aninus, Pionius decided to descend from the pillar and proceed to complain to the judges. St. Aninus "discerned the soul" of this stylite and his intention. He sent a letter to Pionius, by his lion, counselling him to abandon his intention, to forgive his assailants and to continue in his asceticism. His charity was inexpressible. The bishop of Neo-Caesarea presented him with a donkey in order to ease the burden of carrying water from the river, but he gave the donkey to a needy man who had complained to him about his poverty. The bishop presented him with another donkey and he gave that one away. Finally, the bishop gave him a third donkey, not only to serve as a water-carrier but one that Aninus was to care for and to return. Before his death Aninus saw Moses, Aaron and Or [Egyptian Ascetic] approaching him, and they called out to him, "Aninus, the Lord is calling you, arise and come with us." He revealed this to his disciples and gave up his soul to the Lord, Whom he faithfully served. He was one-hundred ten years old when his earthly life was ended.

St. Edward the Martyr, king of England (978) - the eldest son of the first-crowned king of England, Edgar the Peaceable, and the only King of England formally recognised as a saint by the Orthodox Church. He was slain in 978 at the instigation of his step-mother and a party within the realm who wished to secularise the monastic properties and lands. The abundant miracles which took place at his tomb bore witness to the favour he had found with our Saviour, and he has been glorified by the Church for his righteous life and his defence of the monastics. His relics were uncovered in 1931 during an

archaeological dig at the ruins of Shaftesbury Abbey in Dorset, which are privately owned. Mr John Wilson Claridge, the man who found the relics and whose family 'owned' them decided in the 1980's to hand them over to the care of a group of Russian Orthodox monks in England under the jurisdiction of the Russian Church Abroad. He made this decision as he wanted the relics to be kept in a place where they would be properly venerated. A small monastic brotherhood was formed and a church building was purchased to house the relics (now the Shrine Church of St. Edward). In 1982, the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Church Abroad verified the correctness of the veneration of St. Edward. The significance for England of the martyred King Edward is akin to that of the martyred Tsar for the Russian people. Holy King-martyr Edward, pray for us!

Also commemorated on this day: Synaxis of all Venerable Fathers of the Kiev Caves (movable holiday on the 2nd Sunday of the Great Lent). New Hieromartyr Demetrius priest, Virgin-martyr Natalia (1938). Venerable Maria (Skobtsova), nun, who suffered at Ravensbruck (1945). Martyrs Trophimus and Eucarpus of Nicomedia (300). The 10,000 Martyrs of Nicomedia. St. Tetricus, bishop of Langres in Gaul (572-573) (Gaul). Venerable Daniel, monk of Egypt (6th c.). Venerable Cyril of Astrakhan (1576).

19 March / 1 April — The Holy Martyrs Chrysanthus and Daria - Chrysanthus was the only son of a great noble, Polemon, who moved from Alexandria to Rome. As the son of rich parents, Chrysanthus studied all the secular disciplines, having the most learned men as his teachers. But worldly wisdom confused him, and he was left ignorant of the truth. And he grieved over this. But God, who provides for each and all, assuaged the grief of the young Chrysanthus by putting copies of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles into his hands. The truth was revealed to him in the reading of these. But he wanted a teacher, and found one in the person of Carpophorus, a priest, who instructed and baptised him. But this did not please his father, who did all in his power to turn him back from the Christian faith. Then, in no way succeeding, the wicked father tried to corrupt him by shutting him up alone with shameless girls, but Chrysanthus gained the victory over himself in that, and preserved his virginity. Then his father compelled him to marry the pagan Daria, but Chrysanthus persuaded Daria to receive the Christian faith and to live with him as his sister although appearing to be married. When his father died, Chrysanthus began openly to confess Christ and to live as a Christian, both he and his whole house. In the time of the Emperor Numerian, both he and Daria were terribly tortured for their faith. The torturer Claudius himself, though, seeing the endurance of these martyrs and the wonders that were revealed at their martyrdom, embraced the Christian faith with all his house. For this, Claudius was drowned, both his sons were beheaded and his wife died on the gallows with prayer on her lips. Daria showed such endurance under martyrdom that the pagans cried out: 'Daria is a goddess!' Finally it was decreed that Chrysanthus and Daria be buried in a deep pit and covered with stones. A church was later built on the site. Near this pit was a cave, in which some Christians at one time met together for prayer and communion in memory of the holy martyrs Chrysanthus and Daria. Discovering this, the pagans rolled a stone across the entrance to the cave, and thus by death drove those Christians from this world into that better world where Christ the Lord reigns in eternity. These glorious martyrs, Chrysanthus and Daria and the others with them, among whom are Diodorus the priest and Marianus the deacon, suffered for Christ in Rome in 283 and 284

The Holy Martyr Pancharius.- born in Villach, Germany [present day Austria]. He was a high-ranking officer at the court of Diocletian and Maximian. At first, he denied Christ but, being counselled by his mother and sister, he returned to the Faith of Christ and died for it in the year 302 A.D.

Also commemorated on this day: St. Sophia of Slutsk and Minsk (1612). St. John confessor (1932). St. Matrona (1938). Venerable Symeon of the Pskov Caves (Glorification 2003). Venerable Innocent of Komel (Vologda), disciple of St. Nilus of Sora (1521). Venerable Bassa, nun, of Pskov (1473). Venerable Simeon, prior of the monastery Dajbabe (1941) (Serbia). The Smolensk "Tenderness" Icon of the Mother of God (1103). Martyr Dimitri of Tornada (564). New Martyr Demetrius at Constantinople (1564) (Greek). Righteous Mary, wife of Vsevelod III (1206). New Martyr Nicholas of Karamanos in Smyrna (1657). Martyr Alcmund, prince of Northumbria.

20 March / 2 April — Our Holy Father John and those martyred with him - This glorious monastery, which still exists today, was visited by our own Serbian St. Sava and endowed by several Serbian rulers. Many times it was attacked by brutal Arabs, pillaged and laid waste. But, by the Divine Providence of God, it was always restored and is preserved until today. During the reign of Constantine and Irene, it was attacked and pillaged by the Arabs. The monks did not want to flee but, counselling with their abbot Thomas, they said, "We have fled from the world into this wilderness for the sake of our love for Christ and it would be shameful if we fled from the wilderness out of fear of men. If we are slain here, we will be slain because of our love for Christ for Whose cause we came to live here." Having decided, they awaited the armed Arabs, unarmed as lambs before wolves. Some of the monks the Arabs killed with arrows and some they sealed off in the cave of St. Sabbas. They lighted a fire at the entrance of the cave and all were suffocated by the smoke. Thus many of them died as martyrs for the sake of Christ and were translated into the Kingdom of Him Whom they loved and for Whose love they perished.

They suffered honourably prior to the Feast of the Resurrection in 796 A.D., during the reign of Constantine and Irene and Elijah, the Patriarch of Jerusalem. A just punishment quickly befell these savage attackers. Returning to their tents, they began to quarrel among themselves and in mutual combat all were slain. This occurred in the year 796 A.D.

The Holy Martyr Photina - This was the Samaritan woman who had the rare fortune to converse with the Lord Christ Himself at the Well of Jacob, near Sychar (St. John 4:4-31). Believing in the Lord, Photina afterwards went to preach His Gospel with Victor and Josiah her two sons, and with her five sisters, Anatolia, Phota, Photida, Parasceve and Cyriaca. They had gone to Carthage in Africa. There they were arrested and taken to Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero and were thrown into prison. By God's Divine Providence, Domnina, the daughter of Nero, came into contact with St. Photina and was converted to the Faith of Christ by her. After imprisonment they all suffered for the sake of Christ. Photina, who for the first time was enlightened with the light of truth at the well of Sychar, was now thrown into a well where she died and entered into the eternal kingdom of Christ.

St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, bishop (687) - one of the greatest English saints and missionaries, became a monk of Melrose abbey on the River Tweed 'then ruled by Abbot Eata, the gentlest and simplest of men,' as the Venerable Bede observed. The prior of Melrose, named Boisil, taught Cuthbert the Bible and the pattern of a devout life, and when Boisil died, Cuthbert became prior in his place. He would preach throughout the surrounding countryside, riding many miles on horseback to win the erring for Christ. 'Cuthbert was so great a speaker and had such a light in his angelic face,' wrote Bede, 'he had also such a love for proclaiming his good news, that none hid their innermost secrets from him.' But the saint preferred the life of a hermit and secured Eata's permission to live as one for eight years on the island of Farne. In the year 684 he was appointed, unwillingly, Bishop of Hexham. Cuthbert preferred Lindisfarne, where Eata was bishop, to Hexham and the two men exchanged bishoprics. He had two more years to live.

Also commemorated on this day: New Hieromartyr Vladimir priest (1918). New Hieromartyr Basil deacon (1938). New Hieromartyr Priest Nicholas Holz of Novosiolki (Chelm and Podlasie, Poland) (1944). Suffering of Venerable Euphrosynus of Blue-Jay Lake (Valaam) (1612). Seven Virgin-martyrs of Amisus (Samsun): Alexandra, Claudia, Euphrasia, Matrona, Juliana, Euphemia, and Theodosia (310). St. Nicetas the Confessor, bishop of Apollonias in Bithynia (813). New Martyr Myron of Crete (1793). St. Martin of Braga in Iberia (580). St. Wulfram, missionary (703) (Neth.). Righteous Abel, first martyr in history of mankind. St. Austreigiselis, bishop of Bourges (624) (Neth.). Martyr Michael the Sabbaite, who suffered at Jerusalem (691). St. Archil II, king of Georgia (744). St. Herbert, hermit of Derwentwater. Martyrs Rodion, Aquila the Eparch, Longinus, and Emmanuel (Greek).

21 March / 3 April — St James, Bishop and Confessor - Neither his birthplace nor the place of his episcopate are known. It is known only that he fulfilled the Law of Christ, living in strict asceticism, in fasting and prayer and that, in the time of Copronymos, he endured much hardship and suffering at the hands of the iconoclasts: hunger, imprisonment and ridicule of every sort. He finally gave his soul to God, whom he had faithfully served in this life. He lived and suffered in the eighth century. Our Holy Father Cyril (Beryllus), Bishop of Catania; St Thomas, Patriarch of Constantinople; Our Holy Father Serapion; St. Enda, earliest leader of Irish monasticism.

St. Thomas, patriarch of Constantinople - Thomas lived during the reign of the Emperors Maurice and Phocas and at the time of the Patriarchs St. John the Faster and Cyriac. Because of his great piety and zeal, Thomas attracted the attention of St. John and was advanced to the order of patriarchal deputy by that saint. Following the death of Cyriac, Thomas was elected patriarch. At this time, an extraordinary event occurred. On one occasion when there was a procession with crosses, the crosses began to sway on their own and began to strike one another. All the people were amazed at this. When the patriarch learned about this being an actual occurrence, he summoned Theodore Sykeon, the renown hermit who possessed the "gift of discernment." The patriarch implored Theodore to explain to him what this incident foretells. Theodore prayed to God and revealed to the patriarch that this occurrence portends great misfortunes, both for the Church and for the Greek Empire, which will surface as a result of internal religious and internal political dissensions. Christians will fight and annihilate each other. All of this was shortly fulfilled. Thomas implored Theodore to pray for him that God would take him before these tragedies begin. "Do you command that I come to you or that we see each other over there before God." This is how Theodore replied to the patriarch, indicating that the patriarch would die soon. That very same day the patriarch became ill and died. Shortly after him, St. Theodore also died. St. Thomas died and took up habitation with the Lord in 610 A.D.

Also commemorated on this day: New Hieromartyr Vladimir priest (1931). New Martyr Archbishop Theodore Pozdeyev (1938). Venerable Seraphim Vyritsa (1949). St. Cyril, bishop of Catania (2nd c.). Venerable Serapion, bishop of Thmuis in Lower Egypt, friend of St. Anthony the Great (358). Venerable Lupicinus, desert-dweller of the Jura Mountains (480) (Gaul). St.

Enda of Aran, monk, earliest leader of Irish monasticism (530) (Celtic & British). Martyrs Philemon and Domnina of Rome (Greek). St. Beryllus, bishop of Catania (2nd c.). St. Sophronius, abbot of the monastery of St. Theodosius (542). New Martyr Michael of Agrapha (1544). St. Serapion the Sindonite, monk of Egypt (542).

22 March / 4 April — The Hieromartyr Basil, Priest of Ancyra - Under the Emperor Constantius there was much suffering at the hands of the Arians. At that time, Basil became known as a staunch defender of Orthodoxy and a true shepherd of his flock in Ancyra. When, after Constantius, Julian the Apostate came to the throne and began to persecute the Christians, Basil openly denounced this new wickedness and encouraged his people in the Faith. For this he was thrown into prison. When the Emperor Julian came to Ancyra, Basil was brought before him and he began to urge Basil to abandon the Christian faith, promising him honours and wealth. Then Basil answered him: 'I believe in my Christ, whom you have denied and who gave you this earthly kingdom, but He will shortly take this from you. How can you have no shame before the altar under which you were saved from death as an eight-year-old child when they sought to kill you? Therefore He will soon take this earthly kingdom from you, and your body shall not be buried when you have spewed forth your soul in bitter torments.' Julian was furious and ordered that seven strips of skin be torn from his body every day. And his torturers carried this out for seven days. When Basil was brought out again before the Emperor, he tore a strip of his own flesh off and threw it into Julian's face, shouting: 'Take this and eat it, Julian, if such food is sweet to you, but Christ is life for me!' This occurrence was noised in the town, and the Emperor left Ancyra in secret out of shame and went to Antioch. And they continued to torture Basil with red hot irons until he surrendered his soul to his Lord for whom he had suffered so much. This was in the year 363.

St. Drosida - Drosida was the daughter of Emperor Trajan. She was captured with five other women at night while they were gathering the bodies of the tortured martyrs for Christ. For this she was severely disfigured by the emperor. Those five women were horribly tortured and, in the end, were thrown into a vat of molten copper, where they gave up their souls to their Lord. Drosida remained under the strict guard of the emperor. She escaped from the palace and baptized herself in a river. After eight days she gave up her soul to God.

Also commemorated on this day: Venerable Isaac, founder of the Dalmatian Monastery at Constantinople (383). Martyrs Callinica and Basilissa of Rome (2nd c.). Venerable Euthymius of Constantinople. "The Izborsk" Icon of the Mother of God (1657). St. Paul, bishop of Narbonne, Brittany (3rd c.) (Celtic & British). New Martyr Euthymius of Mt. Athos (1814) (Greek). New Martyr Basil (Zelentsov) bishop of Priluk (1930). New Martyr Schema-abbess Sophia of Kiev (1941) and her priest Demetrius Ivanov (1934).

23 March / 5 April — The Hieromartyr Nikon - Born in Naples of a pagan father and a Christian mother, he was an officer in the Roman army in Naples. He was not baptised, although his mother, unbeknown to his father, had instructed him in the Christian faith. Once, when he was setting off with his company to war, his mother advised him, if he were in trouble, to make the sign of the Cross and call on Christ to help him. And so, when Nikon's company was surrounded during the battle and close to final extermination, Nikon made the sign of the Cross and began to call upon Christ. At that moment he was filled with exceptional strength and rushed upon his opponents, killing some and putting the others to flight. Returning home, Nikon could not stop exclaiming in wonder: 'Great is the God of the Christians!' After he had brought joy to his mother with his report of the victory by the aid of Christ's Cross, he set sail in secret for Asia, where the Bishop of Cyzicus, Theodosius, baptised him. After his baptism, he shut himself up in a monastery and devoted himself to study and to asceticism. However, Bishop Theodosius had a vision before his death, in which he was told to consecrate Nikon as his successor. The aged Theodosius summoned Nikon immediately and ordained him deacon, and then priest and bishop. By divine providence Nikon came soon after this to Neapolis, where he found his mother still alive. On her death, he went to Sicily with nine disciples, one-time comrades in battle, and devoted himself to preaching the Gospel. There was a terrible persecution of Christians at that time, and Prince Quintianus seized Nikon and his companions and gave them over to great torture. One hundred and ninety of his disciples and friends were slain. The torturer tied Nikon to the tails of horses, threw him from a high cliff into a ravine, beat him and flayed him, yet Nikon survived all these tortures. He was finally slain with the sword and his body was abandoned in a field for the birds to eat, but a shepherd boy, possessed by a raging evil spirit, fell on the dead body of Christ's martyr, took hold of it, and was immediately healed. He spread the news about Nikon's body, and Christians came and buried it. St Nikon suffered and went to the Lord in the reign of the Emperor Decius; Our Holy Father Nikon of the Kiev Caves.

Also commemorated on this day: New Hieromartyr Macarius priest (1931). New Hieromartyr Stephen priest (1937). New Martyr James, New Hieromartyr Basil priest, Virgin-martyr Anastasia and Barbara, Martyr Alexis (1938). New Hieromartyr venerable confessor archbishop Sergius (Serebriansky) (1948). Venerable Nikon, abbot of the Kiev Caves (1088). Martyrs Philetas the Senator, his wife Lydia, their sons Macedon and Theoprepis, the notary Cronides, and Amphilochius the Captain, in Illyria (125).

St. Basil of Mangazea in Siberia (1600). Martyr Dometius the Persian, under Julian the Apostate (ca. 360-361). Venerable Luke the New of Mytilene, Mt. Athos (1802). Venerable Pachomius, abbot of Nerekhta (1384). St. Bassian, archbishop of Rostov (1481). St. Gwinear of Cornwall.

24 March / 6 April — Forefeast of the Annunciation — Venerable Zacharias the Recluse of Egypt - Zacharias was the son of Carion the Egyptian. Zacharias left his wife and children and became a monk. He took his father with him because his mother was unable to care for him. Even though Zacharias was younger than most of the elders in the Scete, he was favored with greater gifts of Grace than many of the others were. He felt that his whole being was on fire with the Grace of God. To the question of St. Macarius: "Who is the ideal monk?" Zacharias replied, "He who continually compels himself to fulfill the commandments of God." To the question of Abba Moses: "What does it mean to be a monk?" Zacharias removed his monastic head gear [Kamilavka] and trampled it underfoot and said, "If a man is not shattered as this, he cannot be a monk." He was a great light among the monks of the wilderness and while still young died to the Lord.

Commemoration of the miracles at the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev - Two friends, John and Sergius, swore brotherhood before the icon of the holy Mother of God in this monastery. John was a rich man, with a five-year-old son, Zachariah. John fell ill, and at his death commended his son to the care of Sergius, and left in Sergius's keeping a large sum of silver and gold for him to hand over to Zachariah when he had grown up. When Zachariah came of age, however, Sergius denied receiving anything from the deceased John. Then Zachariah said: 'Let him swear before the same icon of the most holy Mother of God, in front of which he accepted brotherhood with my late father, that he received nothing from John, and then I will seek nothing more from him.' Sergius agreed, but when he had sworn this and went up to kiss the icon, some force held him back and would not allow him to come near. Then, tormented all at once by a demon, he began to cry out: 'Holy fathers Antony and Theodosius, do not let this merciless angel destroy me!' The demon had attacked him by God's permission. He then told them of all the money which John had left. But when they opened the box, they found double the amount. Taking it, Zachariah gave it to the monastery and was himself tonsured as a monk. He lived a long time and was worthy of God's great gifts, entering peacefully into eternity; Our Holy Father Zacharias.

Also commemorated on this day: St. Artemon, bishop of Seleucia (1st c.). New Hieromartyr Alexander priest (1918). New Hieromartyr Vladimir priest (1920). Venerable Zachariah, faster of the Kiev Caves (13th c.). Martyrs Stephen and Peter of Kazan (1552). Venerable James the Confessor, bishop of Catania (802-811). "The Clouded Mount" Icon of the Mother of God. Hieromartyr Parthenius, patriarch of Constantinople (1657). St. Savvas the New of Kalymnos (1948) (Greek). Eight Martyrs of Caesarea in Palestine (Greek). Venerable Martin of Thebes, monk (Greek). St. Thomas, abbot of the monastery of St. Euthymius (542). St. Severus of Catania (802-811). St. Artemius, bishop of Thessalonica. St. Dunchad, abbot of Iona.

‡ Daily Scripture Readings ‡

Monday - Isaiah 8:13-9:7; Genesis 6:9-22; Proverbs 8:1-21

Tuesday - Isaiah 9:9-10:4; Genesis 7:1-5; Proverbs 8:32-9:11

Wednesday - Isaiah 10:12-20; Genesis 7:6-9; Proverbs 9:12-18

Thursday - Isaiah 11:10-12:2; Genesis 7:11-8:3; Proverbs 10:1-22

Friday - Isaiah 13:2-13; Genesis 8:4-21; Proverbs 10:31-11:12

Saturday - Hebrews 10:32-38; Mark 2:14-17

REFLECTION

St. Gregory Palamas learned much through heavenly revelations. After he had spent three years in stillness in a cell of the Great Lavra, it was necessary for him to go out among men and benefit them with his accumulated knowledge and experience. God revealed this necessity to him through an extraordinary vision: One day, as though in a light sleep, Gregory saw himself holding a vessel in his hand full to overflowing with milk. Gradually, the milk turned into wine which likewise spilled over the rim, and drenched his hands and garments. Then a radiant youth appeared and said: "Why would you not give others of this wonderful drink that you are wasting so carelessly, or are you not aware that this is the gift of God's grace?" To this Gregory replied: "But if there is no one in our time who feels the need for such a drink, to whom shall I give it?" Then the youth said: "Whether there are some or whether there are none thirsty for such a drink, you are obligated to fulfill your debt and not neglect the gift of God." Gregory interpreted the milk as the common knowledge (of the masses) of moral life and conduct, and the wine as dogmatic teaching. The second time Gregory secluded himself in a monastery he was writing his Principles of Orthodoxy. On the eve of the Feast of St. Anthony the Great, the monks summoned him to the all-night vigil service, but he remained at his work in the cell while all the brethren went to church. St. Anthony suddenly appeared to him and said: "Perfect stillness is good, but sometimes it is necessary to be with the brethren." Convinced by this revelation, Gregory immediately went into church to the joy of all the monks.

ON FASTING

By Saint Gregory Palamas

The calm sea, radiant and bright with sparkling light, reflecting the dawn on its smooth surface, is a pleasant sight to the eyes. But it is far more delightful not just to see but to address the church gathered together according to God's will, freed from disturbances, illuminated mysteriously by the divine light, stirred up towards that light's dawn, with hands and eyes, all the senses and the mind uplifted. The grace of the Spirit has today granted me this agreeable sight. You are all spending your nights and days together here in God's temple, and by your unceasing attendance upon Him you could be regarded as heavenly trees planted by the streams of the water of the Spirit. So may I now assist these streams as far as I am able. As you have offered your daytime prayers in addition to your early morning prayers, may we, as far as time allows, offer an evening sermon in addition to the one this morning, that we might show you openly all the different kinds of tricks to which the enemy of our salvation turns his hand to render not only our fasting but also our prayer worthless.

Brethren, there is another sort of evil satiety and drunkenness which does not result from indulging in food and drink, but from anger and hatred towards our neighbor, remembrance of wrongs, and the evils that spring from these. On this subject Moses says in his song, "Their wine is the wrath of dragons and the incurable wrath of asps" (Deut. 32:33). So the prophet Isaiah says, "Woe to those who are drunken, but not with wine" (Isa. 29:9), and again he commands, "ye shall not fast to fight" (Isa. 58:3 Lxx). To those who fasted in this way he says, speaking on the Lord's behalf, "If thou bendest thy neck as a ring, even then ye will not call this an acceptable fast, and if ye make many prayers, I shall not hearken unto you" (Isa. 58:5 Lxx), and, "When ye spread forth your hands unto me, I will turn away mine eyes from you" (Isa. 1:15).

This is the drunkenness of hatred which more than anything else causes God to turn away, and the devil attempts to bring it about in those who pray and fast. He prompts them to remember wrongs, directs their thoughts towards harboring malice, and sharpens their tongues for slander. He prepares them to be like that man who wishes for evil whom David describes with the words, "He deviseth mischief continually, his tongue is like a sharp razor" (Ps. 51:2 Lxx), and from whom he prays God to deliver him, saying, "Deliver me, O Lord, from the evil man: preserve me from the violent man; they have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips" (Ps. 140:1, 3).

In this time of fasting and prayer, brethren, let us with all our hearts forgive anything real or imaginary we have against anyone. May we all devote ourselves to love, and let us consider one another as an incentive to love and good works, speaking in defense of one another, having good thoughts and dispositions within us before God and men. In this way our fasting will be laudable and blameless, and our requests to God while we fast will be readily received.

We shall rightly call upon Him as our Father by grace and we can boldly say to Him, "Father, forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matt. 6:12).

Again, he who schemes against our souls uses another means to render our prayer and fasting useless, self-conceit. Because that Pharisee was conceited when he fasted and prayed, he was sent away empty-handed (Luke 18:10-14). We know, how-ever, that people with proud hearts are unclean and unacceptable to God, and we are well aware that we owe God many large debts and pay back very little. So let us forget those things which are behind as worthless, and reach out towards those things which lie ahead (cf. Phil. 3:13). Let us fast and pray with contrite hearts, self-reproach and humility, that our fasting and our regular attendance and presence in God's Church may be pure and pleasing to Him.

Another of the evil one's methods of making our toil in fasting and prayer fruitless is to persuade us to accomplish them hypocritically for the sake of vainglory This is why the Lord commands us in the Gospel, saying, "Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:6).7. He did not say to encourage us to excuse ourselves from gatherings and prayers in church, because in that case the prophet and psalmist would not have said to Him, "In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee" (PS. 22:22), or, "I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: I will sing unto thee among the nations" (Ps. 57:9), or, "I will pay my vows before them that fear thee, Lord" (PS. 22:25). Nor would he have said to us, "Bless ye God in the congregations" (Ps. 68:26), or, "O come, let us worship and bow down and weep before the Lord our God" (Ps. 95:6 Lxx). The Lord teaches, be-sides other, higher matters, of which there is no time to speak now, that if we are stirred up to pray alone in our houses and bedrooms this also encourages prayer to God in church, and inner prayer of the mind encourages spoken prayer. If someone only wants to pray when he attends God's Church, and has no concern at all for prayer at home, in the streets or in the fields, then even when he is present in church he is not really praying.

The psalmist demonstrates this because after saying, "My heart is ready, O God", he adds, "I will sing and give praise in my glory" (Ps. 108:1 Lxx). Elsewhere he says, "When I remember thee upon my bed, I meditate on thee in the morning hours" (Ps. 63:6 Lxx). The Scripture says, "When ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:16-18).

How incomparable is His love for mankind! With these words the Lord makes clear to us the distinction and decision He will make at the future Judgment, so that from now we might lay hold of the better choice and portion. To those who live for vainglory and not for Him, He will definitely say, in accordance with His words in the Gospel, "You received your reward during your lifetime", just as Abraham said to that rich man in the flames, "Thou in thy lifetime receivest thy good things" (Luke 16:25). Those who look towards Him as they practice virtue He shall, it says, reward openly, which means that in the sight of the whole world He will give them in return His blessing, an inheritance, pleasure and pure joy for ever and ever. He wants nobody to miss this, and everybody to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4), so He makes clear now, as I said before, His impartial and unalterable choice, showing that only those who despise the glory that comes from men are sons of God.

He addresses the same words to both categories of people, saying, "Thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:18). Those who are disdainful of the empty glory that comes from men He will make and proclaim his own adopted sons and heirs. The others He will exclude from adoption as sons unless they repent. The Lord says this lest, by considering how we look to other people when we pray and fast, which is of absolutely no benefit to us, we should endure the labor of fasting and prayer but be deprived of the reward. He tells us to anoint our heads and wash our faces, that is, we should not make a point of looking pale, nor should our heads be unwashed and dried up so that it seems that we are suffering from long drawn out fasting and contempt for our bodies, and are looking for praise from other people. The Pharisees acted like this for the sake of appearances, which is why they were estranged from Christ's Church, and the Lord forbids us categorically to copy them.

We can refer to the mind metaphorically as the head of the soul, since it is the soul's guiding force and to the imaginative aspect as its face, as this contains the permanent centre of the senses' activity. So it is good to anoint our heads with oil when we fast, namely, to render our minds merciful, and to wash our faces, our imaginations, clean from shameful impure thoughts, anger and everything evil.

Such a fast carried out in this way banishes and puts to shame all the evil passions together with the demons who are their makers and guardians. It also enlists those who fast among good angels, turning these angels towards them, accustoming them to be their guardians and moving them to help and assist them.

In Babylon a fourth person was seen in the midst of the flames alongside those three young men, who were adorned with self-control and fasting, keeping them unharmed and mysteriously refreshing them (Dan. 3:25). When Daniel kept a long fast an angel came to him to instruct him and to foretell the future (Dan. 10:1-21). At another time when Daniel had closed the lions' mouths by his prayer and fasting (Dan. 6: 16-27), an angel carried a prophet through the air from far away to bring him food (Bel & Dr. 33-39 Lxx). When we practice both spiritual and bodily fasting and pray, for us too the fire of fleshly desire will be extinguished with the help of good angels, and anger will be tamed like a lion. We will become partakers of prophetic food with hope, faith and inner vision of the good things to come, and we will be able to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy.

Fasting which is neither like this nor carried out in this way is more akin to the evil angels, for their own abstinence from food is accompanied by anger, hatred, pride and opposition to God. As servants and helpers of the good we are their opponents. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood", says the apostle, "but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness" (Eph. 6:12). We do not resist them just by fasting, but we use the breastplate of righteousness to protect us, the helmet of saving works of mercy and the shield of faith (cf. 1 Thess. 5:8, Eph. 6:t6). Also the sword of the Spirit, which is more than sufficient for defense, that is, God's saving word to us (Eph. 6:14-17). So let us fight the good fight (1 Tim. 6:12), keep the faith firm, quench all the fiery darts of the evil one (cf Eph. 6:16), and, when we have been proclaimed victors in everything, we shall attain to pure heavenly crowns and rejoice eternally together with the angels in Christ Himself, our Lord.

To whom belong all glory, might, honor and worship, together with His Father without beginning and the all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and for ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Saint Gregory Palamas: The Homilies, pp 49-53.

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