

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church
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The Second Sunday of Great Lent
(03.31.2024.)

Mark 2:1-12

And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. 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. And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. 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. When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. But there was certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? 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? 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? 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, I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. 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. **(KJV)**

St. Gregory Palamas
John 10:9-16

I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth

not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. **(KJV)**

God's Holy Church is concluding the second week of Great Lent. Believers' focus on their souls should be increasing as Great Lent progresses. Repentance is a major theme of Great Lent.

Purification of the soul comes with repentance. St. Mark's Gospel for today describes Jesus' power to forgive sins. The same Gospel demonstrates Jesus' healing power.

Sins create paralysis in believers. Sin inhibits growth and progress. Jesus healed the man from his inability to walk. Jesus absolved the man of his sin.

Jesus gives believers the opportunity to have sins forgiven during Great Lent.

Jesus creates opportunities for believers to be freed of the paralysis of sin. Great faith is involved in approaching Jesus in repentance. Coming to the priest in Holy Confession with a desire for forgiveness is necessary

Jesus welcomes believers seeking to repent. Jesus' love and mercy are unlimited. Great Lent is the opportunity to begin life anew in Jesus Christ.

St. John's Gospel for today states Jesus gives life abundantly.

Families experiencing difficulties do well to begin anew in Christ. Parishes having turmoil are renewed when parishioners collectively embrace repentance as primary in the journey to Pascha.

Beginning anew in Christ involves seeking forgiveness from Christ and being forgiving in daily life. The value of forgiveness from Christ and being forgiving in daily relationships is revealed by deep and sincere prayer.

Opening the heart to God leads to repentance and understanding forgiveness. Focusing the mind on Jesus Christ creates perspective for life. Jesus' love is revealed in St. John's Gospel for today.

Jesus stands by those who follow Him. Jesus died and rose from the dead for His followers. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Jesus does not run when there is turmoil in life.

Jesus is present to help believers face and deal with life's turmoil. Jesus faced the crisis of the man being unable to walk that was brought to Him in faith. Jesus clearly understood the value of forgiveness of sins and the connection with healing.

Great Lent is an opportunity to free believers from the paralysis of sin. Great Lent is a journey in God's Holy Church to life abundantly in Jesus Christ. The hunger in the soul is addressed during Great Lent.

The believer's need for personal peace and freedom is addressed during Great Lent. Encounters with Jesus result in peace. Jesus is the personification of freedom and peace.

Jesus opens the doors to abundant life. Jesus enables believers to freely use talents and gifts for God's glory. Jesus destroys the shackles of sin. Peace rests in the heart, soul and mind when forgiveness occurs.

Great Lent is time-limited. Each day has great value in life. Wise believers seek to make use of each moment of earthly life to be united with Christ. The Church offers daily wisdom and nourishment for believers to grow in Christ.

Thank God for the opportunities to repent and grow in Christ during Great Lent. Thank God for the increased Divine services. Thank God for the Gospel nourishment and the opportunity to partake of Christ's Precious Body and Blood.

**The Second Sunday of Great Lent. St. Gregory Palamas. St. Gyril of Jerusalem.
March 18/31. 2024. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic**

Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas

Introduction

On the Second Sunday of Lent the Orthodox Church commemorates our Holy Father Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica, the Wonderworker. The feast day of Saint Gregory Palamas is November 14, however, he is commemorated on this Sunday as the condemnation of his enemies and the vindication of his teachings by the Church in the 14th century was acclaimed as a second triumph of Orthodoxy.

Life of the Saint

Our holy Father Gregory was born in Constantinople in 1296 of aristocratic parents who had emigrated from Asia Minor in the face of the Turkish invasion, and were attached to the court of the pious Emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus (1282-1328). Despite his official duties, Gregory's father led a life of fervent prayer. Sometimes as he sat in the Senate, he would be so deep in prayer as to be unaware of the Emperor addressing him. While Gregory was still young, his father died after being clothed in the monastic habit; and his mother for her part wanted to take the veil, but delayed doing so in order to take care of the education of her seven children. Gregory, the eldest, was instructed by the most highly reputed masters of secular learning and, after some years, was so proficient in philosophical reasoning that, on listening to him, his master could believe he was hearing Aristotle himself. Notwithstanding these intellectual successes, the young man's real interest lay only with the things of God. He associated with monks of renown in the city and found a spiritual father in Theoleptus of Philadelphia, who instructed him in the way of holy sobriety and of prayer of the heart.

About the year 1316, Gregory decided to abandon the vanities of the world. His mother, two sisters, two brothers and a great many of his servants entered upon the monastic life with him. He and his two brothers went on foot to the holy Mountain of Athos, where they settled near the Monastery of Vatopedi under the direction of the Elder Nicodemus, who came from Mount Auxentius. Gregory made rapid progress in the holy activity of prayer, for he had put into practice since childhood the fundamental virtues of obedience, humility, meekness, fasting, vigil and the different kinds of renunciation that make the body subject to the spirit. Night and day he besought God ceaselessly with tears saying, "Lighten my darkness!" After some time, the Mother of God, in whom he had put his trust since his youth, sent Saint John the Theologian to him with the promise of her protection in this life and in the next.



After only three years, the early death of his brother Theodosius, followed by that of the Elder Nicodemus, led Gregory and his second brother, Macarius, to attach themselves to the Monastery of the Great Lavra. Gregory was appointed chanter. His conduct in the cenobitic life was beyond reproach, and the brethren admired his zeal for putting into practice all the holy evangelic virtues. He lived with such abstinence as to appear unburdened by the flesh to the extent of being able to go three months without sleep. At the end of three years of common life, his soul thirsting for the sweet waters of the wilderness, he retired to the hermitage of Glossia, under the direction of an eminent monk called Gregory of Byzantium. With the passions purified, he was now able to rise up in prayer to the contemplation of the mysteries of the Creation. Solitude and inner stillness enabled him to keep his intellect fixed at all times in the depths of his heart, where he called on the Lord Jesus with compunction, so that he became all prayer, and sweet tears flowed continually from his eyes as from two fountains.

The incessant raids of Turkish pirates soon obliged Gregory and his companions to leave their hermitage. Together with twelve monks, he wanted to make the pilgrimage to the Holy Places and to seek refuge at Mount Sinai; but this did not prove feasible. Instead, he spent some time in Thessalonica, where he joined the group around the future Patriarch Isidore, who was endeavoring to spread the practice of the Jesus prayer among the faithful so that they might profit from the experience of the monks. In 1326, Gregory was ordained a priest, having understood in a vision that this was indeed the will of God. He then departed to found a hermitage in the area of Beroea, where he practiced an even stricter asceticism than before. For five days of the week he remained alone, fasting, keeping vigil and praying with abundant tears. He only appeared on Saturdays and Sundays to serve the Divine Liturgy, share a fraternal meal, and converse on some spiritual subject with his companions in the ascetic life. He continued thus to rise up in contemplation and to enter into closer union with God in his heart.

When his mother died, he went to Constantinople to fetch his sisters, whom he settled in a hermitage near his own. But as Serbian raids in the region became more and more frequent, he decided to go back to Mount Athos. He settled a little above the Lavra in the hermitage of Saint Savas, where he lived in greater seclusion than before, and could converse alone with God. He went to the monastery only infrequently and would receive his rare visitors on Sundays and feast days. Going on from that contemplation which is still outward, Gregory then attained to the vision of God in the light of the Holy Spirit and to the deification promised by Christ to His perfect disciples.

One day in a dream, he saw that he was full of a milk from heaven which, as it overflowed, changed into wine and filled the surrounding air with a wonderful scent. This was a sign to him that the moment had come to teach his brethren the mysteries that God revealed to him. He wrote several ascetic treatises at this time, and, in 1335, was appointed Abbot of the Monastery of Esphigmenou. But the two hundred monks who lived there understood neither his zeal nor his spiritual expectations so, after a year, he returned to his hermitage.

At that time, Barlaam, a monk from Calabria, won a great name for himself as a speculative thinker in Constantinople. He was particularly fond of expounding the mystical writings of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, which he interpreted in an entirely philosophical way, making knowledge of God the object of cold reason and not of experience. When this refined humanist learned of the methods of prayer of some simple monks of his acquaintance, who allowed a place to the sensory element in spiritual life, he was scandalized. He took occasion to calumniate them and to accuse them of heresy. The hesychast monks appealed to Gregory who then wrote several polemical treatises in which he answered the accusations of Barlaam by locating monastic spirituality in a dogmatic synthesis.

He showed that asceticism and prayer are the outcome of the whole mystery of Redemption, and are the way for each person to make the grace given at Baptism blossom within himself. He also defended the authenticity of the methods which the Hesychasts used to fix the intellect in the heart; for since the Incarnation we have to seek the grace of the Holy Spirit in our bodies, which are sanctified by the Sacraments and grafted by the Eucharist into the Body of Christ. This uncreated grace is the very glory of God which, as it sprang forth from the body of Christ on the day of the Transfiguration, overwhelmed the disciples (Matthew 17). Shining now in the heart purified from the passions, it truly unites us to God, illumines us, deifies us and gives us a pledge of that same glory which will shine on the bodies of the Saints after the general Resurrection. In thus affirming the full reality of deification, Gregory was far from denying the absolute transcendence and unknowableness of God in His essence. Following the ancient Fathers, but in a more precise manner, he made a distinction between God's imparticipable essence and the eternal, creative and providential energies by which the Lord enables created beings to participate in His being, His life and His light without, however, introducing any division into the unity of the divine Nature. God is not a philosophical concept for Saint Gregory: He is Love, He is Living Person and consuming fire, as Scripture teaches (Deuteronomy 4:24), Who does everything to make us godlike.

Saint Gregory's brilliant answer to Barlaam was first accepted by the authorities of Mount Athos in the Hagiorite Tome and then adopted by the Church, which condemned Barlaam (and with him the philosophical humanism that would soon inspire the European Renaissance), during the course of two Councils at the Church of Saint Sophia in 1341.

Barlaam's condemnation and his departure for Italy did not bring the controversy to an end. No sooner had Gregory returned to his Athonite hermitage from Thessalonica where he had been writing his treatises in seclusion than Akindynos, an old friend of his, restated the substance of Barlaam's arguments and condemned Gregory's distinction between essence and energies as an innovation. Akindynos, who at first aspired to be an umpire between Barlaam and Gregory, was the kind of rigid conservative who does no more than repeat set phrases without seeking to enter into the spirit of the tradition. At the same time, a dreadful civil war broke out as a result of the rivalry between the Duke Alexis Apokaukos and Saint Gregory's friend, John Cantacuzenus (1341-47). The Patriarch, John Calecas, sided with Apokaukos and encouraged Akindynos to bring a charge of heresy against Gregory, which led to the excommunication and imprisonment of the Saint.

During the four years of Gregory's confinement, there was no slackening of his activity. He carried on a huge correspondence, and wrote an important work against Akindynos. When John Cantacuzenus gained the upper hand in 1346, the Regent, Ann of Savoy, came to the defense of

the Saint and deposed the Patriarch on the eve of Cantacuzenus' triumphal entry into the City. He nominated Isidore as Patriarch (1347-50), and summoned a new Council to vindicate the Hesychasts. The controversy was not finally resolved until 1351, at a third Council which condemned the humanist Nicephorus Gregoras. In the Synodal Tome the doctrine of Saint Gregory on the uncreated energies and on the nature of grace was recognized as the rule of faith of the Orthodox Church.

Among Isidore's new episcopal appointments, Gregory was named Archbishop of Thessalonica in 1347; but he was unable to take possession of his see as the city was in the hands of the Zealots, the party opposed to Cantacuzenus. After finding shelter for a while in Lemnos, where he showed heroic devotion during an epidemic, Gregory was eventually able to enter the city acclaimed as if Christ Himself were coming in triumph, with the chanting of Paschal hymns.

During a voyage to Constantinople, he fell into the hands of some Turks, who held him for a year in Asia Minor (1354-55), but allowed him a measure of freedom. This, and his openness of spirit, enabled him to engage in amicable theological discussions with the Muslim doctors of religion and with the son of the Emir Orkhan. When he was set free, thanks to a ransom from Serbia, he returned to Thessalonica to take up his activity again as pastor and wonderworker. He suffered a long illness and, some time before his death, Saint John Chrysostom appeared to him with the invitation to join the choir of holy hierarchs immediately after his own feast. And, indeed, on November 14, 1359 the Saint gave up his soul to God. When he died, his countenance was radiant with a light like to that which shone on Saint Stephen (Acts 6:15). In this way God showed, through the person of his servant, the truth of his doctrine on the reality of deification by the uncreated light of the Holy Spirit. The veneration of Saint Gregory was approved by the Church in 1368. The Saint works many miracles even to the present day and, after Saint Demetrios, is regarded as the Protector of Thessalonica.

Orthodox Commemoration of the Sunday of Saint Gregory Palamas

The feast day of Saint Gregory Palamas is November 14, the day of his repose, however the Orthodox Church commemorates the Saint on the Second Sunday of Lent. As a Sunday of Great Lent, the commemoration is celebrated with the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great, which is preceded by a Matins (Orthros) service. A Great Vespers is conducted on Saturday evening.

Hymns of the Feast

Apolytikion (Plagal of Fourth Tone)

O Gregory the Miracle Worker, light of Orthodoxy, support and teacher of the Church, comeliness of Monastics, invincible defender of theologians, the pride of Thessalonica, and preacher of grace, intercede forever that our souls may be saved.

Kontakion (Plagal of Fourth Tone)

With one accord, we praise you as the sacred and divine vessel of wisdom and clear trumpet of theology, O our righteous Father Gregory of divine speech. As a mind that stands now before the Primal Mind, do you ever guide aright and lead our mind to Him, that we all may cry: Hail, O herald of grace divine.

Seasonal Kontakion (Plagal of the Fourth Tone) - Sung during Divine Liturgy

O Champion General, we your faithful inscribe to you the prize of victory as gratitude for being rescued from calamity, O Theotokos. But since you have invincible power, free us from all kinds of perils so that we may cry out to you: Rejoice, O Bride unwedded. (Translated by Father George Papadeas)

Services this Week

- **3rd Sunday of Lent – Veneration of the Cross (04.07.2024.)**
 - **The Annunciation to the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary**
 - ***Divine Liturgy starts at 10:00 AM***

Donations March 17, 2024

Offering - \$ 875.00 Candles - \$87.00
Building Fund - \$1000.00 From Ann (Raich) Luy in Memory of
Husband Thomas Luy

Large Candles

IMO Mary Ellen Locher-Byrd from Helene Gleason
IMO Mike & Mildred Tumbas from Milica Knepp
IMO Grandparents Amelia & Pete Mastovich from Rick Kondas
IMO brother Joseph Kondas from Rick Kondas

CONGRATULATIONS

To all of our St. Nicholas Parishioners who helped make the
Lenten Fish Fries a HUGE success!!

From the preppers, bakers, order takers, servers, runners,
cleaner-uppers to the supporters; we can't do it without you.
Mnogaja ljeta!

A very special thank you to our runners; Amelia Ribaric, Maddie
Zahurak, Eli Ribaric, Nikki Ribaric, and Sam Ribaric - We Love You

Saturday, April 13th (Rain Date Wednesday, April 17th)
Church Grounds Clean-Up - 8:30 AM

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

His Grace Bishop Irinej will be joining us on Sunday, April 21st for
Divine Liturgy and evening Vespers.

PLEASE make an effort to attend both services

UPCOMING EVENTS

**Sunday, April 21st – 5th Sunday of Lent
Lenten Vespers at Our St. Nicholas
Special Guest – His Grace Bishop Irinej
Speaker Fr. Stefan Djoric – 5 PM**

**Lazarus Saturday – Saturday, April 27th – Divine Liturgy – 9:30 AM
6:00 pm – Vrbica – Vesper Service - Sanctification of palms and pussy
willows and procession following Vespers.**

**Palm Sunday – Sunday, April 28th – Divine Liturgy – 10:00 AM
GREAT and HOLY THURSDAY - *May 2nd* - 9:30 am – Divine Liturgy
7:00 pm – Great Vigil (The reading of the 12 Gospels)**

**GREAT and HOLY FRIDAY – *May 3rd*
7:00 pm – Vespers Service Veneration of Platanica (Epitaphios)**

**GREAT and HOLY SATURDAY – *May 4th* -9:30 am – Divine Liturgy
Egg coloring and Lunch Following Divine Liturgy
9:00 pm – Paschal Matins
RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST - PASCHA *May 5th*
10.00 am – Divine Liturgy**

Anniversary Celebration – Sunday, May 19th !!!!

**Cemetery Blessings
Saturday June 8th St. Nicholas & Grandview
Saturday June 15th Mercury Ave and St Petka**

Polka-Fest – Friday May 31st to Sunday, June 2nd

Band of Brothers – July 11-13th and 17 – 20th

TASTE OF SERBIA – Saturday, August 10th

Johnstown Slavic Festival – September 20-21st