

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

February, 2025 - Volume XXX, Issue 2

St. Gregory the Great Orthodox Church
A Western Rite Congregation of the Antiochian Archdiocese
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From a Discourse of St. Symeon the New Theologian d. 1022

God is light, and to those who have entered into union with Him He imparts of His own brightness to the extent that they have been purified. When the lamp of the soul, that is, the mind, has been kindled, then it knows that a divine fire has taken hold of it and inflamed it. How great a marvel! Man is united to God spiritually and physically, since the soul is not separated from the mind, neither the body from the soul. By being united in essence man also has three hypostases by grace. He is a single god by adoption with body and soul and the divine Spirit, of whom he has become a partaker. Then is fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet David, *I have said, ye are gods, and ye are all the sons of the Most High* [Ps. 82:6], that is, sons of

Inside:

<i>The New Martyrs of Russia</i>	3
<i>Parish News</i>	5
<i>To Receive the World as a Gift</i>	6
<i>The Meeting of Christ</i>	8
<i>The Presentation of the Lord</i>	9
<i>Calendar</i>	11



the Most High according to the image of the Most High and according to His likeness. We become the divine offspring of the Divine Spirit, to whom the Lord rightly said and continues to say, *Abide in Me, and I in you* [Jn. 15:4]. How He abides in us and how we in turn abide in Him, the Lord Himself taught us when He said, *Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, and they are in Me, and I in them* [Jn. 17:21-23]... It is evident that just as the Father abides in His own Son and the Son in His Father's bosom by nature, so those who have been born anew through the divine Spirit [Jn. 3:3, 5] and by His gift have become brothers of Christ our God and sons of God and gods by adoption, by grace abide in God and God in them [I Jn. 4:12ff]...

To you, who are Christ's servants, who are anxious to learn and have prepared your ears to hear, the Master of all things shouts through His holy Gospels, saying, *While you have the light, run to the light, lest the darkness overtake you* [Jn. 12:35-36]. By repentance run in the way of His commandments. Run, run, while it is still the time when He shines on you, before the night of death overtakes you and you be sent away into eternal darkness. Run, seek, knock, that the door of the kingdom of heaven may be opened to you and you may enter within it and have it within you.

Therefore, I exhort you, let us keep God's commandments with all eagerness, in order that we may obtain the eternal life and kingdom. May we never hear in this life these words addressed to us, *He who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him* [Jn. 3:36], nor in the world to come, *Depart from Me, I do not know where you come from* [Luke 13:25]. Rather

may we listen to that blessed voice as it says, *Come, O blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, because you fed Me when I was hungry for your salvation by practicing My commandments, you gave Me drink, you clothed Me, you welcomed Me, you visited Me* [Mt. 25:34ff] by cleansing your hearts from every spot and defilement of sin. Now enjoy My blessings whose enjoyment is ineffable, and is eternal and immortal life. May we all obtain this, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

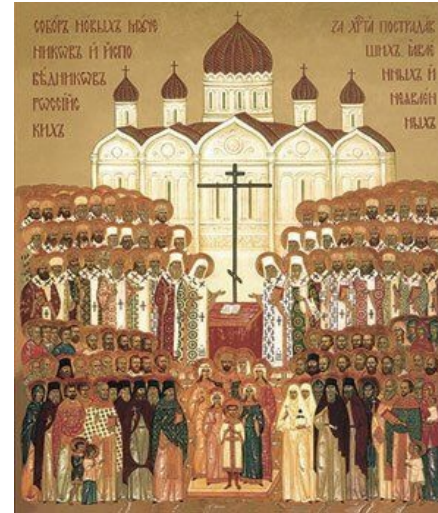
New Martyrs of Russia

Feast Day ~ February 4

Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven. [Matt. 5:11, 12]

There have been Christian martyrs in almost every age - those who were persecuted and killed for their belief in Jesus Christ. In the early centuries of the Church, the Roman authorities were threatened by those who refused to accept the claim of imperial divinity. The Roman Martyrology is filled with the stories of those who endured torture and remained faithful to Christ.

In later centuries, persecution of Christians continued, but it reached the most severe in Russia during the Communist era. The godless ideology of Communism could not tolerate Christian teachings of love, forgiveness, repentance, and the belief in “supernatural” events such as the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection. The revolutionary leader, Lenin, had called religious belief “the most dangerous foulness, the most shameful infection” and his Bolshevik party began its efforts to destroy the Russian Orthodox Church.



In 1918, the right of the Church to own property was removed and religion could no longer be taught in public or private schools. Soon theological schools and monasteries were closed and clergy were forbidden to wear clerical garb in public. By 1923, all religious holidays were abolished and Sunday morning was designated as a time for sporting events and other activities to discourage any attempts at gathering for worship. All of these measures were designed to remove religion from the everyday lives of the people.

In 1922, 50 bishops and priests were arrested and given a public trial. Patriarch Tikhon (who had served in America from 1898 to 1907) was forced to be a witness to the sham trial and to the executions which followed. Those martyrs went to their deaths singing “Christ is risen from the dead”.

By the 1930s, Russia had produced numerous martyrs for the faith - clergy, monastics, and lay people who were accused of “counter-revolutionary activities” and killed (primarily by a shot to the back of the head).

A day to remember the initial martyrs on January 25 or the Sunday following was first established in 1918, shortly after the October Revolution of 1917, but public observance was suppressed soon after. It was not until those who had escaped the terrors of Communist Russia and who had formed the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (eventually named the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia) glorified the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia in 1981 that observances began again. After the collapse

of the Soviet Union, the glorification of individual martyrs began in Russia with the feast day on the Sunday nearest January 25. The Antiochian Orthodox Western Rite has designated February 4 as the feast day.

It has been estimated that the faithful Christians who suffered for their faith in Russia far outnumber the many martyrs in the first three centuries of Christianity. In America today, as in 20th century Russia, we see some of the same attempts at diminishing the influence of religion and forcing Christians to accept practices and beliefs that are contrary to the teachings of the Church. May the New Martyrs of Russia pray for us as we struggle against these forces of evil.

Sources: Websites of the Carpatho Russian Orthodox Diocese of North America, Orthodox Church in America, OrthoChristian.com, and Wikipedia.

Parish News

The Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord (Candlemas and the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary), February 2, falls on Sunday this year. At this service, candles are blessed to be used throughout the year, as we hear the story of Christ's Presentation in the Temple recounted in St. Luke's Gospel in which St. Simeon refers to the Child as a *Light to enlighten the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel* [Luke 2:32, and the *nunc dimittis*]. At the end of the Liturgy, we will anticipate St. Blaise day (February 3) and offer the blessing of throats.

The season of Epiphany will come to an end the week following February 9, the Last Sunday after Epiphany. We will put away the Alleluia until we resume this joyful chant at Pascha. The three-week period of preparation - the "gesima" Sundays - for the longer period of preparation - Lent - will begin on February 16.

Our annual Parish Meeting will be held on Sunday, February 23, during coffee hour. This is an opportunity to hear reports from the Parish Council, the Treasurer, our Pastor, and others on our work as Christians in this church family.

Thanks to all who contributed to the 251 pounds of canned and packaged food which we collected this year for the Food for Hungry People program of the Archdiocese, and thanks to the Caldwell family for delivering this collection to the Manna Food Bank.

St. Gregory's will again host a neighborhood pot-luck dinner in our Parish Hall on Sunday, February 16. These events are a way for us to become known in the neighborhood and to show Christian hospitality.

To Receive the World as a Gift

by Metropolitan SABA



The universe is the vine that God gave to mankind. Saint John Chrysostom says, "All things were made for our sake, but we were not made for them." Everything is a gift from God to man, evidence of His love. Everything testifies to the sap of God's love - His kindness, His grace - and transmits it to us. So everything carries this gift, the gift of divine love. Every gift that we exchange with each other is a sign and bearer of love. But every gift calls for another gift in return, for the exchange of love to be achieved. However, man has nothing to offer God except what was given to him, for his needs. Therefore, his gift is a sacrifice that he presents to God, as an act of thanksgiving. Man's gift to God is a sacrifice and a "Eucharist" in the most comprehensive sense, according to Fr. Dumitru Staniloae.

The transformation of the world, its transfiguration, begins with our receiving it as grateful believers, grateful for God's everlasting kind stance toward us. It is not without significance that the Eucharist is the most central and important ritual for Christians. Unfortunately, Christians today give the Sacrament of the Eucharist different names, and by neglecting to call it "The Sacrament of Thanksgiving," they forget that thanksgiving is the foundation of their faith.

Man can bless and praise God for the sake of the world. He can present the world to God as an act of thanksgiving... Likewise, man is capable of reshaping and modifying the world, giving it a new - entirely new - meaning. "He imprints Creation with the seal of his understanding and perceptive action. The world, for man, is more than a gift; it is a task" [Father Dumitru Staniloae]. It is worth mentioning here that in the sacrament of thanksgiving, we offer not sheaves of wheat but, rather, a prepared loaf, and we offer not clusters of grapes but, rather, aged wine.

Man provides material things a voice with which Creation can glorify God, whether through cultivating the land or through other professions - through his writings or even painting icons. The first task assigned to man was to give names to the living creatures [Genesis 2:19-20]. As long as we do not give a name to an object or an experience, a precise word for its real significance, then we cannot begin to understand or use it.

Man, then, is the priest of Creation because he has the authority to give thanks to God and to offer Him Creation anew. He is also the king of Creation because he has the power to shape and fabricate it, to unite and divide it. Saint Leontios of Cyprus gracefully describes these two tasks, royal and priestly, saying "Across heaven, earth, and sea, through wood and stone, across all visible and invisible Creation, I honor the Creator, the Master and the skilled Craftsman." Creation does not directly and spontaneously honor its maker, but through me. The heavens

proclaim the glory of God, and through me the moon worships Him and the stars glorify Him, just as rainwater, dewdrops, and all created things glorify and honor God.

A person does not approach this role through force but, rather, through the light of his spiritual vision. His call is not to dominate nature or to exploit it but, rather, to exalt and sanctify it.

Reprinted from *Your Grace Transforms the Universe*

The Meeting of Christ

by Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos



It is a moving scene when Christ as an infant, as a baby, is offered to the Temple. The pre-eternal God Who, as the Word of God, has always been united with His Father and the Holy Spirit and simultaneously has directed the world, the entire universe, is presented to the Temple as an infant in the arms of His mother.

Although Christ was an infant, at the same time He was "God before the ages", and therefore He was wiser than anyone else. We know that human nature in the womb of the Theotokos was deified by the union of divine and human nature in the person of the Word, and therefore Christ's soul was enriched with the fulness of wisdom and knowledge. Yet this wisdom was expressed in accordance with His age... Although Christ was an infant, nevertheless He was God, having all the fullness of divinity bodily and all the human wisdom and knowledge by virtue of the hypostatic union of His divine and human natures.

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Address Correction Requested

By means of this infancy He cured Adam's "infantile mind". When God formed Adam in Paradise, Adam was an infant as to grace and sanctification. He did have an illuminated nous, but He had to be tested and attain deification. Since he was unshaped and an infant in spirit, because he had an infantile mind, he was easily deceived by the evil demon, who awakened him to sin and evil. Therefore Christ, having the bodily age of an infant, cured not only Adam's infantile mind, but also his human nature and did what the first Adam failed to do. Thus, by the incarnation of His Son, God the Father made the deification of Man more sure and effective. In Christ the devil could no longer deceive human nature, as he had done with ease in the first Adam.

Reprinted from *The Feasts of the Lord*

The Presentation of the Lord

by St. Nikolai of Ochrid

This day was commemorated among Christians from the beginning, but its solemn celebration began in the time of the great Emperor Justinian. At that time, Constantinople and its surroundings were struck by an epidemic, with five thousand or more people dying every day. At the same time there was a terrible earthquake in Antioch. Seeing the powerlessness of men to avert these catastrophes, the Emperor and the Patriarch together decided to call for fasting and prayer throughout the whole empire. On the day of Presentation itself, they arranged processions through the towns and villages to implore the Lord to have mercy on His people. And the Lord did have mercy, the epidemic and the earthquake ceasing instantly. This happened in the year 544. As a result, the Presentation came to be celebrated as a great feast of the Lord.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>February 2025</h1>						<i>Sunday services: Matins at 9am Sung Mass at 9:30</i>
						1 St. Ignatius of Antioch, BM, c. 107; St. Bridget, V, 523 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
2 Presentation of Our Lord: Candlemas; comm. Fourth Sunday after Epiphany <i>W</i>	3 St. Blaise, BM, c. 316; St. Anskar of Hamburg, BC, 865	4 New Martyrs of Russia, 1917 and following; St. Joseph of Aleppo, M, 1686	5 St. Agatha, VM, c. 250	6 St. Photius, BCD, 891; St. Dorothy, VM, c. 313	7 St. Romuald, Ab, 1027	8 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
9 Fifth Sunday after Epiphany; St. Cyril of Alexandria, BCD, 444; St. Apollonia, VM, c. 248 <i>G</i>	10 St. Scholastica, V, 543	11 St. Gregory II, PC, 731; St. Benedict of Aniane, Ab, 821	12	13	14 St. Valentine, PrM, 3 rd C	15 Ss. Faustinus & Jovita, Mm, 120 <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
16 Septuagesima; St. Nicholas of Japan, BC, 1912 <i>V</i>	17 <i>(Presidents' Day)</i>	18 St. Simeon of Jerusalem, BM, 1 st C; St. Flavian, BM, 449	19	20	21	22 Chair of St. Peter at Antioch; St. Joseph of Arimethea, C, 1 st C <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
23 Sexagesima <i>V</i>	24 St. Matthias, Apostle, 1 st C	25 St. Walburga of Heidenheim, V, 779	26 St. Porphyrius of Gaza, BC, 420; St. Ethelbert, KC, 616	27 St. Raphael of Brooklyn, BC, 1915; St. Leander of Seville, BC, c. 600	28 St. Oswald of Worcester, BC, 992	