

# ✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

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St. Gregory the Great Orthodox Church - A Western Rite Congregation of the Antiochian Archdiocese

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## *From a homily of Saint John Chrysostom*

*died 407AD  
feast day - January 27*

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If someone wants to praise martyrs, let them imitate martyrs. If someone wants to extol the athletes of piety, let them emulate their hard work...*How is it possible, you ask, for us to imitate martyrs now? After all, it is not a time of persecution.* Yes, I know. Yet while it isn't a time of persecution, it is a time of martyrdom. It isn't a time of wrestling matches of that sort, but it is a time of crowns. Human beings aren't in pursuit, but demons are in pursuit. A tyrant isn't in persecution mode, but the Devil is in persecution mode, crueller than any tyrant. You don't see burning coals lying in front of you, but you do see desire's flame kindled. They trampled on burning coals; trample on nature's pyre. They sparred with wild animals; bridle your anger, the savage and untamed wild animal. They stood fast against unbearable pains; subvert the unnatural and wicked thoughts that swell in your heart. It is in this way you will imitate martyrs. [As St. Paul has said,] *For our struggle now isn't against blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil.* [Eph. 6:12]

Nature's desire is a fire, a fire that is inextinguishable and constant. It is a rabid and mad dog; no matter how many times you get rid of it, it leaps at you every time and doesn't give up. The flame of burning coals is savage, but this is crueller - that is, the flame of desire. We never have a cease-fire in this war, we never have a lull in hostilities throughout the present life; instead, the struggle is constant, so that the crown might be magnificent too. It is for this reason that Paul constantly arms us, since it is always a time of war, since the enemy is always alert...

The martyrs' tomb is a soldier's tent. And if you open wide the eyes of faith, you will see the breastplate of righteousness lying here, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the

greaves of the Gospel, the sword of the Spirit [Eph. 6:14-17] hurling the very head of the Devil onto the ground...



So then, learn about [the martyr's] wrestling matches, so that you may imitate their victories. Despise wealth and money and all the rest of life's ostentation. Do not consider blessed those who are rich, but bless those who are martyrs; not those in luxury, but those in roasting pans. Not those at a lavish table, but those in a boiling caldron. Not those at the baths every day, but those in cruel furnaces... I address these remarks to both men and women. For the stadium is shared. Christ's army is not divided on the basis of gender; instead the company is united. Women too have the capacity to don a breastplate and wield a shield and let fly a shaft, both in a period of martyrdom and in another like it that demands considerable bold speech...

Just as painters wipe clean a painting that has often become dimmer with smoke and soot and time, so too you, beloved, use the memory of the holy martyrs. When worldly concerns attack and are about to dim your mind, wipe it clean through the memory of the martyrs. For if you keep this memory in your soul, you will not admire wealth, will not weep over being poor, will not praise glory and power, and in general of human affairs you will suppose that nothing joyous is great and nothing grievous unbearable. Instead, you will be above all those things and will have the viewing of this painting as a constant instruction in virtue...

Let us imitate these saints, let us honor the warriors, the crowned victors, the friends of God, and by walking the same road as them, we shall attain the same crowns as them. May we all attain these blessings through the grace and loving kindness of our Lord, Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father be glory, together with the Holy Spirit, now and always and forever and ever. Amen.

## *The Saints of God*

by Kh. Rebecca Alford

In their Sunday School classes, the children of St. Gregory's are learning about the saints. Children ask such questions as "Why do we have saints in the Church?" "What makes a saint?" "Who can become a saint and how?" Perhaps we should all ask these questions.

In the pages of the New Testament, St. Paul and others use the term "saint" to refer to all Christians. [I Corinthians 1:2] But in its

early days, the Church recognized the need to hold up certain Christians for particular veneration.

Jewish Christians already held the Patriarchs and Prophets in great esteem; their graves were marked with honor and their role in preparing the way for the Messiah was never forgotten. In his book, *The Cult of the Saints*, Peter Brown points out that even in pagan Roman society, people were aware of a “spiritual” world apart from this material one and often held a belief in a type of guardian angel. The graves of their ancestors were marked with monuments and anniversary meals were celebrated at them. These beliefs and practices paved the way for the veneration of saints among Christians.

Explaining the new Christian perspective, John Meyendorff (in *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions: The Church AD 450-680*) says that

the Christian Gospel affirmed that the Holy One Himself had assumed humanity, making His personal holiness - not an abstract heavenly “Supernatural” - accessible to humans...When the divine presence manifested itself in a human person, it was always by anticipation of the future universal Kingdom of Christ...Christian spiritual consciousness recognized itself in the Saints - both during their lifetime and after their death - as the witnesses *par excellence* to Christian truth...

When the persecutions of Christians began and many courageously faced death rather than deny Christ, these martyrs provided the impetus for a more formal recognition by the Church. The example of these brave Christians could provide inspiration for others who also faced persecution. Their memories had to be kept alive.

A shift in attitude toward the remains of one who had died also took place. In pre-Christian times, the body had been treated as a vessel which was shed at the time of death. Bodies were buried outside the cities (and burned in many societies). Among the Jews, handling a dead person’s body made one spiritually, as well as physically, unclean. (The hasty burial of our Lord’s body without the usual preparations before the beginning of Passover is an example of this.) Now, in the case of the martyrs, Christians came to understand that something of the holiness of the martyr was still present in his remains which had been the “temple of the Holy Spirit” [I Corinthians 6:19]. They were diligent in retrieving the bodies (sometimes just the bones, and often in secret) of these martyrs and then marking their graves in such a way that others could come there to pray and venerate the one who was now



considered a saint. The saint could be an intercessor before God for the one who venerated him or her.

As Rome was the center of many of the martyrs' deaths (St. Ignatius of Antioch is an example of one who was made to travel all the way to Rome for his trial and execution) and it was also the center of Western Christianity at this time, Rome led the way in establishing "martyrologies" - calendars listing the days on which a martyr had died and on which the Church celebrated with services in his memory. Soon, martyrologies appeared in other parts of the Christian world, giving liturgical scholars of later ages a glimpse of what was important to our Christian ancestors and how the stories of the saints spread throughout the world.



After Emperor Constantine's edict giving Christianity a legal position in the Empire, processions were made to the tombs of the martyr saints and soon, their relics were being placed inside churches and particularly, in the altar. Miracles were reported as happening as a consequence of praying near the relics. Shrines were built over the relics in many places and these shrines became the destination for pilgrims traveling from far places. Today, relics of the saints continue to be venerated by Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christians. Relics of Ss. Gregory, Nicholas, and Sebastian are kept on the altar of our church.

When anyone (whether a martyr or not) was given the designation of "saint", it was due to the proclamation of those who had known the person, who had been witness to the kind of life he had led and how he had faced his trials and tribulations. Popular acclaim became the common route to sainthood. But in order to avoid the scandal of giving the designation of saint to one who was not entirely deserving, bishops began to expect certain criteria to be established before the designation was made. In the West, by the 12<sup>th</sup> century, decisions regarding sainthood were being made by the pope alone and now a strict period of study and a rigid set of criteria (including a set number of miracles) is required for canonization in the Roman Catholic Church.

In the Orthodox Church, the process of glorification is less precise and proof of miracles is not required. But the Holy Synod of an Orthodox jurisdiction makes certain that the person who is to be named as a saint is worthy of our veneration as one who cooperated with God's will for their lives and who can point us to God.

When a new saint is declared, a service (with proper chants and readings appropriate to the life of the saint) is prescribed by the Church and the day of celebration (usually the date of death or "heavenly birthday") on the calendar established. An icon of the

new saint is produced for veneration so Christians can pray before the icon of that saint and implore his (or her) aid.

According to Fr. Joseph Frawley, a member of the OCA Canonization Commission (in an article published in 2000 and reprinted online), “The glorification of saints in the Orthodox Church is a recognition that God’s holiness is manifested in the church through these grace-filled men and women whose lives were pleasing to God.” We are now blessed to have saints from our own day and country to intercede for us at the heavenly throne.

When we celebrate the feast of All Saints at St. Gregory’s, we always share stories of our patron saints and others at a party after the Liturgy. We sing a little children’s hymn - “I Sing a Song of the Saints of God” - and should truly mean it as we sing the last phrase: “and I want to be one too!” May we strive to emulate the saints and always seek their prayers.

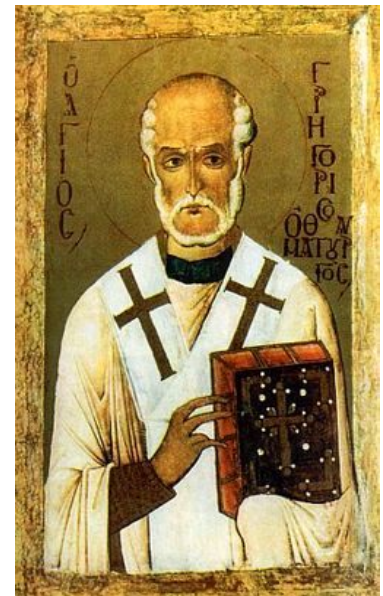
## *St. Gregory the Wonderworker* *Feast Day ~ November 17*

In the year 203, a child, who was given the name Theodore, was born to a wealthy pagan couple in Neocaesaria. This child was destined to play an important part in the life of the Christian Church and to be numbered among the saints.

Theodore was an intelligent, precocious child - one who excelled in his studies of Greek and Egyptian philosophy. His family’s intention was for him to become a lawyer and to prepare him for this, Theodore was sent to Alexandria to study while still a teenager. In the fortuitous ways of God, it was there that Theodore met the prominent Christian teacher, Origen.

It was not long before Theodore began to question the pagan religion of his childhood and to desire to become a Christian. He was baptized by his teacher and took the new name of Gregory as he took on the new life of one who would follow Christ.

An incident from his student days shows how Gregory exhibited patience in adversity and forgiveness toward his enemies. Some fellow students, who were jealous of his abilities and ridiculed him for his virtuous living, played a cruel trick on him. They hired a well-known local prostitute to approach Gregory in a public place and demand payment which he owed for her “services”. When Gregory quietly replied that she was wrong, the woman persisted





more loudly, attracting a crowd of curious people. To the delight of the perpetrators of this trick, Gregory paid the woman what she was demanding in the hopes of avoiding a further disturbance. Many in the crowd of onlookers were beginning to believe that this outwardly moral young man was not so good after all when the woman fell down, writhing in a violent convulsion. Gregory prayed over her and she soon recovered and apologized for participating in such a sham, restoring his reputation in the eyes of all.

Gregory abandoned the idea of becoming a lawyer and instead, went into the desert to devote himself entirely to contemplating the ways of God, praying and meditating on his goodness and mercy. He spent several years in the practice of extreme asceticism and as word spread of this intense man in the desert, he was sought out for spiritual counsel.

When Gregory decided to make a visit to his hometown, the seventeen Christians who lived there gathered in anticipation of meeting him and asking him to become their bishop. In one of the many instances of his gift of foreknowledge, Gregory sensed this and, fearing the responsibility of being a shepherd, he went back deeper into the desert. Eventually, however, he assented to the will of the people and agreed to be consecrated as the bishop for seventeen people in a largely pagan city.

Through the following thirty years, Bishop Gregory was the instrument of God in reversing the make-up of the city of Neocaesaria. He was wise in his dealings with the people of his flock and their pagan neighbors and he was known for his never-waning optimism. There were many events which could only be explained as miraculous. Once, when he was caught outside during a violent storm, he ran inside the nearest building - a pagan temple. He had to spend the night there and the next day, the pagan priest reported that he was unable to perform any of his usual ceremonies. The priest was so impressed with the Christian bishop's powers that he sought conversion himself.

Another miraculous story shows how God's answers to our problems can sometimes be humorous. Two brothers were fighting over their inheritance - a piece of land which included a lake which they both insisted belonged to their portion of the land. They asked the bishop to settle the dispute and after his fervent prayers for a resolution, the lake dried up in a very short time, eliminating the problem!

Bishop Gregory had a vision which greatly influenced his understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. He saw an old man and a woman in his vision. The man told Gregory that he was sent by God to explain the faith to him. The woman, whom

Gregory realized was the Blessed Virgin Mary, addressed the man as John (the Evangelist) and asked him to proceed. John then explained to Gregory the relationship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Gregory composed a creed based on this vision which was preserved and in the next century was used in the formulation of the Nicene Creed.

**W**hen the persecution of Christians began under the Emperor Decius in 250, Bishop Gregory advised his people to flee the area in order to preserve the Christian community for the future. Although the martyrdoms of many saints in other places and times contributed to the growth of the Church, this was the best plan for this place and time. The bishop and his deacon, who hid in the desert, were saved from discovery by the soldiers because they appeared to them as trees. The persecution ended the next year with the death of Decius, and the bishop and his people were able to return to the practice of their faith.

**D**uring his years as bishop, Gregory saw the conversion of so many people that a large church had to be built to accommodate the services for so many. As he lay dying at nearly seventy years of age, St. Gregory asked how many pagans were still left in Neocaesaria. Seventeen, he was told - the exact number of Christians he had first ministered to in this city. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of November in the year 270, St. Gregory entered the heavenly kingdom, thankful that his labors had changed the course of history in that place. Holy Gregory, pray for us.

## *Parish News*

**T**here are several important feast days in the month of November, beginning with the great celebration of All Saints on November 1. We will transfer our observance of this day to the Sunday within the octave, November 4. As has been our custom for many years, we will continue the celebration with a party at coffee hour following Liturgy. You are all asked to tell about a favorite saint (costumes and “props” are welcome!).

**W**e honor the lives of our departed loved ones on All Souls day, November 2. A Requiem Mass will be celebrated on the Eve, November 1, at 7:30 (Vespers of the Departed at 7:10PM) with a pot-luck supper following.

**T**he feast of the Presentation of the Theotokos in the Temple will be celebrated on the Eve, November 20, at 7:30PM with Vespers before and supper afterward.



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>November 2012</h1>						
<i>Sunday Services: Matins at 9AM, Mass at 9:30AM</i>				<b>1</b> All Saints Day  <i>Mass at 7:30pm</i> <b>B</b>	<b>2</b> All Souls Day	<b>3</b> of the Octave of All Saints; St. Winifred, VM, 680; St. Silvia, Mother of St. Gregory, Ma, 592  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>4</b> Sunday in the Oct. of All Saints; comm. 22 <sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost; Ss. Vitalis & Agricola, Mm, c. 304 <b>W</b>	<b>5</b> of the Octave of All Saints; St. Elizabeth, Ma, 1st C.	<b>6</b> of the Octave of All Saints; St. Leonard of Noblac, Ab, c. 559	<b>7</b> of the Octave of All Saints; St. Wilibrord of Echternach, BC, 739	<b>8</b> Patriarchs & Prophets of the Old Law; Octave Day of All Saints; Four Crowned Martyrs, c. 303	<b>9</b> Dedication of the Basilica of the Holy Savior in Rome, 324; St. Theodore Tyro, M, 306; St. Benignus, BC, c. 468	<b>10</b> Ss. Tryphon, Respicus & Nympha, Mm, c. 250  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>11</b> Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost; St. Martin of Tours, BC, 397; St. Theodore the Studite, Ab, 826 <b>G</b>	<b>12</b> St. Martin I, PC, 655	<b>13</b> St. Britius of Tours, BC, 444	<b>14</b> St. Gregory Palamas, BCD, 1359	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b> St. Gregory the Wonderworker, BC, c. 270; St. Gregory of Tours, BC, 594  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>18</b> Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost; Dedication of Basilica of Ss. Peter & Paul in Rome 4 <sup>th</sup> c. <b>G</b>	<b>19</b> St. Pontianus, PM, 235	<b>20</b> St. Edmund, KM, 870  <i>Mass at 7:30pm</i> <b>W</b>	<b>21</b> Presentation of the BVM; St. Gelasius, PC, 496; St. Columbanus, Ab, c. 615	<b>22</b> St. Cecilia, VM, c. 230  <i>(Thanksgiving Day)</i>	<b>23</b> St. Clement, PM, 96; St. Felicity of Rome, M, 165	<b>24</b> St. Chrysogonus of Apuileia, M., c. 304  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>
<b>25</b> 25th & Last Sunday after Pentecost; St. Katherine of Alexandria VM, c. 4th c. <b>G</b>	<b>26</b> St. Peter of Alexandria, BM, 311	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b> St. Saturninus, M, 309	<b>30</b> St. Andrew the Apostle, 1st c.	<b>1</b> St. Eligius of Tournai, BC, 660  <i>Vespers at 6pm</i>

Confessions may be made during the Psalms at Matins, following Vespers, and by appointment.

Coffee Hour follows Sunday Liturgy. Sunday School for children is during Coffee Hour.



## *A Prayer to God and His Saints*

*O almighty and holy Trinity, one God, whom I adore, whom I love, whom I confess, hear my humble prayer; enter into my heart and blot out my numberless sins.*

*O holy Mary, virgin Mother of Christ the Son of God, hear me, succor me, protect me: obtain for me true faith, perfect charity, humility, chastity, and self-control.*

*Do thou, O holy Michael, with all the army of Angels, pray for me. Snatch me from the power of my adversaries: help me to love my God, to possess purity of heart and a strong faith.*

*O holy Patriarchs and Prophets, do you too assist me to obtain the gifts of kindness to others, patience, constancy, and holy perseverance.*

*O ye blessed Apostles, free me from my bondage, defend me in peril, strengthen me in the hour of trial, and bring me at length into the kingdom of life.*

*May holy charity and true peace, may purity of soul and body, be granted to me through your intercessions, O holy Martyrs.*

*O glorious Confessors of God, pray for me: through your intercessions and help may I obtain a yearning after heavenly things, may I possess a love for uprightness of life, may I ever strive to keep the commandments of God.*

*O all ye holy Virgins, to you do I turn, help me to have good will to all, obtain for me health of soul and body, brotherly love, prudence, and the spirit of justice, fortitude, and temperance.*

*Again and again, yea always, will I turn to you, O all ye holy Saints: come to my aid: take pity on me; raise me up when I fall; correct me when I err. Through your intercession may I be granted a pure conscience, a salutary sorrow, an upright life, and an ending precious in God's sight; that through you I may come to the company of the blessed through the mercy of Him who reigns, one God and three Persons, for ever and ever. Amen.*

A prayer of Abbot Aelfwine (d. 1052) of Hyde Abbey, Winchester  
(From *The Prayer Book of Aelfwine of Hyde: Prayers of Ancient Christian England*)