

## 2nd Sunday of Great Lent: St Gregory Palamas Commemorated on [March 24](#)

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

Saint Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica, was born in the year 1296 in Constantinople. Saint Gregory’s father became a prominent dignitary at the court of Andronicus II Paleologos (1282-1328), but he soon died, and Andronicus himself took part in the raising and education of the fatherless boy. Endowed with fine abilities and great diligence, Gregory mastered all the subjects which then comprised the full course of medieval higher education. The emperor hoped that the youth would devote himself to government work. But Gregory, barely twenty years old, withdrew to Mount Athos in the year 1316 (other sources say 1318) and became a novice in the Vatopedi monastery under the guidance of the monastic Elder Saint Nicodemus of Vatopedi (July 11). There he was tonsured and began on the path of asceticism. A year later, the holy Evangelist John the Theologian appeared to him in a vision and promised him his spiritual protection. Gregory’s mother and sisters also became monastics.

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

Later on, in the eleventh century Saint Simeon the New Theologian (March 12) provided detailed instruction in mental activity for those praying in an outward manner, and the ascetics of Athos put it into practice. The experienced use of mental prayer (or prayer of the heart), requiring solitude and quiet, is

called “Hesychasm” (from the Greek “hesychia” meaning calm, silence), and those practicing it were called “hesychasts.”

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

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

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

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

About the year 1330 the learned monk Barlaam had arrived in Constantinople from Calabria, in Italy. He was the author of treatises on logic and astronomy, a skilled and sharp-witted orator, and he received a university chair in the capital city and began to expound on the works of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite (October 3), whose “apophatic” (“negative”, in contrast to “kataphatic” or “positive”) **Con’t Pg 8**

## *St. Gregory Con't*

theology was acclaimed in equal measure in both the Eastern and the Western Churches. Soon Barlaam journeyed to Mt. Athos, where he became acquainted with the spiritual life of the hesychasts. Saying that it was impossible to know the essence of God, he declared mental prayer a heretical error. Journeying from Mount Athos to Thessalonica, and from there to Constantinople, and later again to Thessalonica, Barlaam entered into disputes with the monks and attempted to demonstrate the created, material nature of the light of Tabor (i.e. at the Transfiguration). He ridiculed the teachings of the monks about the methods of prayer and about the uncreated light seen by the hesychasts.

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

But the dispute between the Palamites and the Barlaamites was far from over. To these latter belonged Barlaam's disciple, the Bulgarian monk Akyndinos, and also Patriarch John XIV Kalekos (1341-1347); the emperor Andronicus III Paleologos (1328-1341) was also inclined toward their opinion. Akyndinos, whose name means "one who inflicts no harm," actually caused great harm by his heretical teaching. Akyndinos wrote a series of tracts in which he declared Saint Gregory and the Athonite monks guilty of causing church disorders. The saint, in turn, wrote a detailed refutation of Akyndinos' errors. The patriarch supported Akyndinos and called Saint Gregory the cause of all disorders and disturbances in the

Church (1344) and had him locked up in prison for four years. In 1347, when John the XIV was replaced on the patriarchal throne by Isidore (1347-1349), Saint Gregory Palamas was set free and was made Archbishop of Thessalonica.

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

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

### **DANBURY FOOD PANTRY - APRIL**

Suggested donation of canned vegetables (and other non-perishable goods) will be collected through April 14.

February donations will be delivered to the food pantry Thursday April 18.



### Living Lent 3

#### Weekly Reflections by Metropolitan Tikhon

*His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon offers a series of reflections on the themes contained in the Triodi on hymns sung on Monday of each week during Great Lent.*

Our liturgical hymns guide us through Great Lent by making use of many elements. One of these elements is time and this is reflected in the texts from the Lenten Triodion.

From our human perspective, time passes by either very quickly or very slowly. We often attribute this to external factors, such as our age or how busy our day or week has been. But the effect of the passage of time is more often than not dependent on our spiritual state. Hymns such as these keep us anchored in the meaning of the passage of time:

“O holy and honoured Trinity, as we now enter upon the third week of the Fast, keep us safe from harm and condemnation. Enable us rightly to pass through the time that still remains, and to fulfill all Thy commandments, that so, offering up our hymns of praise, with a pure conscience, we may attain the glorious resurrection.”

In this one text, we are reminded that, although the third week is already upon us, our focus should remain on our worship of the Holy Trinity and on the fulfilling the commandments with prayer and pure hearts, all of which prepare us to greet the resurrection of Christ.

During this third week, we are also taken back in liturgical time to the Sunday of the Prodigal Son. In that pre-lenten period, the parable of the Prodigal Son was presented as an image of the merciful kindness of God the Father.

This time around, the hymns encourage us to look more closely at our own departure and voluntary return to God: “I have sinned, and have no need of others to accuse me; for I myself bring before Thee all my shameful acts.”

It is through this self-examination, and with the knowledge that the Fast “gives strength to the body and light to the mind and heart,” that we are able now to look forward in time and to entreat of our Savior:

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#### MYRRH STREAMING ICON “TENDER HEART”

The myrrh-streaming icon from Taylor, PA will be visiting St. Vladimir's Ukrainian Cathedral, in Cleveland on Friday, March 29 at 7 PM. Archbishop Daniel will preside at the Molieben.

Anyone interested in going please see Fr. ASAP. If there is enough to go we will cancel service here & go.

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#### LENTEN RETREAT AT DEANERY PARISH OF ST. INNOCENT

Retreat with Dr. Nicole Roccas “DESPONDENCY AND GREAT LENT” redeeming the time through hope, repentance, and thanksgiving. FREE ADMISSION. FREE WILL OFFERING!

The retreat will be Friday, April 5 from 7:00pm-8:30pm “Time, Despondency, and Great Lent”. And Saturday, April 6 from 9am-noon (Redeeming the past: remembering “wasted Time”.

Dr. Nicole Roccas has been researching and writing about time from both a historical and theological perspective for nearly ten years. She is most well-known for her Ancient Faith blog and podcast, *Time Eternal*, the only online media forum devoted to the interface between Christian faith and the lived experience of time. Her book, *Time and Despondency: Regaining the Present in Faith and Life*, explores the connection between time and the spiritual sickness of despondency (akedia), first identified by Evagrius of Ponticus in the fourth century. In addition to writing and podcasting, Nicole is an adjunct faculty member at the Orthodox School of Theology at Trinity College (Toronto.) Her book will be for sale.

St. Innocent Orthodox Church  
8526 Usher Rd  
Olmstead Falls, OH

## Fasting from “Being Busy” During Lent

One of the main struggles faced by families during Lent is the conflict that seems to exist between lenten expectations and the busy demands of daily family life. It seems as if we try and cram lenten practices, such as increased service attendance, charitable activity, and youth retreats, into a schedule that maintains the same level of involvement in school-related commitments (sports, music lessons, school band, etc.).

I remember Archbishop Job of blessed memory once speaking about celebrating and attending church for feast days. He asked when families attended services, “Were we celebrating a feast, or just attending another busy activity?” I answered to myself that the experience was just another busy activity to fit into an already busy schedule.

Can families fast from being busy during Lent? This is not as an easy question to answer. I know that for some sports events, if children don’t attend the scheduled practices, they won’t be permitted to play in regular games. And how often such activities, practices, and games conflict with lenten services. I offer the following thoughts for your consumption and further reflection.

- When is too much, too much? Do children have to play two or three sports? Do they have to learn more than one instrument? School bands travel on the weekends; do they have to attend every trip?
- Parishes offer Presanctified Liturgies at least every Wednesday — and some on Fridays. If there is a conflict, can families participate in at least 50% of the services offered (and not attend the school event)? Perhaps your parish priest can write a letter to the coach, teacher, or director requesting that one’s child might be excused from a practice or a game to attend a church service or activity. This request could include a request that the child would not suffer any consequences for missing the school or sporting event.
- Can children be sent to school with fasting meals for lunch if none are offered at school? Are we so concerned about fitting in that we can’t use these opportunities to witness to our Faith and why we do what we do?

When I served as a priest in Toledo, a former parishioner told me a great story about how his dad

dealt with him with regard to sports activities. The father told his son he could play football but he had to remember Wednesdays and Sundays were church days and he needed to attend church for scheduled events (not a football event). When a Sunday came up during which the football coach wanted his players to gather to view films from the previous game, my former parishioner went to church that day instead. Whatever consequence he faced for missing out on film viewing, he accepted. Are we willing to do this?

The Lord’s blessing be upon you,  
Forgive me a sinner,

## Sunday of Orthodoxy Procession

