

Lenten Synaxarion

Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas

*Now is the truly great preacher of the Radiant Light
led by the Source of Light to the never-setting Light.*

This son of the divine and never-setting Light was a true man of God indeed, and a wondrous servant and minister of the divine mysteries, having been born in the imperial city (Constantinople) of most radiant and glorious parents. Through his virtue and instruction he desired to adorn not only the outer of mankind according to the senses, but also much of the unseen inner being. When he was yet quite young, his father died. His mother, brothers and sisters raised him and instructed him in morals, catechism and sacred scripture, and sent him to teachers of worldly wisdom, from whom he learned well. Cleverly combining his learning with a natural zeal, he soon became skilled in verbal arts. At the age of twenty, regarding all earthly things as inferior and passing dreams, he sought recourse to God the Author and Giver of all wisdom, to consecrate his entire self to God through a perfect life. Hence he disclosed his great love for God, his pious intentions and burning desire to his mother, and he found that for a long she too had been desirous of this and rejoiced at his decision. And straightway gathering her children his mother said with joy, "Behold, I and the children God has given me!" And she disclosed to them the intent of the great Gregory, asking if it seemed to them to be good. And he with words of instruction soon convinced them all in earnestness to follow him in his love and withdrawal from life. Distributing then his earthly possessions to the poor according to the teachings of the Gospel, and cheerfully abandoning human love, earthly honor and the approbation of men, he followed after Christ.

Placing his mother and sisters in a convent, he and his brothers went to the sacred Mount Athos, where he convinced his brothers to stay in different monasteries, so that they would have no time to be together, thereby perfecting their life in God. He himself became obedient to a wondrous man named Nicodemus who had consecrated his life of silence to God alone. Learning from him through actions every precept and every virtue, through a mystical revelation there he received the protection of the all pure Theotokos, an invincible help in all things. After Nicodemus' parting from this life to God, having lived for several years in the Great Lavra most zealously with perfection of thought and a love of silence, Gregory left the Lavra and embraced the wilderness.

Increasing ever in love and always desiring to be with God, he dedicated himself to a life of utmost severity, strengthening his reasoning with earnest attention, raising his thoughts to God, practising prayer at all times, meditating on divine things, and leading an excellent life. With the help of God he overcame the attacks of demons, and cleansing his soul with fountains of tears at all night vigils, he became a chosen vessel of the gifts of the Spirit of God, and often had visions of the Godhead.

Wondrously, because of the commencement of attacks of the Ishmaelites on Thessalonica, he retreated to the summit skete, and was constrained to speak with several of the citizenry. Having led a diligent life, for he was no longer young, and having cleansed his body and soul entirely, at God's command, he received the great anointing to the priesthood, and like an angel, becoming transcendent in the celebration of the sacred mysteries, so that all who observed him were moved. He was truly great and was recognized as a bearer of the Spirit by those who lived godly lives, revealing himself to those who witnessed the following outward signs: He had authority over demons and was able to release those

possessed from their wiles and deceit. He could change barren trees into fruitful ones. He foresaw things to come, and was blessed with other gifts and fruits of the Divine Spirit. For when it lies within our power to act upon the virtues, then we are not able to fall into temptation. Without the virtues there can be no perfection or appearance of faith in God (for, he says, action and passion descending together perfects a man in goodness after God), but frequent falls into various temptations...this great man...so that he is shown to be perfect to all. And what mind can think on this further?

What more can be said? First the licentious wiles of the evil contender. And then the lies and slanders of the new theomachists were directed at him. In all twenty-three years he endured much anger and affliction. For the Italian beast, Varlaam of Calabria, philosophized in a worldly manner, and through the vanity of his philosophy (for he thought to know everything) he mounted a fierce attack against Christ's Church, against our faith and against those who openly professed it. For the grace of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is one and the light of the age to come, as also the righteous shine like the sun, as Christ Himself demonstrated beforehand in splendor on the mountain. And simply he erroneously taught that all the power and action of the Godhead in three hypostases and all differences there might be in the divine nature were created, and those who piously believed that the divine Light was uncreated, and all His power and action, as not to one new of that which is naturally in God, through his rhetoric and widespread letters, he called bitheists and polytheists, as the Jews, Savelius and Arius call us. For the sake of these the divine Gregory, as a defender of piety and most glorious intercessor, fought before everyone and was reviled. He was sent by the Church to Constantinople, and he went. And when the most divine emperor Andronicus, fourth after the Paleologos, sought to defend the faith, a sacred council was assembled. And when Varlaam appeared with his previously mentioned impious teachings and his accusations against piety, the great Gregory, filled with the Spirit of God and clothed with invincible power from on high, stopped his mouth from speaking against God and disgraced him utterly. With words of spiritual fire and documents he burned Varlaam's heresies like brushwood to ashes. Wherefore unable to endure the shame, the enemy of piety ran back to Italy, whence he came. Immediately after this the council exposed his great harm, and with arguments to the contrary dispersed his compositions. But those who had partaken of these ideas did not cease their struggle against God's Church. For this cause through the great urging of the sacred council, the emperor himself, and most importantly the command of God, Gregory was persuaded to ascend the bishop's throne, and was appointed the pastor of the sacred Church in Thessalonica. Wherefore he bravely and steadfastly accomplished great deeds in behalf of the Orthodox Faith. But many evil heirs of Acindinus and Varlaam appeared, fierce beasts born of ferociousness, as well as their teachings and compositions, not once, not twice, not three times, but many times in great quantity, and not during the reign of one emperor or patriarch but during three successive reigns and an equal number of patriarchates and many councils, which through divinely inspired words and writings, countered them in many ways, and eventually overcame them completely. And some persist, having no regard for the High Court, shamelessly attacking the saints who triumphed over them. Such were in short Gregory's victories over the impious.

Then God, in an ineffable manner, sent the teacher to the East. He was sent as the elder from Thessalonika to Constantinople to make peace between two quarreling emperors. But he was seized by the Agarians and for an entire year was made to travel in suffering from place to place, from city to city, fearlessly preaching the Gospel of Christ. And he affirmed and convinced them in their faith, entreating them to remain steadfast, confirming with divine wisdom those who were wavering in the faith or could not understand or asked questions about the previous events, and freely granting healing to those who asked it. To those who did not believe, to wretched apostates, to those who had followed them and those who cast aspersions on our teachings about the incarnate providence of our Lord and God, or the veneration of the precious Cross and the holy icons he spoke many times without hesitation. He spoke

also of Mohammed and answered many other questions which they put to him. Some wondered in themselves, others were angered and put forth their hands and would have made him a martyr, if not for God's plan and the promise of money to be gained from his ransom. So he was spared.

Then the great saint was freed by the lovers of Christ, and this bloodless martyr returned once more in joy to his flock. In addition to the other many and great gifts and preeminent qualities, which he had, he was also adorned with the wounds of Christ, bearing also in himself Christ's, according to Paul. Let us describe him; these were his characteristics. Along with his excellence he was meek and humble. (We do not speak here of God and divine matters, for he was quite a defender of these.) He did not remember evil and was good-natured, desiring to return good for evil. He never quarreled. He was always patient and magnanimous in the face of adversity. He was above vanity and sensuality. He was always temperate and not extravagant in all personal necessities, and for all that time he was not ill. He endured quietly and silently, always graciously, to the limits of what was done to him, so that all would see him as reasonable, attentive and keen witted. And consequently he never allowed his eyes to be void of tears, but sympathized with a flow of tears.

And so like a martyr from the beginning to the end he struggled against demons and the passions, driving heretics far the Christ's Church, defining the Orthodox Faith through his words and compositions, and by them as with a seal sealing all divinely inspired writing, for his life and word became a seal of the life and words of the saints. He tended his flock for thirteen years more in the godly manner of the Apostles, and having adorned them with his moral teachings, he guided them to the heavenly sheepfold. And having served all Orthodox, both those who lived during his time and those yet to be born, he was translated to the higher life, having lived sixty-three years in all. And he commended his spirit into the hands of God, leaving his body to his flock, as a special portion and a precious treasure, enlightened and glorified at the end.

*For every day Christ benefits with wonders those who come near in faith
and grants healing of many diseases,
many of whom tell of their cures.
Through His prayers, O God,
have mercy on us.
Amen.*