

## HOMILY FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT St Gregory Palamas

In The Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory Be To Jesus Christ! Glory Forever!

It is good to see so many of you this morning, especially since we have “sprung forward” an hour with our return to daylight savings time. I always like that term *spring forward* which is used to remind us which way we turn the clocks at this time of the year. It has a nice ring to it, especially as we are moving forward during this Holy Season of the Great Fast. Hopefully this week we will see a thawing out and more spring like temperatures, in the 50’s. Won’t that be awesome! Especially to see the snow melt! Hurray!!!

This image of the melting snow, warmer temperatures and a movement from the cold and gloom of winter to the warmth, beauty and wonder of spring, is very fitting as the same is or should be happening in our spiritual life. Spiritually, we should be starting to thaw out – we should notice that our heart which has grown cold and frozen from the winter of sin, is starting to melt as the sunshine of prayer, and the nourishment of fasting have begun to work on it. Maybe you have shed a few tears, and been more sensitive to the suffering of others. Perhaps you have felt closer to God and prayer is coming a little easier. Or perhaps, if you have exerted little or no effort, or have not at all opened your heart and mind to embrace this holy season, you are not seeing any difference at all. Or perhaps, you are trying mightily but are struggling, and Great Lent is not seeming all that great to you. These are all distinct paths that you and I might be on right now.

Our Mother, the Church, knows how difficult it is for us to make the changes that this season asks of us. She knows how hard it is to repent, that is to make a radical turn around, to be the person God wants us to be. And because of this, during the season of Lent, she constantly offers us encouragement. She gives us the beautiful Lenten services to sooth our aching hearts and weary minds. During this season, she gives us some of the most beautiful hymns to sing, and she places before us the examples of some incredible Christian warriors, who took advantage of the Church's weapons of prayer, fasting and good works, and were victorious over sin, and experienced in a very real and powerful way, the Grace of Almighty God.

Today, the Church places before us the example of one of the most incredible saints of all time, St. Gregory Palamas, the saintly Archbishop of Thessalonica and wonderworker for our edification and encouragement.

As I was preparing my sermon, I read a very beautiful account of the life of St. Gregory Palamas, which I found on the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese's Special Great Lent website. I encourage those of you who are computer literate to go on line and read it. I will email you a link later today, with a copy of this sermon to remind you.

What struck me the most about this saint, was learning about what a pious family he was born into. While his family was very wealthy and a part of the aristocracy, they were people of deep faith and prayer. Gregory was a Senator and was often found praying incessantly during the sessions of the Senate, even to the point of not being aware when the emperor was addressing him. His father, with his mother's permission, became

a monk before he passed away. His mother and sisters, and brothers later in life also joined the monastery. So you see, it was understandable why St. Gregory, progressed as well in the spiritual life as he did, because of the piety of his parents who did not merely talk about the faith but lived it. They were people of prayer.

Today, as we who are parents well know, it is difficult to raise children in the way of the Lord, in the midst of the society that we live in. Our Church teaches us to follow the Gospel of Christ, that there are moral absolutes and there are wrong and right behaviors... that it is not okay for a man and woman, or a man and a man, or a woman and a woman to cohabit in a carnal relationship outside of marriage. And the world it seems no longer believes and accepts that fact that marriage as designed by God and lived for centuries universally is limited to being between a man and a woman. Period. I was shocked to hear that on ABC Family Channel on Monday night the plot of a family show included two 13 year old boys kissing.

So how do we handle being in this world that is sinful, where Christians in Egypt are being killed for the faith, and where we as Christians are being marginalized in our own nation, for uphold conservative family values? Yes we need to engage where we can and make a courageous moral stand. However, the best way for us to be good parents in this day and age is for us to be men and women of prayer. Not just the saying of prayers, or the keeping of some prayer rule, all of this is important, but rather we are prayerful people. And what exactly do I mean by being prayerful people. I mean just what it sounds like that we are filled with prayer. That everything we do is done in a prayerful, peaceful and godly way. And in this prayerful state we will have the courage

and strength to guide our children along the right path, even when it is so out of step with the rest of the world.

But how is this possible, we are not monks and Nuns. We don't live in a monastery like St. Gregory and his family. This is true, but the Church by placing the example of St. Gregory Palamas in front of us today, is telling us we indeed can be prayerful.

St Gregory was known for teaching his contemporary monks the prayer of the heart, the Jesus prayer. We all know this prayer, Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have Mercy on Me A Sinner! A very short and easy prayer, one which the fathers of the Church says sums up the whole Gospel, that Jesus is Lord and Son of God, and that we are Sinners in need of his Help, and He can Save us through his mercy. St. Gregory prayed this prayer so much that eventually it became automatic, and with every beat of his heart, the prayer was being prayed. You try it sometime, go somewhere very quiet and listen to your heart beat. As you breath in say *Lord Jesus Christ*, as you exhale, *son of God*, as you inhale again, *have mercy on me*, and as you exhale *a sinner* . When you do this for awhile, you begin to feel more relaxed and peaceful. And it is something you can do no matter where you are as you always breath, right? If you are creative, you can tie the saying of the Jesus prayer with some repetitive act you do at the office, like making a copy, or stuffing envelopes, or hitting save on the computer. If you are a carpenter, it might even be easier, as you are walking from one place to another, picking up supplies or as you are nailing. If you are a teacher, between classes, as you are walking in the halls with your students, or when that bully is standing up in your class room and you are ready to run to the phone to call security. Students as you are walking

the halls, as you are quietly listening to your teachers, when you are feeling lonely, or upset, or as you are taking your tests. Or you who are in your golden years and are enjoying the life of retirement, as you are relaxing in your favorite chair or perhaps if you are feeling a bit lonely, say the prayer, feel the presences of God!

The more we pray, the more opportunity there is for the Holy Spirit to come within us and fill our hearts and minds with Wisdom, for you know that the Holy Spirit is the Comforter and the Spirit of Truth. And what parent doesn't need wisdom and comfort and strength, Right?

St Gregory was a man of prayer and he was obedient to the Church, he observed the fasts, and all the commandments willingly. And because he was so obedient, because he struggled so mightily, he was given great grace to endure suffering, and suffering he did, he was slandered, arrested, falsely accused, deposed by the Church at one point, only to be later re-instated. Talk about a rollercoaster ride of life. But he was given great consolation by Christ, when he prayed, he was given the grace to shine with the uncreated light of Christ, to bask in the warmth of the Holy Spirit.

For us today, in the here in now, who are no where near as close to God as St. Gregory, I hope and pray, that we listen to the voice of the Church today, and continue to be faithful by practicing the ascetical disciplines of the Church during this Lenten season, increasing our prayer life and fasting in a meaningful way, so that with lightened bodies we can better pray and be more inclined to forgiving and helping others who are in need. We don't practice these things just so we find favor with God. He doesn't need our prayers or our fasting. We do so to put us in a better frame of mind and soul to realize

that we need the Lord in our life, we need him to guide us and strengthen us and show us what we must do to have a calm and peaceful life, and how to fight off the Devil and his warriors who are battling mightily against us.

Let us take home with us today, the need for us to not only pray more, but rather to be more prayerful or prayer-filled, so that like St. Gregory Palamas, we may find the way to paradise along with our entire family. Let us leave today with the prayer of Jesus on our lips, Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have Mercy on Me A Sinner. Let us bring this simple prayer to our homes, to our schools, to our places of work, as we are surfing the net, as we are playing our sports, as we are eating, as we are sleeping, so that we may help to fill the world with the light of Christ. May this be the fruit of our Lenten Journey that by being ourselves more prayerful people, not only will we find peace,, not only will our hardened hearts be softened, but so too, will our world, and the entire cosmos be renewed.

Truly, may our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Have Mercy on each and everyone of us. Don't give up on the Fast You Can Do it For Christ is in our Midst! And He is and ever Shall Be!!!