

SYNAXARIA OF THE TRIODION

by Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos

SECOND SUNDAY of LENT

On the same day, the Second Sunday of the Fast, we celebrate the memory of our Father among the Saints, Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica.

Verses

The Fountain of light leadeth unto the unwaning light
The radiant herald of the light and the truly great mind.

Synaxarion

This son of the Divine Light that knows no evening, a true man of God and wondrous servant and minister of Divine things, hailed from Constantinople. His parents were illustrious and notable people, who were zealous to adorn with virtue and education not only the outward and perceptible man, but also, and much more importantly, the inward and invisible man. When Saint Gregory was very young, his father, Constantine, reposed, and his mother, Kalliste, brought up and instructed Saint Gregory, his brothers, and his sisters, educating and admonishing them in the Lord and with sacred literature, and she also saw to it that they be furnished with secular wisdom by studying at school. Saint Gregory, combining eagerness with his innate intelligence, in a short time acquired every kind of philosophical knowledge, but when he was about twenty years old, reckoning all such things to be unspiritual and more illusory than dreams, he sought to ascend to God, the Cause and Bestower of all wisdom, and to dedicate his whole self to Him through a more perfect way of life. Hence, he disclosed to his mother his God-loving purpose and his great longing and ardent love for God; and he found her to be similarly disposed, for she had been thinking along the same lines for a long time, and she rejoiced as much as he did. She immediately gathered her children around her, and, saying with gladness, "Behold, I and the children which God hath given me," attempted to determine what attitude they had towards good things and revealed to them the intention of their older brother. And he, speaking words of exhortation to them, succeeded in winning them over more quickly than one could reasonably expect, and they all eagerly entertained the same longing as he did, namely, to flee from the world.

Hence, after distributing his property to the poor, in accordance with the Gospel, and forsaking imperial favor and the honors and plaudits of the imperial court, Saint Gregory followed Christ. He settled his mother and sisters in a convent and, taking his brothers with him, went to the mountain that is the namesake of holiness, Mount Athos. But he persuaded his brothers to remain for a time in other monasteries, perhaps because they did not have the opportunity to pursue the spiritual life together. He placed himself under obedience to a wondrous man who lived as a Hesychast with God alone, near the Holy Monastery of Vatopedi, Nikodemos by name, from whom he learned every commandment and every virtue through practice and in humility of soul. There, through a mystical revelation, he received the help and invincible succor of the All-Pure Theotokos in all matters. After Nikodemos departed to God, Saint Gregory spent several years in the Great Lavra, where he lived with the greatest of zeal, having the mind of a venerable Elder, but attracted by love for silence, he withdrew from the Lavra and embraced the solitary life. Ever adding longing to longing and striving to abide with God unceasingly, he gave himself over to extreme austerity, and restraining his senses from all sides with scrupulous attentiveness and raising his mind to God, he devoted every moment to prayer and the study of theology. Living an exceptionally disciplined life and with God as his ally, he mightily conquered the demons that made war on him, and cleansing his soul by standing for whole nights and with fountains of tears, he became a choice vessel of the gifts of the Divine Spirit. He had frequent visions of God, and more wonderful still, even after moving to Thessalonica—on account of the Hagarene onslaughts—and establishing a skete in Berrhoia, and being compelled to have contact with certain of the cities, not even then did he depart from his strict way of life.

After completely purifying both body and soul over a period of many years, he received the great anointing of the Priesthood by Divine decree. He celebrated the Divine Mystagogy like one without a body and, as it were, in a state of ecstasy, such that the mere sight of him aroused compunction in the souls of those who saw him; he was truly great and was known by those who lived godly lives as a Spirit-bearer. He showed himself to be such even to those who only looked at him from the outside, having power over demons, delivering the possessed from their deception and trickery, transforming unfruitful trees into fruitful ones, and foreseeing the future, and he was adorned with all the other gifts and fruits of the Divine Spirit.

Since acting virtuously lies within our power, whereas encountering temptations does not depend on us, and without temptations there is no perfection or demonstration of faith in God (for when, it is said, action and desire come together for the good, the godly man is made perfect), this great Saint was permitted to meet with divers and constant temptations, in order that through all of these he might be proved truly perfect. What mind can comprehend what subsequently happened? What discourse could recount the machinations of the crafty Adversary, which were greater than

before, the libels and slanders hurled against Saint Gregory by the newly-manifest fighters against God, and all the maltreatment that he endured at their hands while contending for the sake of piety, over a period of twenty-three years in all? For the Italian beast, Barlaam of Calabria, puffed up by secular wisdom and fancying in the vanity of his own thoughts that he knew everything, stirred up a terrible war against the Church of Christ, against our godly Faith, and against those who unwaveringly adhered thereto. For in his derangement, he taught that the Grace which is common to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; that the Light of the age to come, wherein the righteous will shine like the sun, as Christ revealed in advance when He shone on Mount Tabor; and, quite simply, that every power and energy of the Tri-Hypostatic Godhead, and everything that is in any way whatsoever distinct from the Divine Nature, is created. Those who piously profess that that most Divine light and every Divine power and energy are uncreated, since none of the attributes that belongs naturally to God is of recent origin, Barlaam called “ditheists” and “polytheists,” in lengthy orations and writings, as the Jews, Sabellios, and Arios also call us.

On account of this, the Divine Gregory, being an illustrious champion and defender of Orthodoxy, who fought, above all, for the sake of piety and who was slandered for doing so, was summoned by the Church to Constantinople. A Synod was convened by the most godly Emperor Andronikos, the fourth of the Palaiologoi, who was a defender of Orthodoxy. Barlaam came to this Synod, where he presented his heretical doctrines and his accusations against the pious. Filled with the Divine Spirit, the great Saint Gregory, girt with invincible power from on high, stopped that mouth which had been opened against Go and finally, by his fiery orations and writings, put Barlaam to shame and reduced his heretical tinder to ashes. Wherefore, unable to endure the shame, this enemy of the true Faith fled to the Latins, whence he came. Immediately after this, before a Synod Saint Gregory confuted Akindynos—or rather, Polykindynos—and tore asunder his writings with refutatory discourses. Not even in the wake of this did those who shared their corrupt way of thinking cease to war against God’s Church. Hereafter, with much pressure from the Holy Synod and from Emperor John Cantacouzenos himself, and, above all, persuaded by Divine decree, Saint Gregory was elevated to the Episcopacy, being appointed Archpastor of the Holy Church in Thessalonica. In this capacity, he valiantly and steadfastly accomplished much greater struggles than before on behalf of the Orthodox Faith. For he destroyed the evil successors of Akindynos and Barlaam, who turned out to be many and vexatious, the frightful offspring of frightful wild beasts, and he refuted both their teachings and their writings in many different ways, not once, or twice, or thrice, but many times and through many discourses and not under one emperor or Patriarch, but under three successive emperors, an equal number of Patriarchs, and not a few Synods with Divinely-inspired orations and treatises, and he finally won a mighty victory over them. There were some who remained impenitent, tak-

ing no thought for Divine retribution; for there still exist remnants of all heresies, which speak with effrontery against the Saints who vanquished them, to say nothing of that most insolent Jewish race, which even now rages against Christ.

Such, in brief, and so many were the victories of this great Saint over the impious. God, in His ineffable ways, sent him out also as a teacher to the Orient. He was sent as an envoy from Thessalonica to Constantinople in order to reconcile the Emperors, who were at odds with each other; but when he arrived in Gallipoli, he was arrested by the Hagarenes and detained for an entire year, passing martyringly from place to place and from city to city, dauntlessly teaching the Gospel of Christ. Those who were steadfast he confirmed still more, beseeching them to be loyal to the Orthodox Faith, and he strengthened with Divine wisdom those who were confused about the Faith and who put various difficulties and questions to him regarding current events (that is, the astounding progress and expansion of the most ungodly race of the Hagarenes), applying the most effective remedy to what they had to say. To the rest, the infidels and those Christians who had fallen into pitiful apostasy, converted to Islam, and ridiculed our Faith, he spoke frequently and openly about the Incarnate Economy of our Lord and God and about our veneration of the Precious Cross and the Holy Icons; he also talked about Mohammed and about many other questions posed by them. Some admired him, but others were furious at him and stretched out their hands, and they would have put him to a martyr death had they not, by Divine Providence, seen fit to spare him, in the hope of receiving money in exchange for him—which is, in fact, what happened. The great Saint was freed by certain Christ-loving people, and the bloodless Martyr returned in triumph to his flock, being adorned, in addition to his many other great gifts and accomplishments, with the wounds of Christ, having in himself that which was lacking of the afflictions of Christ, according to St. Paul.

Let us indicate some of his characteristic traits. He was exceedingly meek and humble, insofar as the conversation did not have to do with God and things Divine; for in these matters he was very combative. He did not remember wrongs at all and was forbearing; he was eager to requite, as far as possible, with good things those who struck him as being in any way evil. He had a firm aversion to accusations made against other people; he displayed patient endurance and magnanimity in the face of difficulties; he was above pleasure and vainglory; he was always frugal and did not give excessive attention to his bodily needs, despite being in poor health for much of his life; in his patience, he was calm and peaceful, and he was always so gracious that it was quite evident to those who saw him; above all, he was pensive, attentive, and focussed, and as a result of this, his eyes were almost never devoid of tears, but poured forth fountains of tears.

So martyringly did he struggle, from the beginning of his life until its end, against the passions and the demons, driving heretics far away from the Church of Christ and expounding the Orthodox Faith in orations and

writings, through which he confirmed practically all of Divinely-inspired Scripture, that his life and words constitute a kind of recapitulation and authentication of the lives and words of the Saints. Having shepherded his flock in an Apostolic and God-pleasing manner for twelve years, adorned it with moral sermons, guided it to the heavenly sheepfold, and proved himself to be, as it were, a fellow-worker with all the Orthodox, both living and yet to come, he was translated to the heavenly life in the year A.D. 1359, having lived for a total of sixty-three years. He committed his spirit into the hands of God, but to his flock he left his sacred body as a Relic, which is preserved in the Metropolis of Thessalonica and which, in due course, became extraordinarily distinguished and glorified as an inheritance and a most precious treasure; for it ever bestows miracles on any who approach it with faith and deliverance from all maladies, not a few of which are recorded in the story of his life.

By his intercessions, O God, have mercy on us and save us. Amen.

