

The Second Sunday of the Great Fast - 2017
Homily-Reflection for the
Sunday of the Paralytic & St. Gregory Palamas

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Let us begin this reflection in the name...

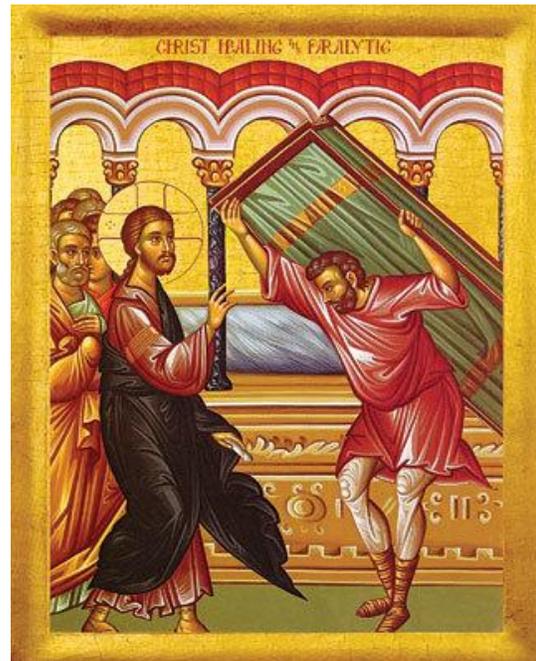
In the first reading from Hebrews we hear about the transcendence of God, "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands." At the beginning of time, God created everything out of nothing. Therefore He is greater than anything in creation and He is infinitely beyond creation.

Then it states about creation, "They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail."

The Scriptures teach there will be "a new heavens and a new earth." Creation will be changed and renewed but God never changes. This is important for us as Christians: if God doesn't change, then

His truth does not change. It says later in Hebrews, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for all ages." This is something we can depend on (and rejoice in) as Byzantine Christians. Our Eastern Christian Faith has not changed. We hold to the same faith which was, as St. Jude wrote, "once for all delivered to the saints."

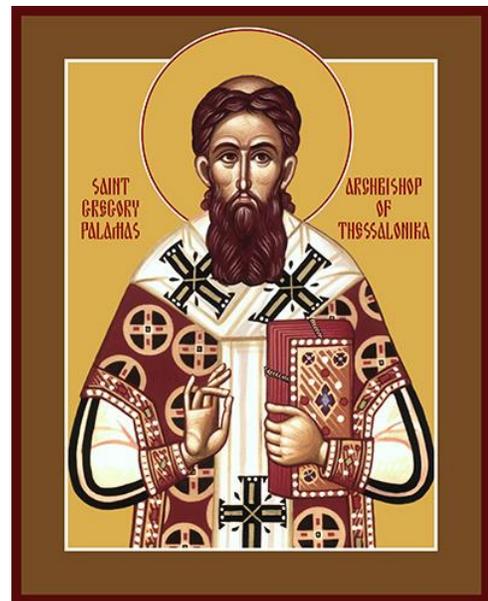
Our Byzantine Liturgy which we celebrate each week is also the same basic Liturgy which goes all the way back to the Apostles in Jerusalem (known as the Liturgy of St. James). In our Eastern tradition, proper faith and proper worship



always go hand and hand. If you have the right faith you WILL glorify God properly. This is the real meaning of the word "orthodox": to give right glory to God and to have right faith in Him. So whereas the world's "truth" constantly changes, God's truth does not change.

Then Hebrews turns to the majesty of God's Only-begotten Son, stating, "But to which of the angels has He ever said: 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool'"? To sit at the right hand of a king was to share fully in his royal power. God never said to an angel "sit at my right hand" but He did say this to His Only-begotten Son. Jesus Christ is truly Son of God sharing the same divine nature as His Father -just as much as my sons share in the same human nature as me and are equal with me.

Today's Gospel gives us deeper insight into the mission of God's Only-Begotten Son. Jesus heals the paralytic. Our Lord came to heal that which was sick. He came to restore that which was broken. He came to save that which was lost. While the story of Jesus' encounter with the paralytic is certainly true, it also serves as an analogy. Mankind became paralyzed by sin and death. Our first parent's sin led to death. Our fear of death and our own mortality now leads us into sin. Hebrews states elsewhere about our Lord, "He Himself... shared in [our human nature] that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Mankind needs no longer to be paralyzed by sin and fear of death. Christ has conquered death and gives life to those who turn to Him with their whole hearts.



This is also the Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas. St. Gregory was a 14th century monk of Mt. Athos who devoted his entire life to prayer, repentance and union with God through the practice of hesychasm. *Hesychia* means 'silence.' This prayer of silence centered on continuous praying of the name of Jesus, especially

in the Jesus Prayer. St. Gregory was also a great Byzantine Church teacher who helped us understand deeper a teaching that went all the way back to St. Basil the Great. God in His Essence is utterly unknowable (incomprehensible), while at the same time, we can come to know God through His Energies (i.e., His actions and operations in the world).

According to our Byzantine Fathers, we actually participate in the life of God. As the Apostle St. Peter wrote, we are partakers of the Divine Nature! We participate in God through His Energies called Grace. One of the most powerful ways we receive God's Energies are through His Sacraments.

We are now in the Great Fast which is a time to reflect on our relationship with God. Do we recognize the transcendence of our God and hold Him in awe? Do we hold fully to the "once for all delivered faith" and try follow His commandments? Do we give God the glory we should by attending Church and worshipping Him in His holy house weekly, on His Holy Day?

[Whereas some Christians go to Church to see what they can get out of it, in our tradition, we go to the Divine Liturgy to see what we can GIVE to Him: To glorify Him for all He has done for us. And, like always, it is in giving that we truly receive.]

Finally, in our daily lives do we follow the example of St. Gregory Palamas and go to God daily in the silence and secret of our heart? As we continue our Lenten discipline, like St. Gregory, we can pray the Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner" to draw closer to Him. Let's not forget that when we pray, fast, and give alms, we do this in order to be freed from the paralysis of sin and the fear of death and to open ourselves more fully to the love of God and His truth in our lives.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Sub-Dn. Lazarus Der-Ghazarian

A.D. 2017