

Second Sunday of Great Lent



The Holy Church calls the second Sunday of Great Lent the Sunday of the light creating fasts. In its Divine services, in line with the destruction of the sinful condition of man, it is descriptively and touchingly represented in the church hymns, which explains the Gospel parable about the Prodigal son, and praises the fast as a means to the beneficial inner light, and posits in this glorification a new impulse for the ascetic effort of the fast. The Orthodox teaching about fasting as a means for the beneficial inner light is opened with special power in the commemoration on this Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica and Wonderworker (see Nov. 14). St. Gregory is known as the one who exposed the heresy of Barlaam, the Calabrian monk, who rejected the Orthodox teaching about the blessed light, which illuminates the internal person sometimes openly visible (as for example on Tabor and Sinai), and who did not admit the possibility to achieve this inner light through both prayer and fasting and other individual efforts _). At the Council in Constantinople called in 1341 concerning this heresy Barlaam, his disciple Akindynos, and their other accomplices were condemned for this false teaching. And during the subsequent time of his life St. Gregory zealously struggled for Orthodoxy, "not once", but "many times many" through his inspired speeches and writings denying the teachings and compositions of the evil followers of Akindynos and Barlaam. For this ascetic effort for the benefit of the Holy Church, and also for the confession and witness for the faith and Christ's flock, for the sanctity of the strict ascetic life and the deep edification for all ascetics through his works, St. Gregory is also glorified in the service on this day by the Holy Church. Thus the Holy Church, celebrating on the previous Sunday the triumph of Orthodoxy over all heresies, on the present Sunday celebrates the victory of Orthodox ascetic teachings over all false doctrines opposing it. The first celebration is in general for all Orthodox Christians; the second is for the use of ascetics, the monks. Patriarch Philotheus of Constantinople composed the church service in honor of the originator of this latter celebration, for St. Gregory. In it St. Gregory is also glorified, as "the labor of theology, the flaming mouthpiece of grace, the honorable vessel of the Spirit, the unshakable pillar of the church, the great adornment of the universe", "the sword and arrows for the slanderers" that broke, "the pride of Barlaamites, and any heretical power", "like the web of spiders" he brushed away, "the preacher of the

divine light, the initiate of the heavenly mysteries of the Trinity", "the healer of human infirmities", "the most holy father, the good shepherd", "you gave your soul for your sheep", "the firm sufferer and faster", "the advocate of the pious, and the opponent of the impious, the fervent defender of the faith, the great guide and teacher", "the adornment of monastic life, glorified in action and contemplation".

Troparion, tone 8

O light of Orthodoxy, teacher of the Church, its confirmation.

O ideal of monks and invincible champion of theologians.

O wonderworking Gregory, glory of Thessalonica and preacher of grace.

Always pray to save our souls.

Kontakion, tone 4

Now is the time for action.

Judgment is at the doors.

So let us rise and fast,

Offering alms with tears of compunction and crying:

"Our sins are more in number than the sands of the sea;

But forgive us, O Creator of all,

So that we may receive the incorruptible crowns."

Liturgy of St. Basil the Great. Epistle: Heb. 1:10-2:3; sel. 304. For St. Gregory: Heb. 7:26-8:2; sel. 318. **Gospel:** Mark 2:1-12; sel. 7. For St. Gregory: John 10:9-16; sel. 36.

If a feast of a saint with the Polyeleos falls on this day, then the service for St. Gregory is dropped and is sung at Great Compline.

_) Barlaam propagated in the East the teaching of Abelard that the truth is only true when it is proved exclusively from the beginning of reason, and closely connected to this rationalism the teaching of Thomas Aquinas that God is entirely essence and that the essence and action in Him do not differ. This and other teachings rested on the ruminations and amplifications of the rationalism of Arianism then in the West. The Barlaamites taught that the light of Tabor was something material, created, revealed in space and painted in air because it was seen by the corporal eyes of people who were not yet consecrated by grace. Through such, i. _ . through the created, they recognized all the divine actions and even the gifts of the Holy Spirit: the Spirit of wisdom and reason and so forth, not being afraid to reduce God to the category of the created, "subverting light and the blessed righteousness in the Kingdom of the Father of Heaven, the power and action of the Trihypostatic Divinity" (see the Synaxarion). And in general through their rationalistic Arian teaching the Barlaamites threatened to shake the very bases

of Christian teachings on faith, asceticism and morals. St. Palamas and his fellow Athonite ascetics taught and proved by their very life what could not be proved by philosophical reasoning, but the constant purification of the soul accomplished by silent feelings and thoughts, incessant exercise in meditating on God and intelligent prayer or through intelligent action the person can achieve the inner light from above. But the essence of the Deity which, abiding in the unapproachable light cannot be seen, is inaccessible to our limitations and our sinfulness, and the action of the Deity (*energi*, a is an expression used in this sense by Aristotle), i.e. the active movement can be seen as the manifestation of the essence. This active manifestation of the Divine essence usually is opened by silence in the image of the light, which can sometimes be seen even by corporal eyes. For example, during the revelation of the Divinity of Jesus Christ on Tabor and during all the appearances and revelations of the Deity in the form of light and fire, for example, by Moses and Elijah, or by ancient Christian ascetics, for example, Anthony the Great, all those who have seen God saw with both corporal and noetic eyes the Divine light, the reflection of the Deity. This light of Tabor and all immediate actions, the manifestations of the Deity is called by them the uncreated Divinity, as the essence of God is uncreated. This name in the addition to the moral actions and acts of grace of the Deity stands for better understanding, which the Prophet Isaiah calls the Spirit of wisdom and reason, the Spirit of council and fortress, the Spirit of knowledge and piety, the Spirit of the fear of God. The teaching on the subject of essence is mysterious and incomprehensible for the natural mind, but is convincing, immutable for the believing heart! St. Palamas, having acted as the defender of this doctrine and the fervent expositor of the Barlaamites, rendered the Church a rather important service. He was revealed the spokesman of the purely contemplative direction, without extreme measures, into which, with all good intentions, some church writers sometimes fell. St. Palamas and his Palamites from all of the earliest contemplative spiritual world, made everything better, developing a reconciliatory direction. Many classically educated and prolific writers from the school of St. Palamas have written many articles in this reconciliatory, moderate direction. Many of his disciples have become instructors of the intelligent action in all Orthodox countries, mainly in Russia. Their views and rules live in the ascetical environment up to now and present a great interest for people of all callings and situations (See details in the *Tserkovniya Vedomosti*, (Church News) 1890, 9).

*S. V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp 516-517.
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