



## Second Week of the Great Lent

The previous Sunday we celebrated the Triumph of Orthodoxy, the triumph of that true Church of Christ to which, by the grace of God, we all belong. But the triumph of Orthodoxy is not only a historical event, dear brethren; it is not revealed only in the fact that for almost 2,000 years, despite diverse and most terrible persecutions and heresies, this Church, founded by Christ Himself and His apostles, continues to exist unchanged and to safeguard the fullness of truth. The Church is not some bureaucratic institution; the Church is a living assembly of all its members and, therefore, the full triumph of Orthodoxy occurs only when all the members of the Church are truly Orthodox, i.e. when the faithful incorporate their faith into their lives, when their lives become transformed by Orthodoxy, when they live in an Orthodox manner.

But precisely how should we live in an Orthodox manner? In what way must Orthodoxy permeate our entire life? To this answer the Church dedicates the remaining four Sundays of the Great Lent. First of all, there is **prayer**. Through prayer we come directly into contact with God, our Creator. Prayer is the breath of life for us, without prayer we spiritually suffocate. Prayer is just as essential to our soul as air is to our body. And so – as a prime example of prayer – on this, the second Sunday of lent, the Church offers us Saint Gregory of Palamas, teacher of the highest form of prayer – the inner prayer, the internal spiritual endeavor.

Another factor of Orthodoxy in our life is **the bearing of one's cross**. Thus, as a supreme example – on the third Sunday of lent the Church brings out to us the life-giving Cross of our Lord. Subsequently, on the fourth Sunday of lent the Church gives us St. John of the Ladder, who teaches us another important aspect of Orthodoxy in our life – **the acquisition of virtues**.

But perhaps we already pray more-or-less, we more-or-less patiently endure the cross which we have been given in life, and perhaps we have even acquired some virtues, and yet we are still not living entirely in an Orthodox manner. Why? Because we sin. All of us are already born with the seeds of sin within us, and during our lifetime we further amass our own sins. If we continue to live with these sins, we cannot be truly Orthodox. However, the Church offers us a wonderful means of overcoming this handicap in our life, and that is – **repentance**. And so, as a supreme example of penitence and also an example of how we should never despair of our sins, – on the fifth Sunday of lent the Church gives us St. Mary of Egypt, who from the worst possible sinner turned not only into a righteous person, but literally into an angel on earth. In this fashion, throughout the entire Great Lent the Church reveals to us the treasures of the Orthodox faith and teaches us how to incorporate this faith into our lives.

But now let us dwell on the lesson of this Sunday, which is prayer. Saint Gregory Palamas came from Constantinople, lived in the 14th century and was the Archbishop of Thessalonika. He attained a highly virtuous life, became an eminent theologian and wrote many spiritual writings. But his greatest achievement was the revival of the ancient art of inner prayer, which flourished among the great Church Fathers – desert-dwellers and ascetics, – and which in time became forgotten. This method was also called the “internal endeavor,” because those who used it not only prayed at certain

times, for example in the mornings and evenings, as we barely manage to do, but remained in prayer constantly.

Such a state of constant prayer became possible only after a long and hard effort, when a person learned to disregard all external stimuli of the surrounding environment, learned to focus his attention within himself, which was called “to bring the mind down into the heart,” and then, miraculously and by the grace of God, a direct link between man and God Himself became established. This was made possible through the use of the so-called “Jesus prayer”: **“O Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner.”** This brief prayer was constantly said in such a way that it became incorporated into one’s very breathing, and thus prayer literally became part of one’s breath, even when one was doing something, or talking to someone, etc.

For us, in our extremely busy lives, with the constant hurry in which we live, with the manner in which we are bombarded by external stimuli, – the process of internal endeavor, dear brethren, is beyond our capability. However, its most elementary part – the Jesus prayer – remains quite accessible even to us. We may not be able to combine it with our breathing, but we can certainly manage to say it continuously within ourselves: while traveling to and from work, while doing household chores, while going shopping – we can always at least keep this prayer in our mind. And you will see, dear brethren, how the fruits of this prayer will quickly reveal themselves: by saying this prayer over and over again, and by continuously repeating the sweetest name of Jesus Christ, we will not be so quick to pay attention to all the temptations that surround us, we will not be so quick to take offense or pass judgment on others, we will not be so quick to fall into despair; on the contrary, as long as we occupy our minds with the Jesus prayer, we will be calm, joyous and peaceful. The Scriptures tell us that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Such is the treasure of prayer which Orthodoxy gives us.

Let us take advantage of this wonderful time of the Great Lent, dear brethren, in order to apply some effort and try to teach ourselves the Jesus prayer, which is the mightiest weapon against the evil spirits and, at the same time, a source of spiritual blessings and joy for us.

“O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon us, sinners.” Amen.

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