



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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SUNDAY 15 MARCH 2020

SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS - SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

EPISTLE: The Reading is from St Paul’s Letter to the Hebrews [1:10-14, 2:1-3] And: “You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands: 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.” But to which of the angels has He ever said: “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool”? Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him.

EXPLANATION: This Epistle teaches us not to neglect the salvation granted in God the Son. Salvation is from the Father, in the Son and through the Holy Spirit. Here, God the Father is addressing the Son as “God”, as “Lord” revealing the Son’s divinity, consubstantial with the Father (one in essence). The Son is the Word or “Logos” of the Father or the “force of power of the Father”, of His “operation”. Thus is it said

that the Father creates all things by the Son in the Holy Spirit. In the beginning the Son made all things out of nothing. "All things became by Him and without Him came nothing into being." Therefore it was Christ's part and His alone, both to bring again the renewal of Creation and Salvation of the world. For He alone, being Word of the Father and above all was in consequence both able to re-create all, and worthy to suffer on behalf of all and to be an ambassador for all with the Father. Therefore, only the image of the Father (the Son) could recreate the likeness of the image of men. Men could not have done it, for they are only made after the image; nor could angels have done it, for they are not the images of God. The Word of God came in His Own Person, because it was He alone, the Image of the Father, Who could recreate man of the image of God and reconcile man with the Father. And He has raised mankind to also sit with Him on His throne at the right hand of the Father for all eternity in the Kingdom of Heaven. [1:10-13] The role of angels is "to minister for those who will inherit salvation". Instead of ruling over man, angels are partners in service with us. [1:14]

GOSPEL: The Reading is from the Gospel of St Mark [2:1-12] And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them. Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you." And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts. "Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk?'" "But that you may know that the Son of Man has

power on earth to forgive sins” – He said to the paralytic, “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!”

EXPLANTION: This passage has a threefold symbolism relating to our preparation for Easter:- (1) We must come to Christ in faith and let Him heal us of our spiritual paralysis. The faith of the four men was so great that they even made an opening in the roof through which they lowered the paralytic. The paralytic also had strong faith otherwise he would not have agreed to be carried if he did not believe that he could be healed. First, Jesus forgives the sins of the sick man and then He cures the disease, since the most severe illnesses occur for the most part as a result of sins. The torture of sin and guilt was the deeper cause of this man’s paralysis. If Jesus had healed only the body of this man, the guilt of unforgiveness would have found expression in some other physical ailment. The physical paralysis was only an outer manifestation of the inner spiritual paralysis. Sin is the greatest paralysis. It paralyzes man, body and soul. Jesus came to cure this paralysis. We come to Jesus paralysed by anxiety and fear and leave with peace. That’s why the sacrament of Confession is so important, because if we confess with a contrite heart we will be forgiven and we will be healed of our physical and spiritual paralysis. (2) Nothing should prevent us from coming to Christ for help. Nothing deterred the four men from getting to Christ. Imagine the amazement of those in the crowded house when they heard the crumbling noise above them; felt the dust and debris falling all over them, and looked up to see the ceiling open and a pallet bearing a sick man descending on them. Similarly, there is no excuse for any Christian not attending Church services, prayer and good works, especially during the Lenten period. (3) We must help each other come to Christ. The four men are the kind of people who delight the heart of God. They not only wanted to see Jesus themselves, but they also thought to bring with them the paralytic who otherwise could not have come. After we have brought ourselves to Christ, we have a

responsibility to bring others to Him. Isn't this our whole purpose as a Church – that is, Sunday School teachers, parents, youth workers, choirs, members, etc, each in his way, to bring others into the healing presence of Christ? [2:1-5] When the Pharisees said that only God can confess sins, they unwittingly confirmed the divinity of Christ, because as Jesus said to them, “What is easier, to cure the paralytic or to forgive sins?” If Jesus is able to heal the body, is He then not also able to cure the soul (that is, forgive sin)? Therefore, it follows that He is God. So why did they accuse Him of blasphemy? Because of their sin of pride which confused their reason. They believed that it was more difficult to heal the body (a visible action) rather than the soul (invisible action). They thought that it was easier for Christ to say that the soul had been healed because this healing was invisible. They reasoned that if Christ was God, He would have healed the body first rather than pretend to forgive sin which cannot be seen. Therefore, the Saviour shows them that He is able to do both. Jesus tries to tell them that it is easier to heal the body. To create the world was easy for Christ. He said, “Let there be light”, and there was light. But to convert hard-hearted people like the Pharisees from the self-centredness which is natural to them into love which is God's own nature, that is more difficult; that requires the agony and death of Christ on the Cross. [2:6-12]

ST GREGORY PALAMAS (1296-1359) Today marks the feast day of St Gregory Palamas. He was a monk on Mt Athos who found the true meaning of Christian life. He became Archbishop of Thessalonika in 1349 and defended “Hesychasm” – the tradition of inner mystical prayer which brings about the union of mind and heart. He also explained the difference between God's essence and His uncreated energy.