

St. Gregory Palamas and The Prayer of the Heart

On Mount Athos in the early 14th Century, the young novice Gregory was especially attached to the prayer of the heart, also known as the Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (see Luke 18:38).

The experienced practice of the Jesus Prayer, requiring solitude and silence combined with physical exercises and breathing methods, is called "hesychasm" (from the Greek hesychos, meaning inner stillness, peace, or silence). Those practicing it are called "hesychasts." Inner silence of this kind makes us capable of listening to the whispers of the divine within us. "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). Therefore, the Jesus Prayer is the prayer of the whole person, involving the human body, mind, soul, and heart.

The hesychasts spoke and wrote about their unique experience. They taught people to pray without ceasing, as the Apostle Paul commands all Christians to do (1 Thessalonians 5:17). They explained that in prayer, man is filled from within with the eternal glory, with the divine light beheld at the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor. The hesychast Gregory explains:

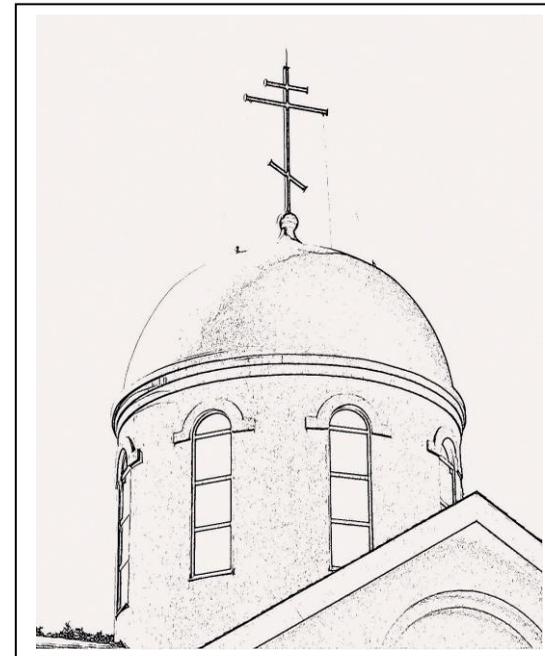
For, on the day of the Transfiguration, that Body, source of the light of grace, was not yet united with our bodies; it illuminated from outside those who worthily approached it, and sent the illumination into the soul by the intermediary of the physical eyes; but now, since it is mingled with us and exists in us, it illuminates the soul from within. (Triads I. 3.38)

The Jesus Prayer is not a mantra, as in Eastern religions, and it cannot be taken as such. The prayer's call for "mercy" involves inner repentance and change. It is also a prayer practiced within the sacramental life of the Church, a prayer combined with Holy Communion, confession, reading the Word of God, fasting, loving one's neighbor, and so forth. Finally, it is not a prayer using "vain repetitions" or babble, but a prayer recited again and again, in persistence (Luke 18:1), from the inner heart of man reaching the divine heights of glory, confessing Christ as the Lord and Savior, in sincerity, humility, and faith.

For that prayer (the Jesus Prayer) is true and perfect. It fills the soul with Divine grace and spiritual gifts. As chrism perfumes the jar the more strongly the tighter it is closed, so prayer, the more fast it is imprisoned in the heart, abounds the more in Divine grace. . . . By this prayer the dew of the Holy Spirit is brought down upon the heart, as Elijah brought down rain on Mount Carmel. This mental prayer reaches to the very throne of God and is preserved in golden vials. . . . This mental prayer is the light which illumines man's soul and inflames his heart with the fire of love of God. It is the chain linking God with man and man with God. (Palamas, "Homily on how all Christians in general must pray without ceasing," in E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer, *Early Fathers of the Philokalia*, London: Faber and Faber, 1981, pp. 412–415)

Such prayer was practiced from the early Christian period. The hesychasts were drawn by God's unconditional graceful love (Romans 5:15) to fill a certain human need around them. Many hesychasts abandoned their solitude to serve their brothers, "since he who loves God must love his brother also" (1 John 4:21). Some cared for the sick in hospitals, like St. Basil the Great in Caesarea; others helped the poor, like St. John the Almsgiver in Alexandria; and yet others welcomed the faithful for confession. Nevertheless, they did not abandon the Jesus Prayer and their inner silence. In this sense, all Christians are called to follow this hesychast way leading to salvation.

WEEKLY



BULLETIN

Today is the beginning of our salvation, the revelation of the eternal mystery. The Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin as Gabriel announces the coming of Grace. Together with him let us cry to the Theotokos: Rejoice O Full of Grace, the Lord is with you!

Troparion of the Annunciation to the Theotokos

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March 20, 2022

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT - St. Gregory Palamas

Tone 6. Synaxis of the Venerable Fathers of the Kiev Caves Lavra. The Holy Fathers who were slain at the Monastery of St. Savva: Ven. John, Sergius, Patrick, and others (796). Monastic Martyr Euphrosynus of Sinozérsk (Novgorod—1612). Martyr Photině (Svetlana, Fatima), the Samaritan woman, and her sons: Martyrs Victor and Joses, and two others (ca. 66). Virgin Martyrs Alexandra, Claudia, Euphrasia, Matrona, Juliana, Euphemia and Theodosia, of Amisus (310). St. Nikéttas the Confessor, Archbishop of Apollonias in Bithynia (ca. 813-820).

Today's Readings:

Epistle: Hebrews 1:10-2:3 and Hebrews 7:26-8:2

Gospel: Mark 2:1-12 and John 10:9-16

Upcoming Service Schedule:

Today – **9:00am Divine Liturgy**

Wednesday – **6:00pm Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts**

Thursday – **7:00pm Festal Vigil** (*Feast of the Annunciation*)

Friday – **9:00am Vespertal Liturgy** (*Feast of the Annunciation*)

Saturday – **6:00pm Great Vespers**

Sunday – **9:00am Divine Liturgy**

Sunday – **5:00pm Deanery Mission Vespers** (*Trenton*)

Next Sunday's Readings:

Epistle: Hebrews 4:14-5:6

Gospel: Mark 8:34-9:1



*The Annunciation
to the Most-holy
Theotokos*

Please pray for vocations to the Holy Priesthood!

Special Prayers

We pray for all our parish family members, but we pray especially for those who are ill and afflicted. Among them are **Fr. Sergius Kuharsky, Zoran Pejovic, Lidia Zemlanicky, Ingrid Kopec, Betty James, Manya Shark, Deryl Tczap, George Stavrou, Rdr. John Economou, Linda Washenko, Margaret Makara, Eileen Zamerovsky, and Dorothy Studier.**

We are happy that you have joined us for worship today and hope that you will join us for coffee hour after the service. Please note that **reception of the Holy Eucharist** is only for baptized members of the Orthodox Church who have prepared with prayer, fasting, and periodic confession. You are encouraged to receive the blessed bread that is **offered at the end of the service** and which may also be offered to you by **one of your neighbors during Communion.**

Annunciations

TODAY – Following the Divine Liturgy, an **Agape Coffee Hour** will be served in the Parish Hall. **Team #1** is in charge of today's Coffee Hour.

TODAY – The parish youth are again **collecting food** for distribution to our neighbors in need. Grocery bags with lists of requested items will be available for anyone to pick up, fill, and return to the narthex over the next several Sundays.

TODAY – The **St. Catherine Society** meets at the end of Coffee Hour.

THIS MONDAY – A group from the parish will be attending a 7pm showing of the film **“Man of God”** at AMC Seacourt 10 Theater in Toms River. Please speak with Father Gary if you wish to attend but have not yet purchased tickets.

THIS WEDNESDAY – We celebrate the evening **Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts**. If you plan to **receive the Eucharist** at this service, please prepare by **fasting to the best of your ability**. If possible, eat and drink nothing from midnight. At the very least, try to abstain from eating and drinking after an early lunch. As it is whenever we receive the Eucharist, we should contemplate that it is **the very Body and Blood of Christ** that we are receiving. Please prepare with this firmly in mind.

THIS WEDNESDAY – After the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, a **pot-luck agape meal** will be held in the parish hall. All are invited to attend and bring along a dish to share.

THIS THURSDAY and FRIDAY – Archbishop Michael will be at our parish to lead us in the celebration of our patronal feastday – **The Annunciation to the Most-holy Theotokos**. Please plan to come celebrate the feast with our beloved hierarch!

Congratulations to Paul and Vicky Berger on the birth of their son, Nathan Joseph, who was born this past Monday. **Many Years** to them and to big brother, Matthew.

We continue the **Lenten discipline of fasting** from meat and dairy until the Great Feast of Holy Pascha. All fasting should be undertaken with regard to each person's ability to tolerate its physical demands. If you have questions about the Lenten discipline, please contact Father Gary for further clarification.

Next Sunday – **Team #2** will oversee the Coffee Hour. All Coffee Hours during Great Lent will include only foods appropriate for the Fast.

Next Sunday – A **Deanery Lenten Vespers** will be served at St. Vladimir Church in Trenton at 5pm. All are invited to participate in the service.

Condolences go out to former parishioners Brandon and Mary Bencivenga on the sudden and unexpected falling asleep of their son, Paul. May his memory be eternal!

We continue to pray for peace in Ukraine, for the withdrawal of Russian troops from that land, and for the wellbeing of the Ukrainian people. Lord, have mercy!