

The Confessor's Tongue for January 25, 2009

32nd Sunday After Pentecost: St. Gregory Theologian; New Russian Martyrs

In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

New Martyrs & Confessors of Russia

The Church has appointed this Sunday for the commemoration of the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, those who suffered and died for their faith under the atheist Bolsheviks.

Following the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks launched their primary assault against the Church, perceiving it as the bulwark of the old order they wanted to destroy. In the first 20 years of Communism, they nearly succeeded: from more than 50,000 working parishes in Russia in 1914, they had reduced the number to 100 by 1939. Most of the clergy had been slain or imprisoned in labor camps to die of overwork, malnutrition, and exposure. Unknown multitudes of the faithful suffered the same fate. But by God's grace and the blood of the martyrs, the Church in Russia survived and today is being renewed, in part through their faithful confession unto death and their prayers.

From Vespers for the Feast

O wondrous army of new athletes of Russia! Who is able to glorify you worthily? Truly blessed is the land which hath been watered by your blood; and its cities and villages are mystically hallowed, having received your precious relics, often without hymnody of the Church or honorable burial. Yet pray, O ye saints, for the land of Russia and for all who honor you!

January 25: St. Gregory the Theologian

St. Gregory was born about 326-328 in Arianzus near Nazianzus in Cappadocia where his father was at first the town mayor and then Bishop. As the son of promise, St. Gregory was dedicated to God from his very childhood by his own pious mother Nonna and very early began to find love for the ascetics of piety and remained as a virgin all his life.

At first he received his formation in Neocaesarea from Amphilocius, the famous teacher of rhetoric, then in Alexandria and, finally, in Athens where he became friends with St. Basil the Great. The saintly friends in Athens had a single room and one way of life. Only two roads were known to them: one is to the holy temples and the trainers in the Word of God and the other is to the school where they heard the teachers of the external sciences. They did not know the streets leading to the shows, considering them unworthy of their attention and that which does not lead to virtue.

In 356 St. Gregory was baptized and with no less zeal continued to study the Holy Scriptures and practice the asceticism of meditation on God, fasting and prayer. The desert strongly attracted St. Gregory, but he decided to remain in the home of his parents to personally serve them and at the same time to live as a strict ascetic. His clothes were rough, he ate bread with salt, drank water, his bed was the bare

ground and his regular occupation was exercise in the Word of God.

Known for his special love for his parents and always treating them with true filial respect and moving care, St. Gregory, at the insistence of his father, was ordained a presbyter. Being weighed down with this rank, which he did not want; St. Gregory left for the desert to St. Basil the Great. Having returned from there reconciled in soul, he also began to reconcile others: he reconciled the Nazianzians to his father. . .

In 372, St. Basil the Great used a few strong measures to incline his friend to accept the rank of bishop. St. Gregory considered himself, in deep humility, unworthy of this dignity, but, convinced by his father and although not willingly, accepted from St. Basil consecration as the bishop of Sasima. Meanwhile due to the intrigues of the enemies of St. Basil, another bishop was assigned to Sasima and St. Gregory conceded the Sasimian see to him.

The father of Gregory, feeling his infirmity, made St. Gregory his assistant, and St. Gregory, sharing the episcopal labors of his father, preached the Word of God and enlightened the presbyters. St. Gregory was a feeder of the needy, minister of the sick, repose of strangers, comfort of those living in misery and protector of the unfortunate. After the death of his father, St. Gregory left for solitude in the Seleucian Monastery of St. Thecla.

In 379 St. Gregory, as most experienced in the affairs of faith, was invited by the Orthodox to Constantinople where the heretics dominated for 46 years for the building up of the church. St. Gregory could preach only in one private house when he was in the capital, and at first only before a small number of the Orthodox. . . . At the same time St. Gregory with his irresistible power of persuasiveness refuted the objections of the heretics (Arians, Eunomians, Macedonians, Novatians and Apollinarians) and with inimitable skill revealed the true teaching of the Church. As the inhabitants of the capital, enemies of Orthodoxy, being seduced only by the external glamour of luxury, at first looked contemptuously at the holy elder, stooping under the burden of years, with his simple and poor clothes, his bare head and his face exhausted by tears of repentance. They laughed at his origins from an unknown poor village. St. Gregory with the power of his mind and eloquence turned to shame the malicious attacks of his enemies. The fame of the inspired orator grew quickly and his sermons were flowed down for the same heretics, but also Jews and Pagans, to hear. He surprised all with his profound knowledge of Holy Scripture, with right judgment and authority, with fruitful and brilliant expression, with warmth and depth of feeling, with an usual easiness of explanations and precise and concise speech. The hearers were agitated about the cathedra, similar to

the rough seas, loudly expressed signs of approval by applause and exclamation and wrote down his words. Fierce and persistent enemies of Orthodoxy slandered Gregory for this; rushing with sticks among his hearers, they tried to disperse them with threats; they roused the people against him; they extended the hatred to even threaten the life of St. Gregory. But the courageous advocate of Orthodoxy took all this with remarkable calmness and patience and, disregarding the danger that threatened the entire Orthodox world at that time, he did not lose courage, but courageously and incessantly continued to be on guard for the faith of the Orthodox, as "the most respectable shepherd". The very private life of St. Gregory involuntarily inspired special respect for him even by his fierce enemies. Neither public assemblies nor the chambers of the aristocrats were familiar to him; he ate little food, wore poor clothes, did not engage in the intrigues of secular society, avoided every external limelight, and did not change the simplicity of his manner even after the unusual success which crowned his labors in building up of the holy actions of the Church.

In 381 at the Second Ecumenical Council St. Gregory was assigned to the Constantinopolitan See and presided over the Council after the death of Meletius of Antioch. Meanwhile other bishops began to challenge the assignment of St. Gregory to the see. The humbly wise, gentle and peace-loving Gregory offered himself for peace in the Church and asked the bishops who have gathered at the Council Cathedral to dismiss him from Constantinople.

The rest of his life (about 8 years) St. Gregory spent in his native land. Continuing to care about Church affairs and with the struggle against the heretics in writing, St. Gregory led a strict ascetic way of life... The holy ascetic extended his deprivations even to sometimes refuse to use his gift for speaking. He kept such a vow of silence during one of the Holy Forty Day fasts.

St. Gregory was honored by the Church for his sermons with the name of Theologian similarly to the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John. In 389 St. Gregory died. In 950 his relics were transferred from Nazianzus to Constantinople (see January 19). Part of them was transferred to Rome.

Growing Pains

Our parish has been meeting in this building for seven years this month. In that time, even with the turnover of people moving away, we have grown from 10 adults to more than 40, and from two children to more than 30. When more than 50 people show up for the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, which is increasingly the case, we feel the tightness of the quarters which have served us so well for so long.

We have plans to build a new church to meet our need for space and provide a suitably beautiful 'sermon in stone' to assist us in proclaiming the fullness of Christ's Gospel in Denton County. But only at the end of last year (2008) did we succeed in

reaching the goal of raising our first \$100,000 for building a new Church which we had set to reach by the end of 2007. In 2008, only \$32,000 came in for building, and a bit more than half came from one donation at year's end. On top of that, we have yet to meet our current monthly budget more than once or twice. Thus we are ill-positioned to undertake additional financial commitments such as building a new church. The cash flow is not there yet.

We find ourselves between a rock and a hard place: we need a bigger church to have room to grow, but we need more people in order to afford a bigger church.

One of our biggest needs this year is to address this matter. We have talked about renovating the kitchen downstairs and continuing to use it as a kitchen, but the press in the church itself compels us to reconsider. The Council reasons, that if we gut the kitchen and then open the side wall of the church to incorporate the kitchen into the nave as a sort of side apse, this will increase the space in the church by more than a quarter (our nave is about 450 square feet; the kitchen alone will add another 128 square feet). This also makes the side entryway and the classroom as space that can be used more easily in connection with Sunday worship, for example, as a place where parents can take children who need to be removed temporarily from the Liturgy.

To do this will deprive us of our kitchen sink and stove downstairs and refrigerator space. It will mean that we'll have to keep serving coffee hour where we do now, hindering efforts to convert that area into bookstore and "coffee shop".

For this incorporation of the downstairs kitchen into the nave to work best, we'll need to convert the upstairs from its present use as a rectory and use it for coffee hour and classrooms. This will only be possible if Fr. Justin & Matushka Michelle can move out into a place of their own, and this will most likely be possible only if the parish can increase its financial support of the priest by a few hundred dollars a month to offset the cost of purchasing or renting a house. The Council has asked Fr. Justin to look for a house and will consider what the parish should do once he has hard numbers to put before them. If you have question, objections, or comments about any of this, please speak to Fr. Justin or to any of the council members: Dax Stokes, Derek Sancer, Patrick St. Jean, Anna Stokes, Frieda Gluschenko, Louise Newcomb. There may well be other solutions to be found.

Upcoming Events 2009

2 February Great Feast of the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple.

1 March, Forgiveness Vespers, 6:00 p.m. All parishioners should make every effort to attend this service, which marks the beginning of the Great Fast.

2-6 March, Clean Week

12-18 April, Holy Week

19 April, Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!