



My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This week, the Church Fathers have given us a great example to help our Lenten journey. If last week's Triumph of Orthodoxy pointed us on the road to Pascha, this week, the Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas, shows how our faith is not an abstract concept, but a living reality in which we are all called to participate.

St. Gregory Palamas is known for his defense of Hesychasm, a monastic practice of still, unceasing prayer which can allow a person to encounter the Uncreated Light of God: the same light that Moses witnessed in the Burning Bush, and the light the Disciples saw during our Lord's Transfiguration. A priest named Barlaam incorrectly saw Hesychasm as a heresy, believing it spoke of a visible and invisible God. However, St. Gregory meant that while man could never truly experience God's *essence*, Hesychasts could experience God's *energies*, and therefore, have true spiritual knowledge of God. It

may seem that these distinctions are complex for the average Orthodox Christian living in the world, but simply, the legacy of St. Gregory Palamas shows us how God's Grace comes only to those who seek it, through careful prayer and fasting.

Barlaam argued against the mystical Hesychasm, in favor of a more "rational" understanding of God's energies, particularly by advocating the study of philosophy. The tragedy of Barlaam, is how he denied that anyone could experience God directly, suggesting that in the end, God is unknowable. To make such a claim, not only denies the reality that the Holy Spirit made wise Apostles out of fishermen, but it also does a great disservice even to our more recent ancestors: those Hellenes who lived, first under slavery, and then, through several wars; educated in secret, and sometimes having very little schooling. Many of our grandparents and great-grandparents were not educated in earthly wisdom, but they held fast to what they knew about God, and it is thanks to their simple faith in Christ and His Church that we are Orthodox here in the United States of America.

On our Lenten journey we are guided by the virtues of humility, repentance and forgiveness, as well as by those Fathers who restored icons to proper veneration & defended the great mystical practice of Hesychasm. As we commemorate St. Gregory Palamas this Sunday, let us rejoice in knowing that if we continue to pray and fast, then we (even those who live in the world) will grow closer to our Lord, experiencing His loving embrace, now, and forever.

+SEVASTIANOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta