

Homily By Archbishop Elpidophoros of America On the Second Sunday of Lent Saints Anargyroi Greek Orthodox Church



Beloved sisters and brothers in Christ,

We have just celebrated the double Feast of our Freedom – the Annunciation of the Theotokos and the Greek Revolution of 1821. I come to you enriched by both these causes for joy, filled with enthusiasm and hope for our Church, because our faith and our foundations are strong. We are a united Archdiocese and a united Omogeneia enjoying the blessings of America.

Even though our Orthodox Holy Week and Pascha are still weeks away, we can and should wish our fellow Christians both here and around the world our very best as they celebrate their Easter today. Our openness and respect of others, our love and compassion for those around us, represent the best of our spiritual tradition. And we celebrate that tradition today with the commemoration of Saint Gregory Palamas.

Last week, on the First Sunday of the Fast, we observed the triumph of Orthodoxy, the Restoration of the Holy Icons, first celebrated on Sunday, March 11th, in the year 843. And what was the triumph? The truth that God became a human being, that He became human in every way – except sin.

Indeed, God became human so much so, that you could paint a picture of Him. By His Incarnation, the Creator showed that His creation was “very good,” as it says in the Book of Genesis.* God entered our experience and made it possible for us to enter into His.

This Second Sunday of Lent is yet another triumph of Orthodoxy, because Saint Gregory Palamas – a great monastic, defender of the Faith and Archbishop of Thessaloniki – gave to the Church the definitive teaching that our experience of God is truly authentic. He articulated the theology of the Divine Energies – the reality of God which every human being experiences, because the Energies of God are the means by which the created world exists.

Like the rays of the sun that reach the earth and create all the conditions for life, in the same way, the Energies of God come forth from the Most Holy Trinity and baptize every creature in Divine Love. Saint Gregory defended this understanding of God’s relationship with His creation against those who would, if you will, leave God exiled in His Heaven.

Instead, we have the true teaching of the Church – that the same light that shone from our Savior on Mount Tabor is “everywhere present and filling all things.” And just as we cannot take icons for granted – but every year, we confirm their authority on the First Sunday of Lent – on this Second Sunday of Lent, we confirm our authentic relationship with God.

And we do this in our exaltation of the life and the teachings of Saint Gregory Palamas. As someone who spent many years in Thessaloniki, I can tell you that the devotion to this Saint is well deserved.

Saint Gregory was a great preacher, and the crowds would throng to hear his sermons, much like the People of Antioch used to pack the churches to the brim to listen to Saint John Chrysostom.

He taught that our human capacity for God – our hearts, souls and minds – are designed to be filled with God’s miraculous Energies. These Energies not only enlighten us, but they also make us open to a wonderful way of living. A way of living that is filled with love, compassion, mercy and forgiveness. If you practice

these virtues in your daily life, you will find that, by God's grace and power, you will build the strength to endure any and every challenge.

Thus we celebrate the holy Archbishop of Thessaloniki, Gregory Palamas. And we affirm that God's power and his glory are available to us, if we live as we were intended to live, as creatures of love and grace. In order to be filled with His Divine Energies, we empty ourselves of egoistic desires and selfishness. In turn, we begin to sense that God's Divine Presence is everywhere, not simply in our physical churches.

May we all gain a glimpse of those Energies working in our souls, and have them illuminate our path through the Great Fast to attain the Glorious Resurrection of our Lord; through the intercessions of this great Father, Gregory Palamas, the Saint and Archbishop of Thessaloniki. Amen.

* Genesis 1:31.

Photos: GOARCH/Dimitrios Panagos

goarch.org