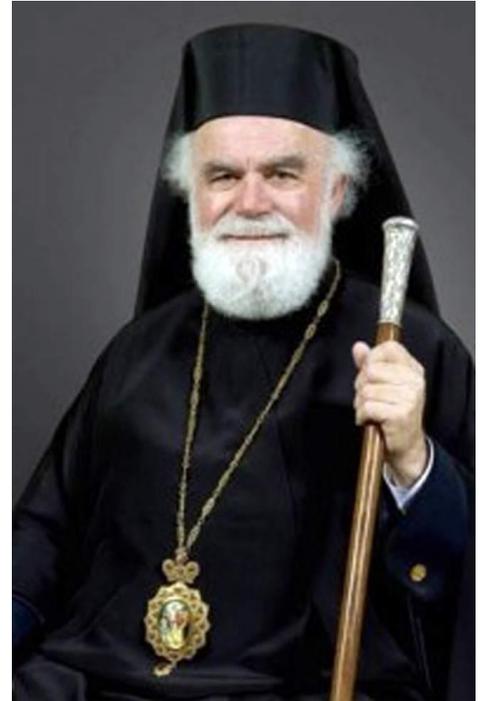


My Beloved Ones,

Coming to the beginning of the third week of Great Lent, we have celebrated the Triumph of Orthodoxy. The Church now seeks to deepen our understanding of the faith by setting aside this week to commemorate the Sunday of Saint Gregory Palamas.

St. Gregory Palamas is most famous for his defense of Hesychasm, a monastic practice of still, unceasing prayer; one which, if diligently pursued, can allow the supplicant to encounter the Uncreated Light of God, which we believe Moses witnessed in the Burning Bush, and the disciples themselves saw during our Lord's Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor.

An Orthodox convert trained in Western scholastics named Barlaam, incorrectly viewed Hesychasm as a kind of heresy, mistaking the Hesychast teaching of the Uncreated Light to be a form of polytheism, advocating for a visible and invisible God. He then began to write many things which attacked the Hesychasts generally and St. Gregory directly.



St. Gregory's defense specified that while man could never truly experience God's *essence* in this life, faithful Christians—and diligent Hesychasts especially—could experience God's *energies*; and therefore, could receive a true kind of spiritual knowledge of God. For his impassioned defense of the mystical tradition, St. Gregory was actually put into prison—and even when he was released, the controversy had not been settled, and so he was forced into a period of exile.

Eventually, after the matter had been brought before several synods in Constantinople, the Hesychast practices were finally upheld in the year 1351. Barlaam went into exile, and St. Gregory Palamas, after many trials and tribulations, served the remaining years of his life as Archbishop of Thessaloniki, before reposing in peace.

My Brothers and Sisters, I write this message, not simply to offer up an account of the life of a great Saint of our Church, or even to just summarize a rich spiritual practice, but to reinforce the message we are asked to carry with us. Each of us, if we solemnly learn to take the words of the Jesus Prayer to heart—*Lord Jesus Christ, Son God, have mercy on me a sinner*—has the possibility to experience the uncreated manifestations of God, within our own lives.

One work after we have honored the Triumph of the Icons with processions and proclamations, we now turn our hearts to a saint who advocated for stillness in both heart and mind. May we take all these spiritual reflections as we continue the remainder of our Lenten journey.

+ALEXIOS

Metropolitan of Atlanta