

## SECOND SUNDAY OF THE GREAT FAST-SUNDAY OF ST. GREGORY PALAMAS

**Gregory Palamas** (1296–1359) was a monk of Mount Athos in Greece and later the Archbishop of Thessaloniki known as a preeminent theologian of Hesychasm. The teachings embodied in his writings defending Hesychasm against the attack of Barlaam are sometimes referred to as Palamism, his followers as Palamites. Palamas is venerated as a Saint in the Eastern Church and he is venerated in the liturgy, and he has been called a saint and has been repeatedly cited as a great theological writer by Pope John Paul II.<sup>[1]</sup> Some of his writings are collected in the Philokalia. The second Sunday of the Great Lent is called the Sunday of Gregory Palamas in those Churches that commemorate him according to the Byzantine Rite of Constantinople.

Gregory born in Constantinople in the year 1296. His father was a courtier of the Byzantine Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282–1328), but he died soon after Gregory was born. The Emperor himself took part in the raising and education of the fatherless boy. The Emperor had hoped that the gifted Gregory would devote himself to government service.

The Emperor's ambitions for him, Gregory, then barely twenty years old, withdrew to Mount Athos in the year 1316 and became a novice there in the Vatopedi monastery under the guidance of the monastic Elder St Nicodemos of Vatopedi. Eventually, he was tonsured a monk, and continued his life of asceticism. After the demise of the Elder Nicodemus, Gregory spent eight years of spiritual struggle under the guidance of a new Elder, Nicephorus. After this last Elder's repose, Gregory transferred to the Great Lavra of St. Athanasius the Athonite on Mount Athos, where he served the brethren in the trapeza (refectory) and in church as a cantor. Wishing to devote himself more fully to prayer and asceticism he entered a skete called Glossia, where he taught the ancient practice of mental prayer known as "prayer of the heart" or Hesychasm.

In 1326, because of Turkish invasions, he and the brethren retreated to defended the city of Thessaloniki, where he was then ordained a priest. Dividing his time between his ministry to the people and his pursuit of spiritual perfection, he founded a small community of hermits near Thessaloniki in a place called Veria.

He served for a short time as Abbot of the Esphigmenou Monastery but was forced to resign in 1335 due to discontentment regarding the austerity of his monastic administration.<sup>[3]</sup>

Hesychasm attracted the attention of Barlaam, a convert to Eastern Catholicism<sup>[4]</sup> who encountered Hesychasts and heard descriptions of their practices during a visit to Mount Athos; he had also read the writings of Palamas, himself an Athonite monk. Trained in Western Scholastic theology, Barlaam was scandalized by hesychasm and began to combat it both orally and in his writings. As a private teacher of theology in the

