

3-24-19 Saint Gregory Palamas © J. Takahashi

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Sunday of Christ Pascha is celebrated greatly all over the world. However, there are some people who celebrate Christ Pascha only one day.

We used to live in San Francisco on a street called Green and then two blocks from our church there was a park and on Easter Day, there is a celebration there. The kids come out and hunt eggs. Then there is a big parade in the afternoon. That was Easter for them and that was it.

In the Orthodox Church, we celebrate Pascha on that day, yet we prepare ourselves. We call it ... Here I have to make it clear that I say Great Fast. Now days of Great Fast is 40 days but not Great Lent. Great Lent, fasting, goes beyond 40 days, more than 40 days. As we all know, our life as Orthodox Christians, we fast almost half a year, maybe a little more than half a year. In other words, half of our life is fasting and half of our life we're celebrating. This is a kind of paradigm of what we do during this period.

Now, Great Fast and Great Feast together, it makes the celebration of Christ Pascha. Therefore, it is not just one day or two weeks, Passion Week and Bright Week but rather, excuse me, 40 days of Great Fast not Great Lent. If you count, it's more than 40 days and Great Feast of 40 days. Put together, 80 days and here again, number eight comes up.

Do you remember I mentioned number eight is very important? One is the number of Christ, he is God. Just like we heard today, the healing, the Jews thought he was just another man. He's Jesus, Jesus, good guy with power. But for us Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Christians, he is not just another guy, Jesus, but he is God. If we read the Gospel According to John, you see the Gospel of John tells us he is our God incarnate and Christ, our Lord himself calls, do you remember, I am the way, I am the light of the world, I am the bread, I am the gate, I am the shepherd.

This guy we believe in is not just simple Jesus but for us he is, first of all, the light of the world. That's why we are celebrating St. Gregory Palamas today who proved that he is God incarnate and the light of the world.

Now, back to the celebration of Pascha, we have 40 days fast but not exactly fasting, dietary fasting I'm talking about. It is 40 days in honor of 40 days Christ, our Lord, went to the desert and 40 years that people of God sojourned in that desert and what else 40? Let's see.

Christ, our Lord, fasting 40 days in the desert and then 40 years of sojourning in the desert and ... Oh, 40 days, Noah's ark. So 40 means that ... in general, it signifies our understanding of fast. Then feasting, 40 days after Christ, our Lord, resurrected he ascended and so put the two together, 80, and then 80 once again shows the presence of God among us.

Now, this whole celebration of Christ Pascha, I hate to mention this because for some of you it's going to be a great temptation here. I call it just like eating good burger. Good buns and good meat, hamburger meat, and put together and we eat and then we get the idea, this is it. Have you ever eaten a good burger? I have and then when you eat it, you get a kind of vision. This is

3-24-19 Saint Gregory Palamas

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it. This is not actually looking at the burger and this is a burger. No, this vision is like totally wholesome. I would say like if you eat it and then here it is. I can see it but you don't see burger in the air.

This is really important. This is the way we understand the presence of our Lord in the midst of us. Now, nobody is just hamburger buns. Good burgers have good hamburger buns. Buns are good. Then put a piece of pickle and then a piece of onion and a piece of tomato, and then you eat it without me. You got to be kidding. Then eat meat, hamburger meat.

You put them together and eat it. Now, Great Fast and Great Feast is the same way. Great Fast is the buns of life. Then 40 days feast is the meat of life. We put them together and we go through and then you see the vision. This is the light of Christ.

Then we are reminded in the presanctified liturgy, in the midst of it, you know the presanctified liturgy is the liturgy of Holy Communion, the liturgy of the light. You attend the presanctified liturgy and you hear the Old Testament readings and then we hear the priest comes and he says, "The light of Christ enlighteneth all men." Then we receive Holy Communion. When we receive Holy Communion, we see the vision. This is it. This is what Christ brought.

I often and also you know that some people say, "Father, I saw Jesus in my dream" or "Jesus came out when I was here doing this and that." In the Philokalia, one of the fathers said, even if Jesus comes to you and you don't believe him. This is just some kind of vision, some of kind of dream, and he says it's okay. You rather not to believe in that sort of vision. Even if you don't, Christ would not mind.

The reason why he doesn't mind is you're cautious. The real vision doesn't come in a materialistic way, in an ordinary way, but it comes in a rather intimate way. This is the cause of [inaudible 00:09:08] controversy. In the early 14th century, there was a man, he was an Orthodox Christian and he was invited to teach a university in Constantinople. As soon as he went there, he heard that Athonite monks meditated and then they said they saw the divine light while they're meditating. He called them navel gazers. You know navel gazers? The reason why is when they meditate they look down like this and look at his own navel.

He laughed and he said, "You know, God cannot be here. He's beyond. He's totally the other. How can he be?" We all do this, singing hymns and meditating and all that. We all do this just by name. What I mean here is just by words just when we say, "Oh God is with us. Christ is with us. Hallelujah" and then just thinking he's here but actually, he is not. That's what Balaam said and he laughed at the monks saying that they see the light of Christ.

Now, Baalam was thinking that seeing vision of light is something like you really see the light and then God is with us. That is not the understanding. St. Gregory of Palamas said, "What are you saying? All these monks are actually seeing the divine light, the divine light of transfiguration.

You know that Christ, our Lord, transfigured on Mount Tabor and then disciples saw the light and the same light they see and we see. Then he called it the work of divine energy. What is this divine energy that he is talking about? I wondered and you know Vladimir Lossky? When I went

3-24-19 Saint Gregory Palamas

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to St. Vladimir's and then first year in patristics, Father Meyendorff assigned me to read that vision of God, and then I read it. It's a really nice book, really heavy and I enjoyed it immensely.

All the fathers, kind of tradition of the fathers, they talk about the vision of God. However, Lossky never showed how they attained. However, it's not a special technique you need or you don't have to become religious.

Then, so, I wondered and it had been a long time. It was one day. These fathers talk about the divine light and why don't I get the divine light and should be. Christ came for all, not just for church fathers, not just for ascetics, not just for special people who have grace. Not at all. Christ, our Lord, came to each one of us to meet us. In other words, he comes to us, each one of us, as I am the light of the world and how do I get to see this light?

Then, I came across ... Of course, Father John Meyendorff was an expert on St. Gregory Palamas and I did some research and I found out that this notion of divine energy is very unique in the Orthodox Church and we maintained because it is something like pitcher throws a ball. A ball itself does not fly. Have you ever seen a ball picked itself up and then started flying? No, it's cartoonish.

A ball is really heavy, the ball baseball players use and then it stays down unless pitcher picks it up and he throws it. When he throws it, if he's a good pitcher, it goes really straight and then really fast. Really heavy, very potent. That's why a batter can't hit and it goes way out there.

Now, why am I talking about this? Is that this ball is like Christ, our Lord or God, is a pitcher. When he pitched this whole world was thrown out here and it's still moving. We can still hear the sound of the creation, yes? Big bang, and then we are supposed to be a good catcher. Now, what am I talking about here is divine energy, a pitcher, not himself, pitcher still remains where he is. Yes. But when he holds the ball and throws it, this ball receives his energy and it goes out there really strong. This whole world got threw, a ball, and this whole world is still moving really fast, strong and we see his energy with our life.

This notion of divine energy is already we can find in the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite. He says everything is created in this world. He is the creator and everything is created yet there are things which are not created in this world, and that's what divine energy is. It comes from God and these are God's properties like truth, goodness, beauty, life, love, grace. All these are not created but entrusted and given to us and that's his and not ours.

As a catcher, we receive it fully and give it back to him and how to receive it is the theme of Great Lent. What we have here are all from God yet we don't realize this so we have to sit down and quietly see what we received. That's why when kids are running around and talking and jumping around, what would you say first? Be quiet and then you say sit down and then stay still. That's what we are supposed to do during Great Lent. It's not just dietary fasting but fasting from what we do in daily life so that we'd be able to see his energy is actually, God's energy is actually activated in us, in others and in this whole world. When we see that, it's just like eating a big good burger, we see, "Wow, this is the light Christ gives us."

3-24-19 Saint Gregory Palamas

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Let us remember this season is ... Great Lent and Great Fast is combination, a big burger, started in the 4th century. Initial 300 years of the Church, there wasn't but this is set up for those who want to be Christians and also Christians who want to review their life. Here you are in the midst of Great Lent reviewing our life and we eventually come to Passion Week. The most important day is the Holy Thursday.

What do we do on Holy Thursday in the evening? There is something called the Twelve Gospels we read. The Twelve Gospels and then Holy Friday and Saturday and then Sunday. Now, this is a time in the past and early church people were baptized. Finally, they saw the light, received the light and then receiving Holy Communion.

Holy Communion is not just an act of eating but Holy Communion is a time you receive full vision of the light of Christ, which priests constantly reminded us in the liturgy of Holy Communion, the light of Christ enlighteneth all.

Now, first gospel of the Twelve Gospel, please do remember this. On Holy Thursday, pay attention in what Christ, our Lord, says in the first gospel. From the second gospel to the end, it's all about his passion, death, resurrection but this first gospel, Christ, our Lord, teaches us what he put in Holy Communion. What is Holy Communion for us? Just like the catechumens who are newly baptized we should receive Holy Communion with the words of Christ we hear in the first gospel of the Twelve Gospels. Amen.