



Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas

Study Guide - Level 4 (Grades 9–12 / Ages 14–18)

Today is the Second Sunday of the Great Fast

Lesson Order

- Opening Prayer
- Intro / Recap last week's lesson
- Review the scripture readings
- Review the hymns of the day
- Read front page of handout together
- Use study guide lesson and Q&A
- Complete handout activities
- Preview next week's lesson
- Closing Prayer

Tips & Hints

- Use as much or as little of the content in this study guide helping the students discover how the Orthodox Faith can be a part of their daily life.
- Use open-ended questions, encouraging young people to share their experiences or ideas, drawing connections to the topics of the day, strengthening their relationship with Jesus Christ and His holy Orthodox Faith.
- Questions, ideas, feedback, and suggestions can be directed to the publisher at orthodoxjourneys@gmail.com

✓ Goal

After completing this week's lesson, students should be able to articulate the following:

- How today's scripture readings and liturgical hymns apply to their life
- Understanding what God is expecting us to live as His followers and members of the Orthodox Faith
- How being part of the Orthodox Church gives us the tools and skills to live godly lives regardless of our circumstances
- Why they believe and follow Jesus Christ as Orthodox Christians

✕ Overview

Last Week

Was the first Sunday of the Great Fast celebrating the restoration of icons to their prominent role in our lives.

We heard Christ calling the disciples to follow Him. Icons serve as a reminder that Christ has a place in our daily life as His modern day disciples.

As Orthodox Christians, our actions should be humble examples, inspiring others to "Come and See" why we follow Jesus Christ and a desire to know God.

The days of Lent help us renew our focus and attention on growing as close to God as possible.

This Week

The second Sunday of the Great Fast celebrates the life and teachings of St. Gregory Palamas, a famous 14th century bishop.

St. Gregory's teachings proclaim the goal of our life is to encounter God, to be transfigured into our true nature - rejecting sin to live in the Light of Christ.

He is an example of faithful devotion to God, and the importance of avoiding false teachings, so we can know and believe in God, having as deep a relationship with God as is possible.

📖 Apostolos / Epistle and Gospel Readings

Have one student read today's Apostolos/Epistle and another read the Gospel lesson.

Epistle/Apostol:
Hebrews 1:10-2:3

Gospel:
Mark 2:1-12

1. What is the author of today's epistle/apostol talking about?
2. How does the message of this epistle apply to our lives?

Possible Answers

- God laid the foundation for all of our lives, and the heavens are all his works
- St. Paul teaches us that God's love changes humanity, restoring it to what was intended originally in Genesis
- God's love will never change, and this provides us with a focal point when we sin or get lost from God
- We must listen to what God spoke through the angels, so we do not miss out on something greater
- A path to heaven was provided by Christ, and is taught by the Church and the saints, confirming that Jesus is truly God and the source of our salvation from sin and death

1. What took place in today's lesson?
2. Why is this important for us living in the 21st century?

Possible Answers

- The men are examples of faith in God, inspiring us to put our faith in action
- The forgiveness of sins is more important than the healing of physical or behavioral impairments
- By approaching Christ in repentance, we can be freed from sin and death
- We should do whatever we can to get closer to Christ
- Are we willing to stand in line for hours to get to liturgy like a concert or new movie?
- Do we help others encounter Christ, removing barriers from their path?
- Being an Orthodox Christian means doing more than standing in church one day a week

🎵 Hymnography

Have a student read the hymn(s) on the front page of the handout.

1. What do the hymns teach us about today's commemoration?
2. How can the message of these hymns apply to our lives?

Possible Answers

- St. Gregory is honored as a wise defender of the Church, and a great teacher who instructed many in the church about the nature of God
- Saints, like Gregory, stand in the presence of God and can pray for us, just as we ask our parents, friends, priest, and others to pray to God for us
- St. Gregory can also help us through his teachings to know more about God, making it possible for us to grow closer to God
- St. Gregory's writings remind us that knowing about God helps us know ourselves better - we were created to be God's helpers in the world, doing good works as Christ helped others

A Closer Look

Let's take a closer look at today's primary topic.

Summary of Gospel Reading

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus Christ is teaching in a home filled to capacity with people eager to hear His words. This doesn't stop some men from bringing their friend, who is paralyzed, to see Jesus. After opening a hole in the roof, the men lower their friend to Christ, who offers words of forgiveness to him.

This offends the religious leaders who know only God can forgive sins. Jesus' statement reminds us that we will know the Messiah by the works He accomplishes (Matthew 7:16 and Isaiah 35:5-6). Since Jesus is all knowing and all powerful, He knew what the scribes are thinking, so He forgive the man's sins AND heals his physical handicap. By doing this, he reveals that He is the Son of God.

What Does This Mean For Us?

During our life, we might pray to God for things which appear to be important, but in the big picture, what really matters for our salvation is repentance and forgiveness. God loves us regardless of any physical or behavioral limitation we might have, and wants us to draw closer to Him in repentance.

If we place ourselves in the gospel reading, with whom do we identify most? (It might change as we spiritually mature as Orthodox Christians):

- **The crowd**, anxious to hear Jesus' teachings, they follow Him, listening to what He says about repentance, healing, and forgiveness, wondering how it relates to our social life, how we should behave at school, at church, the mall, our jobs, at home, or when we go off to college.
- **The Paralyzed man**, reliant on others to help us in life because of circumstances beyond our control, grateful for the help we receive so we can live as normal a life as possible, wanting to encounter Jesus Christ
- **The friends**, willing to help those in need, making sacrifices or going to extreme measures to live an active faith life, bringing others to Jesus Christ through our actions
- **The scribes**, judging the actions of others, finding mistakes or errors that puff up our ego, but potentially miss moments of compassion and truly godly behavior
- **The disciples**, silently paying attention and listening to the teachings of Jesus Christ, eager to understand and follow His teachings because you believe He is the One to provide salvation in your life

Wrap Up

God wants us to be His followers, and that means being in His presence by coming to liturgy, repenting of our sins, receiving the Eucharist, and reading scripture. Once we do these things, we need to put our faith in action - helping others, supporting the good work of the Church and its charitable institutions through our time and talents, so that we can help others also experience the love and mercy of God.

Discussion Questions

Choose from these possible questions to explore today's topic.

1. How important a role does Jesus Christ have in our life?
2. Why is it important to pray to God every day?
3. Why should we attend liturgy and actively participate in the prayers, hymns, and receive the Eucharist?
4. How will remaining active members of the Orthodox Church help us when moving out on our own after high school?
5. How can we apply God's teachings at school? the mall? our job? at church? at home?

Possible answers

- Our behavior reveals what type of Orthodox Christian we choose to be in life
- We can be merciful, forgiving, repentant, compassionate (without fanfare or drawing attention to ourselves)
- We can avoid gossip, lying, stealing, sexual impurity, greed, laziness, despair, a judgmental attitude, needing to control things/people/situations
- 6. Why is the forgiveness of sins so important for our spiritual health?
- 7. How should we feel after receiving the sacrament of confession?
- 8. When we sin after going to confession, what should we do?

Possible answers

- Forgive ourselves and run to God in repentance
- Be realistic about our human condition
- Reflect on why we might have fallen into sin, identifying ways to avoid those behaviors/circumstances in the future
- Pray to God for compassion and guidance to help us make lasting change in our life
- Be grateful to God for the opportunity to receive forgiveness and healing through His mercy
- Talk to your priest about how to change your ways

What the Saints Say

Hear what they say about today's topic.

"Whenever there was need to punish or to honor, to forgive sins or to make laws, Christ was fully authorized to do it. Whenever Christ had to do any of these much greater things, you will not characteristically find him praying or calling on his Father for assistance. All these things, as you discover in the text, he did on his own authority."

– St. John Chrysostom (5th century)

"Now they accuse Him of blasphemy, anticipating the sentence of His death: for there was a command in the Law, that whosoever blasphemed should be put to death. And this charge they laid upon Him, because He claimed for Himself the divine power of remitting sins. Wherefore it is added, "Who can forgive sins, save God only?" For the Judge of all alone has power to forgive sin."

– St. Cyril of Alexandria (5th century)

"But the good Instructor, the Wisdom, the Word of the Father, who made man, cares for the whole nature of His creature; the all-sufficient Physician of humanity, the Saviour, heals both body and soul. "Rise up "He said to the paralytic; "take the bed on which thou liest, and go away home."

– St. Clement of Alexandria (3rd century)

Terminology

Compassion: The act of being charitable or merciful to another or ourselves. Being compassionate is also a way we can be like God, who (as it says in the psalms) is "merciful and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."

Being compassionate means giving of ourselves, using our gifts and resources to help someone less fortunate or someone in need.

Faith: The virtue which is the foundation for all we do as Orthodox Christians. It is through faith that we believe in God, trust in God's mercy, and are obedient to His teachings and commandments.

Faith is referenced throughout scripture as being the source of hope, love, and all the good things of this world. It is through faith that we trust in God's love and mercy, that God will protect and keep us throughout our lives.

Through faith, we rely on God. And through faith, we come to know God, desiring to understand and know God as much as we can, so that we can grow closer to Him. And, as we grow closer to God in faith, we come to see ourselves as part of a larger community to which we are responsible to bring God's love into the world through our words and actions - bringing our faith to life.

Preview

Next Week

The third Sunday of the Great Fast reminds us that our journey through Great Lent leads to the cross of Christ.

As Orthodox Christians, we are called to make the effort to reach the feet of our Lord, bowing humbly before Him on the cross.

The Church encourages us to stay focused, remembering the spiritual efforts we make during the Fast are worth it. By denying ourselves we learn humility and compassion, drawing closer to God, living a life of holiness like the saints.

On The Web

Learn more about this week's topics on the web:

Direct Knowledge of God (7:11 min)

<https://youtu.be/4sOMsZFrdoQ>

Homily on St. Gregory Palamas Sunday (3:57 min)

https://youtu.be/e1vDU0xB_T8

Fasting and Great Lent

<http://ww1.antiochian.org/fasting-great-lent>

The Light of Christ (as proclaimed during the Presanctified Liturgy)

<https://www.oca.org/reflections/berzonsky/light-of-christ>

? Did You Know

In 1369, the Second Sunday of Great Lent was dedicated to St. Gregory for his defending the teachings of the Church.

If there was a theme for the Second Sunday of Great Lent it would build on the message of Having Faith from last week.

It's not simply enough for Christians to believe in God, we also need to put our faith in action.

St. Gregory's actions remind us that our faith must lead to an active life as Orthodox Christians.

