

“ENLIGHTEN MY DARKNESS, O LORD”

The Second Sunday of Lent is dedicated to the memory of a saint that may be described as a “mysterious mystic”: St. Gregory Palamas. Gregory was born in 1296 A. D. and received his secular education in Constantinople. His father was a prominent official in the Emperor’s court, but Gregory chose to devote his life to serving a Heavenly King rather than a temporal one. At the age of 20, he entered a monastery on Mt. Athos, and was ordained to the priesthood 10 years later.

Gregory Palamas became part of a controversial monastic movement called “hesychasm.” Hesychasm called for its followers to embrace a life of silence and contemplative prayer. It taught that through fasting, rigorous bodily discipline and repetition of the Jesus Prayer, man can know God in an intimate way. For years, the only words uttered by St. Gregory were: “Enlighten my darkness, O Lord,” as he sought to know His Creator with all of his being.

Although he would have been content to remain on Mt. Athos for the rest of his life, Gregory was appointed Archbishop of Thessalonica in 1347 A.D. His views on theological matters came under fierce attack by his enemies, even causing him to be imprisoned for heresy on several occasions. Gregory’s positions eventually became universally accepted by the entire Holy Orthodox Church, and today, Gregory Palamas is extolled as a “light of Orthodoxy, a teacher of the church and an invincible champion of theologians.”

Gregory Palamas fell asleep in the Lord in 1359 A. D. He was canonized a saint only 9 years after his death.