

“HEAVENWARD! HEAVENWARD!”

Each year on the 2nd Sunday of the great Fast, the Holy Orthodox Church honors the memory of ST. GREGORY PALAMAS. Gregory lived in the 14th century and would rise to the prominent position of Archbishop of Thessalonica one day. He is best remembered, however, for his exemplary life as a monastic: a life he embraced at the young age of 20.

Much of Gregory’s life was lived on Mt. Athos. Much of his time was spent in contemplative silence and prayer. He fully embraced the spirit and philosophy of “hesychasm” – a method of inward prayer of the heart that was taught by the severe ascetics of the Holy Mountain.

As St. Gregory gained popularity and notoriety with the Church, his teaching of *hesychasm* caused him to be at odds with the other theologians and hierarchs. His position that God, unapproachable in His Essence, was nevertheless revealed through His Energies. This brought Gregory ridicule and condemnation. He was even imprisoned and labelled a “*heretic*” for maintaining that the Kingdom of God is within us – in our WHOLE NATURE, body and soul. Ultimately, the Council of Blachernae upheld the truth of his teaching. This is why he is praised in his troparion of this day as being the “*light of Orthodoxy*” and the “*champion of theologians.*”

St. Gregory Palamas fell asleep in the Lord on November 14, 1359 A.D. He was canonized a saint just 9 years later. His dying words were: “Heavenward! Heavenward!” Indeed, the life lived by this blessed saint was constantly pointed in the direction of the Kingdom of God.