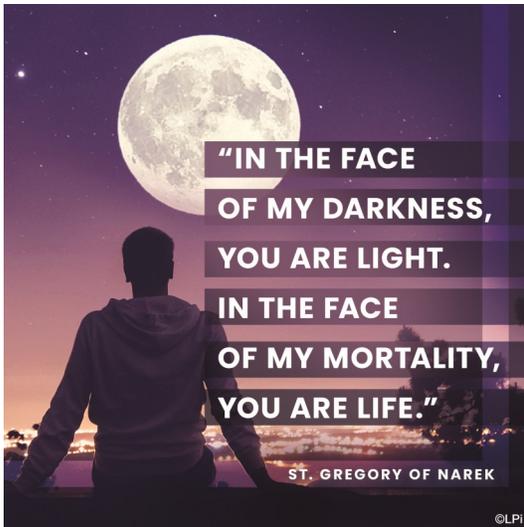


FROM FR. JASON



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

During this time of Lent, we can continually rediscover the beauty and power of our baptism, the gift of the Word that pierces the heart, and the Eucharist that makes us one Body. The Church places before us this week the memorial of St. Gregory of Narek, Abbot and Doctor of the Church. This humble Armenian monk from the 10th century, who lived around the years 951 to 1003, was proclaimed a Doctor of the Universal Church by Pope Francis in 2015, precisely on the occasion of the centenary of the Armenian martyrdom. His voice reaches across the centuries to speak directly to us, calling us to a deeper conversion, to authentic repentance, and to a prayer that rises from the depths of a broken heart.

Born in the region near Lake Van in what is now eastern Turkey, Gregory grew up in a family marked by faith. His father was a bishop, but he experienced early loss with the death of his parents. Raised and formed in the monastery of Narekavank, he became a monk, a priest, a poet, a theologian, and above all, a man of profound interior prayer. His life was hidden in God, yet his writings burst forth with such fire and sincerity that they have nourished generations.

His masterpiece, known simply as the Book of Lamentations, or more affectionately as the Narek (or Book of Prayer), is a collection of 95 prayers, each beginning with the words “Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart.” In these pages, over 10,000 lines of verse, Gregory pours out his soul in a dialogue of love and sorrow. **He confesses his sinfulness with brutal honesty, yet never despairs. Instead, he clings to God’s infinite mercy.** The central theme is our separation from God caused by sin, and the ardent quest to be reunited with Him through repentance, sacramental grace, and unceasing prayer. Like the Psalms of David or the Confessions of St. Augustine, these prayers are raw, mystical, and biblical. They are full of imagery from Scripture, crying out for healing, forgiveness, and union.

Gregory himself described his work as an “encyclopedia of prayer for all nations.” He hoped it would be a guide and consolation for people everywhere, in every age. Toward the end of his life, suffering from a serious illness, he wrote that the book itself would continue to cry out in his place after his death: “This book will cry out... with my voice, as if it were me.” What humility! What faith in the power of the Word offered to God!

We are called to live the paschal mystery intensely and this saint speaks volumes to us. His prayers echo the journey we make together: the painful recognition of our own poverty and sin (“Lord, I am the greatest of sinners”), the joy of forgiveness received in Reconciliation and the Eucharist, and the missionary impulse to share God’s mercy with a wounded world. **In a time when many feel isolated, anxious, or distant from God, Gregory teaches us that true prayer is not polite recitation but a heartfelt cry from the depths, a colloquy where we offer our “pure sighs of the broken and contrite heart” as the most pleasing gift to the Father.**

Let us allow St. Gregory to accompany us. Take time to read one of his prayers aloud. Let his words help you examine your conscience more deeply, to weep over what separates you from Christ, and then to rejoice in the embrace of the Father who runs to meet the returning son. I especially invite all of you to reflect on one of Gregory’s laments, allowing it to prepare your heart to continue the itinerary of faith. May we support one another, holding each other accountable to live what we celebrate. St. Gregory of Narek, you who spoke with God from the depths of the heart, intercede for us! Help us to rediscover the grace of our baptism, to live the Eucharist as true communion, and to become credible witnesses of the Risen One in our families, workplaces, and neighborhoods.

Peace,