

Lesson No. (40)

## **St. Gregory the Theologian**

### **References:**

### **Notes for Servants:**

### **Objectives:**

**General:**

**Specific:**

### **Instructions:**

1. Review last week's lesson.
2. Give a brief description about the church occasion(s) for the coming week.

### **Bible Verse:**

### **Lesson:**

## **St. Gregory the Theologian**

### **Background and Early Life**

St. Gregory the Theologian was born in 300 AD in the village of Nazianzus in southwest Cappadocia. His mother, Nonna, was a pious Orthodox Christian while his father, also named Gregory, converted to Christianity later on in his life. St. Gregory's father originally belonged to a heretic sect who referred to themselves as the Hysistarians. After experiencing a moving dream, however, he converted and was later consecrated bishop of Nazianzus.

St. Gregory himself was small in stature, with a red beard and eyebrows. His personality was strong and he feared no one and he possessed a daring, shod-tempered nature. He loved the Greek poet Pindor, and according to historian Robed Payne, St. Gregory maybe called the first Christian poet. The saint lived a life of strict ascetism where he slept on the floor, clothed himself in rough clothes, lived on bread, salt, and water, and spent half of his nights in prayer.

At the young age of seven, it became apparent that Gregory would dedicate his life to Christ. One night he dreamed of two beautified women dressed in long, white robes that wore veils, which did not conceal the brightness of their eyes. They told Gregory that their names were Purity and Chastity and they encouraged him to join his spirit with theirs. From then on, Gregory consecrated himself, dedicating his life to God.

When Gregory was a teenager, he travelled to Athens for university and studied subjects such as

rhetoric, theology, mathematics, the theory of ideas, and rudimentary medicine, in the university, Gregory's peers noted his excellent debating skills. Besides excelling in the academic component of university life, Gregory met his best friend, St. Basil. Concerning Basil, St. Gregory wrote, "In Athens I sought for eloquence, and I found happiness because I found Basil." He also said to his friend, "You are my breath, more than the air".

## **St. Gregory's Ordination**

On Christmas, in AD 361, Gregory was ordained priest against his will. He did not feel prepared for such a responsibility, and fled and remained in isolation for some time. He finally returned to accept the honour, and wrote the "Apologia" where he explained his reaction to his ordination and said that his knowledge of his unworthiness caused his flight. A few years later, Basil was ordained bishop, and an Asian by the name of Valens became emperor. Immediately following Basil's ordination in 370, Basil and Gregory got into a fight after Basil misinterpreted the reason that Gregory did not attend St. Basil's ordination. Later on, Gregory's bitterness towards Basil increased when Basil forced him to become bishop of Sasina. Gregory addressed the people and said, "Took upon the man who is consecrated, upon whom the Spirit has descended, and watch him as he goes on his way weary and dispirited." Beginning in 373 AD, Gregory would face a series of tragedies that would cause a major change in his life. First, an epidemic irrupted among the cattle, a hailstorm came that mined the crops, and the farmers revolted against the tax gatherers. To make matters worse, Basil and both of Gregory's parents died. At first these events caused the saint a great amount of grief, but they ended up helping Gregory by waking him from his spiritual slumber, kindling the fire in his heart that he had previously suppressed.

In 379, St. Gregory was ordained Patriarch of Constantinople. His enemies managed to dethrone him later on, however, by claiming that his position was not canonical. Gregory was understandably bitter at first, but later on he felt remarkably delighted to return home.

## **His Writing and Orations**

St. Gregory wrote *five* speeches concerning the Trinity, earning him the title, "The Theologian". He wrote clearly, and with a sense of vigour and gaiety, defending the Orthodox *faith* against the numerous heresies that existed at the time. He battled the Asians (who claimed that the Son was not one with the Father), the Eunomians (who said that the Son was unlike the Father), the Sabellians, Marcellians, Macedonians (who basically believed in the Arian creed). He said with Jeremiah, "Behold I am against thee, O thou proud one." He wrote a long letter against the spread of the doctrine of Apollinaris who rejected the complete humanity of Christ saying, "God was made flesh, but not man". Again, he put the heresy to scorn, arguing that to deprive God of his manhood was to deprive Him of every reason of coming to earth. Besides his writings that were very theological in nature, Gregory gave sermons concerning many deeply spiritual topics such as where we can find God & he often delivered his orations in churches and in people's homes. Many writings exist that speak of the huge multitudes of people that would gather to hear St. Gregory's sermons, often filling the houses and ringing to the gates outside.

## **His Death**

In 389 AD, St. Gregory died in Arianzus on his father's estate. Except for a few small bequests, Gregory left everything for the poor. Shortly after his death, St. Gregory's remains were taken to Constantinople until the Crusaders secretly took his remains to Rome in 1204 AD. His relics now rest in the Vatican in the Chapel of St. Gregory, designed by Michelangelo.

May the blessings of this great saint be with us all. Amen.

## **Conclusion**