

September 3

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Gregory the Great (540-604) Church father and pastor

Gregory the Great, a Church father and Pope of Rome, is commemorated today in the Western calendar.

Gregory was born in Rome in 540. He was trained for a political career and became the city's prefect at just over the age of thirty, but his desire to become closer to God soon led him to abandon this prestigious office. On Rome's Celio hill he founded the small monastery of St. Andrew, but declined to become its abbot, preferring to serve God in humble obedience.

Word of Gregory's human and spiritual qualities spread, and he was named the Pope's ambassador to Constantinople. Even in his travels to the capital of the Eastern empire, Gregory was accompanied by a group of monks, who joined him daily in listening to and meditating upon Scripture.

Elected Pope after the death of Pelagius II, Gregory accepted no other title than that of "servant of God's servants." He continued to live with a monk's simple and poor heart in the midst of his new ministry's numerous responsibilities. His first priority was serving those who were considered the last in his diocese.

Gregory lived in a time of transition, in which he often saw what seemed to him to be signs of history's imminent end. Called upon to respond to the epochal changes that were taking place in society, he recognized the emerging role of the barbarian peoples and sought ways to favor their encounter with the Gospel, which he tirelessly continued to announce.

Transported by love for God's word, Gregory transposed into his writings the wealth of his personal *lectio divina* and his love of monasticism. He wrote the only early biography of St. Benedict, which became a classic of Western Christian literature. Gregory died in Rome in the year 604.

A READING

The community of faith is a hermeneutic criterion of the Word of God. "Often, many things in holy Scripture that I was not able to understand on my own," Gregory said courageously to his brothers, "I understood when I found myself among my brothers. After I realized this, I also tried to understand by whose merit such knowledge had been given to me." What is even more surprising is that, for Gregory, every member of God's people who obeys the Word is "an organ of truth" for his or her brothers and sisters in the faith. "When we who are filled with faith try to make God resound for others, we are organs of truth, and truth has the power to reveal itself to other people through me, or to reach me through other people." Gregory's humble discretion with regard to the action of the Spirit, and the Word whom he obeys, generates a model of Church leadership that is expressed in the formula, "Gregory, servant of the servants of God."

(Benedetto Calati)

PRAYER

O God,
who guided your church
with the gentleness and strength
of Gregory the Great,
give your Spirit of wisdom
to those whom you have chosen
as guides for your people,
and the spiritual growth of the faithful
will be the joy of their shepherds
when the supreme Shepherd appears,
Jesus Christ, our only Lord.

BIBLICAL READINGS

Ez 34:11-16; LK 22:24-32

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER

ANGLICANS:

Gregory the Great, bishop of Rome, teacher of the faith

WESTERN CATHOLICS:

Gregory the Great, pope and doctor of the church (Roman and Ambrosian calendars)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (28 misra/nahasé):

Abraham (see on October 19), *Isaac and Jacob* (2nd millennium BCE), our fathers

LUTHERANS:

Oliver Cromwell (d. 1658), statesman in England

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

Anthimus (d. ca. 302), bishop of Nicomedia, hieromartyr;

Theoctistus (d. 467), companion of Euthymius the Great

monk *Sarmeane* (8th cent.), patriarch (Georgian Church)

EAST SYRIAN ORTHODOX:

Pius X (d. 1914), pope (Malabar Church)