

March 12

ON SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT, POPE

109.1 First Point

Saint Gregory was destined by his father to succeed him in his position as a senator in Rome, but this saint, while still young when his father died, built several monasteries and withdrew to one of them, leaving the world and all his wealth in order to live a life of obedience. This saint looked upon submission as the greatest benefit in life because it is the most fitting attitude for a creature, the one that makes man most pleasing to God and draws down the most grace. That was why he believed himself happier to be hidden from all and to submit to a superior than to possess all the wealth and honors on earth.

Is this how you esteem the state in which God has placed you? Do you think yourself very fortunate to be there? Do you prefer it to all that you could have and desire in this world? You are unworthy of so holy a state if you do not have this disposition; if you do not feel it in yourself, at least try to acquire it.

109.2 Second Point

Saint Gregory suffered throughout his life with extreme patience. First, he practiced excessive austerities as a religious. Second, the pains of gout made his body so emaciated that it was difficult to recognize him. Third, he suffered from persecution: the Emperor Maurice, who had been his close friend, became a cruel enemy and wished to deprive him of his title of Universal Patriarch of the Church.

In all this Gregory imitated the holy man Job, whose spirit he had thoroughly absorbed while writing a commentary on the book of Job. The only remedy he used in all this suffering was recourse to prayer;⁵⁷⁷ in this he found great support; God himself became his protector in his sufferings and in the opposition that he met.⁵⁷⁸

Do you love the sufferings found in your state? Do you endure them with as much patience as Saint Gregory loved and suffered his? If you truly possess the spirit of your state, God will make you discover in it all sorts of consolations, and even in your suffering.

109.3 Third Point

When this saint was elected pope, he immediately took to flight, but finally accepted the responsibility of head of the Church despite his feelings. Nevertheless, with unflagging zeal, despite his great infirmities, he worked to procure the good of the Church by his preaching, by his writings, and by his constant solicitude.

He had not been able prior to his elevation to the Sovereign Pontificate to labor in person for the conversion of the infidels, something to which his zeal inspired him. But after he became Pope, he sent out evangelical laborers to preach the faith to them and to instruct them in our religion. By such conduct this saint showed that it was only his humility that made him flee the papacy, because once he had accepted it, his zeal led him to accomplish great things for the cause of religion.

You do not have infidels to convert, it is true. Yet you are obliged by your state to teach your children the mysteries of religion and to give them the spirit of Christianity. This is a task of no less importance than the conversion of infidels. So, apply yourself to it with all possible care and attention.

Pope Gregory (ca 540 - 604) was born in Rome of a patrician family and became prefect of the city, following his father's public career. When his father died, he inherited vast estates, but in 574 he resigned from office and became a Benedictine monk. In 578 he was ordained a priest by the pope; in 590 when Pope Pelagius II died, Gregory was elected to succeed him. He wrote numerous books and sermons, which won for him the honor of being regarded as one of the four great Doctors of the Church. He did much to reform the morals of his day and the liturgy of the Church. Gregorian chant is named for him. He is also the pope who sent Saint Augustine of Canterbury to England to restore the faith there among the pagan Angles and Saxons who had destroyed the earlier Christian culture in Britain. He died on March 12, but his feast is now celebrated on September 3, the day he became Pope.