Gregory of Nyssa *March 9*

Bishop, Teacher of the Faith, c. 395 — Memorial

In the fourth century, a Greek-speaking family in Asia Minor produced a whole clan of saints. One member of this family was Basil the Great, whom we commemorate on January second. Today we commemorate his younger brother Gregory, who became bishop of Nyssa.

Gregory did not start out by following in his brother's footsteps. On the contrary, he seems to have felt oppressed by the sanctity which surrounded him at home and chose to pursue a career as a lawyer and teacher of rhetoric. But in the year 371 his older brother pushed him into becoming the bishop of a small town called Nyssa. Before long Gregory's enemies trumped up a charge of embezzlement against him, and he fled from his diocese. Their perjury was eventually exposed, and he returned to Nyssa in triumph.

In the meantime, he had suffered two bereavements. His brother Basil died, leaving Gregory regretful over the history of their strained relations. Soon afterwards, his older sister Macrina also died. But before her death, while Gregory was nursing her, brother and sister had long conversations about the Christian faith and how Christians should live. These conversations had such an influence upon Gregory that ever afterwards he called Macrina "my teacher."

Gregory came out of these experiences with a new sense of purpose. He took up his pen to continue the theological work which his brother had left unfinished, and he began to emerge as a spiritual teacher in his own right.

Gregory lived in a mountainous part of Asia Minor, and he envisaged the Christian's life with God as if it were a journey up one of these crags. In his view, however, the ascent never ended, because the human movement towards God must be as infinite as the divine goodness which made it possible. This vision, expressed in Greek prose of remarkable beauty, has nourished the spirituality of Eastern Orthodoxy ever since.

See Readings, page 467.

Sentence

And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the Lord stood above it. *Genesis 28.12-13 (RSV)*

Collect

Eternal God,
you formed your servant Gregory of Nyssa
according to the knowledge of your goodness
so that he taught your faithful people
the way of ascent into your glory.
Give us grace to love his doctrine,
that in holiness we may approach your throne
and in glad thanksgiving embrace your mercy;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Readings

Wisdom 7.24-28 Psalm 40.9-14
Refrain Your law, O God, is deep in my heart.
John 14.1-11

Prayer over the Gifts

O Father, Womb of the eternal Word,
who guided the steps of your servant Gregory
upon the ladder of true understanding,
receive the gifts we offer this day
that our service may be laden with your goodness.
We ask this in the Name of Jesus Christ the Lord.

Preface of Trinity Sunday

Prayer after Communion

Eternal God,
you led your servant Gregory in the way of truth
and overcame his fears and hesitations.
Grant us so to study the ways of your goodness
that we may possess the true dignity of our nature,
through the Word made flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ.