

**Adult Education – St. Luke’s Church – Sedona, AZ – Class 21**  
**Introduction to the Doctors of the Church – Pope St. Gregory I (“the Great”)**  
**November 17, 2019**

**Note:** for ease of accessing the web sites referenced in this handout, download your own PDF copy here: <http://www.episcopalnet.org/DBS/Sedona/AdultEducation2019.html> and click on the live links in that copy. Questions or comments? Email me at [dmc89az@gmail.com](mailto:dmc89az@gmail.com). Follow St. Luke’s on Facebook: “St. Luke’s Church Sedona AZ”.



Saraceni (attrib.): Gregory the Great, c.1610

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlo\\_Saraceni#/media/File:Gregorythegreat.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlo_Saraceni#/media/File:Gregorythegreat.jpg))

A dove is his special insignia, in allusion to the popular tradition according to which when the pope was dictating his homilies on the prophet Ezechiel, a veil stood between his secretary and himself. As however the pope remained silent for long periods at a time, the servant made a hole in the curtain and, peering through, saw a dove seated upon Gregory’s head with its beak between his lips. When the dove withdrew its beak, the holy pontiff spoke and the secretary recorded his words; but when he became silent the servant again looked through the hole and saw the dove had once again put its beak between his lips. (<http://saintsresource.com/gregory-the-great/>)

## **I. Opening Prayer**

Grant, we beseech thee, O Lord, that we remembering with gladness the righteousness of thy Saints, may at all times and in all places feel the effectual succor of their intercession. Through Jesus Christ thy Son our Lord. Who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. **Amen.** (*Secret, Common of a Confessor Bishop, Anglican Missal, p. F23.*)

## II. Gregory the Great – Overview

- Gregory was born c.540 to a wealthy, Christian family. He was related to two previous Popes. His mother is venerated as a saint, as are two of his father's sisters
- He was clearly well educated, but we know few specific details of that education
- In Gregory's time, Italy and Rome were in serious decline. Rome had been invaded and/or besieged several times during Gregory's youth, to the point that its population was roughly 40,000 – down from a high of approximately one million
- The real center of the Empire was Constantinople
- However, by age 33 Gregory was Prefect of Rome, the highest civil position in the city, although lacking the power and prestige it had at the heights of Rome's strength
- After his father's death in 574, he converted his home to a monastery, and he also established six more monasteries on property he had inherited in Sicily
- He then undertook a monastic lifestyle – later recalling those years as the happiest of his life
- In 577, Pope Benedict I ordained Gregory (against his will) and appointed him one of the seven deacons of Rome, each of whom was in charge of caring for the sick and the poor in his region
- In 578, Pope Pelagius sent Gregory to Constantinople to serve, essentially, as an ambassador or envoy (the actual term is *apocrisarius*) to the Emperor Tiberias on behalf of the Roman church. He stayed there, unhappily, for about six years
- To the extent he was able, he continued his monastic lifestyle in Constantinople, and he completed his highly regarded *Morals*, and he began to compile an influential series of lectures on Job while there
- In one sense, Gregory's mission to Constantinople was a failure in that he was unable to persuade Tiberias to provide any substantial aid to beleaguered Rome. In the long term, however, this gave him the firm resolve as Pope to take strong local action to save Rome and Italy
- Pope Pelagius eventually recalled Gregory to Rome to serve as his personal advisor, but Pelagius died in 590 during an outbreak of the plague. Rome was at an utter low; the streets were largely deserted except for carts carrying corpses to be buried
- Gregory, realizing there was much popular support for naming him as successor to Pelagius, wrote to Emperor Maurice not to approve his election as Pope. However, Germanus (then Prefect of Rome) intercepted the letter and sent the Emperor a schedule of elections instead
- Maurice approved the election (which had been unanimous), and Gregory became the first monk to be elected Pope – and his election was unanimous
- Once elected, he undertook his responsibilities unreservedly, serving as Pope for 14 years
- Gregory died on March 12, 604 at age 64. He was buried at St. Peter's Basilica with the epitaph "Consul of God"
- He was immediately proclaimed a saint by his successor, Pope Sabinian, and he came to be known as "The Great" by the late ninth century
- Along with St. Ambrose, St. Augustine and St. Jerome, he was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church by Pope Boniface VIII in 1298.
- He is commonly listed as the patron saint of musicians, singers, students and teachers. His Feast Day is celebrated on March 12
- His Papacy served as a crucial bridge between the age of the Church Fathers and the Medieval age.

### III. What is So Great about Gregory?

- Personal holiness
  - Like Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome, all he really ever wanted to do was to live a quiet, monastic life
  - He had an unquenchable thirst for Scripture
  - He was frequently ill from strict fasting and his oppressive workload
  - “The Chink of Contemplation”

“A favorite expression of St. Gregory the Great was ‘the chink of contemplation.’ He thought of God as boundless light. At times a shaft of this light floods the souls of those who have prepared themselves by getting rid of sin and attachment to it and who continue to occupy themselves in fruitful labors. In this life man cannot look directly at the divine essence, just as he cannot look directly at the bright sun. But occasionally, for those who are ready, the sunlight comes in through a chink and fills the room of the soul.

“Two things are to be remarked. The filling of the soul with light is short and momentary. It passes swiftly. Secondly, the light, just like the sunlight which shows all the floating dust particles, shows the soul to be filled with numerous flaws and faults. That is why the mystic is always truly humble. He does not exaggerate, but fully means what he says about his own baseness. He has seen his flaws in the light of a moment’s contemplation.” (*35 Doctors of the Church*)
- Pastoral Care, Concern and Humility
  - His best known work is entitled *Pastoral Care* – on how clergy could and should lead moral lives and set good examples for their churches (how to be “physicians of the heart” – Book I, ch. 2). Copies were frequently given to the newly ordained for centuries afterward
  - Every day he invited 12 poor people to dine with him at his table
  - “During a time of famine throughout Europe, Pope Gregory organized the distribution of food to the starving and encouraged the rich to serve the poor. He called this work ‘the art of arts.’” (<http://saintsresource.com/gregory-the-great/>)
  - According to one legend, in 590 as Gregory was leading a procession during an unrelenting outbreak of the plague (at great personal risk), he saw an apparition of St. Michael the Archangel above Castel Sant’Angelo. Michael was sheathing his sword as a sign of the end of the plague. (See page 6)
  - He introduced illustrated Bibles to help make the Word of God more accessible to the illiterate
  - He was so moved to hear of the death by starvation of a forgotten man that he would not allow himself to say Mass for several days
  - Referred to himself as *Servus servorum Dei* – Servant of the Servants of God; a title adopted by many subsequent Popes later. (Reference: St. Matthew 20:25-27)
- Politically Astute
  - Served ably as Prefect of Rome
  - As the Roman Empire was in serious decline, the Western Church grew dramatically in influence under Gregory’s leadership. This linkage between Church and State would grow and remain dominant for centuries
  - As Pope, he saved Rome from attack by the Lombards c.293 through skillful negotiation and pleading (although some say a large payment the leader of the Lombards did the trick). Regardless, Gregory clearly exercised – in an

unprecedented way – both ecclesiastical and civic power in ensuring peace with the Lombards

- Ecclesiastical Reform and Influence
  - Compiled the influential Gregorian Sacramentary
  - Implemented lasting liturgical reforms (*e.g.*, placement of the Our Father after the fracture)
  - He promoted plainsong chant, and Gregorian Chant is named in his honor:  
Pope Gregory held that the place of Church music was a subordinate one. It should never provide, he said, anything more than a background for the sacred reenactment of Calvary. It should never draw attention to itself, and away from the Holy sacrifice of the Mass. It should, while disposing the minds of the faithful to profound reverence of God, and making more ardent the love of their hearts for Him, never become an end in itself.  
(<https://www.stgregoryenid.com/welcome/who-was-st-gregory-the-great>)
  - Initiated the Gregorian Mass – the custom of having Mass said 30 consecutive days for a departed soul
- Evangelistic Zeal
  - Sent monks to the outer reaches of Europe, having a particular interest in the Christianization of Britain. (Attempted to go there himself but was called back by popular demand.)
  - His interest in Britain was sparked by a chance encounter with three young men up for sale as slaves. (Other accounts say they were free men.) Impressed by their blond hair and blue eyes and their physical grace, he learned they were “Angles” (as in Anglo-Saxon). Gregory considered them to be angelic, and he firmly resolved that such a handsome, pagan race should be converted to Christianity
  - One of the monks who did make it to Britain was Augustine, who later became the first Archbishop of Canterbury

## VII. Closing Prayer

O GOD, who on the soul of thy servant Gregory didst bestow the rewards of everlasting felicity: mercifully grant; that we, which are sore oppressed by the burden of our sins, may by the succor of his intercession be relieved. Through Jesus Christ thy Son our Lord. Who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. **Amen.**  
(*Collect for the Feast of St. Gregory I*, Anglican Missal, p. E36.)

**Next week:** St. Athanasius

## VIII. Sources

- Ancient History Encyclopedia: Gregory the Great and His Pastoral Care  
(<https://www.ancient.eu/article/917/gregory-the-great--his-pastoral-care/>)
- Cardinal Deacons and the Use of the Dalmatic  
([http://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/liturgy/details/ns\\_lit\\_doc\\_20091125\\_cardinali-diaconi\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/details/ns_lit_doc_20091125_cardinali-diaconi_en.html))
- Catholic Encyclopedia: Pope St. Gregory (“the Great”)  
(<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06780a.htm>).
- Lumen Fidei Institute: St. Gregory the Great and His Dove (<http://saintsresource.com/gregory-the-great/>).
- Rengers, C. *The 35 Doctors of the Church (revised ed.) Kindle Edition*. Charlotte, NC: TAN Books 2014.
- Saints Resource: Gregory the Great, Pope (<http://saintsresource.com/gregory-the-great/>).
- Schaff, P. (ed.) *The Complete Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Collection of Early Church Fathers: Cross-Linked to the Bible. Kindle Edition*. Amazon Digital Services 2016.

### Gregory the Great on YouTube

- Introductory: St. Gregory the Great (Victor Hoagland)  
([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZMH1nHSO7U&list=PLQ9-50qJL\\_DaOmdq44JD2n1tIlYtZtkn&index=6&t=0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZMH1nHSO7U&list=PLQ9-50qJL_DaOmdq44JD2n1tIlYtZtkn&index=6&t=0s)) (9 ½ minutes)
- Pope St. Gregory the Great (Catholic Online)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWvSdidzRcA> (4 minutes)
- Catholic History in Less Than Five Minutes (Pat McNamara)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aW\\_t3tdZ\\_dk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aW_t3tdZ_dk) (3 ½ minutes)
- Audio only: St. Gregory the Great – Part I (Dr. Matthew Bunson)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHFIPmczMP0> (28 minutes)
- St. Gregory the Great – Part II (Dr. Matthew Bunson)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wk\\_G9oG4VW0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wk_G9oG4VW0) (27 minutes)
- Butler’s Lives of the Saints: St. Gregory the Great  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ay2ZtXxvxA&t=1703s>) (28 minutes)
- Historical Context: Franks, Brits and Gregory the Great (Bruce Gore)  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sISeS3iH91A&t=109s>) (41 minutes)
- Gregorian Chant: What is Gregorian Chant?  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IgoH5kEqj3Y>) (8 minutes)



Castel Sant'Angelo (Castle of the Holy Angel)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castel\\_Sant%27Angelo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castel_Sant%27Angelo)



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