

Pope St. Gregory the Great

The saint that we celebrate today was a foundational figure with the collapse of the Roman Empire. St. Gregory the Great served the Church as pope from AD 590 – 604. He is considered the first medieval pope and one of the pillars of Western civilization. His pontificate helped bridge the gap between the collapse of the Roman Empire and the rise of the Frankish kingdom (5th – 10th century), providing God's people with much needed help.

In the past, I provided quite a bit information about Gregory's background. He was intellectually gifted, became the prefect of Rome at age 30, and deeply pious. He was eventually made a deacon in Rome by the pope and then became the pope's ambassador to the Byzantine's. Eventually, he was ordained a priest and in AD 590, unanimously voted to become pope at the age of 50 by priests.

When Gregory assumed the papacy in AD 590, the Roman empire was in ruins. The streets were crowded with refugees, and the seat of government was no longer in Rome but in Constantinople. The civil government was incapable of providing relief for the people of Italy. In short, Gregory walked into a disastrous situation in Rome and handled things very well.

Because of his connections as prefect of Rome, Gregory was able to obtain large donations to establish an incredible system of logistics, accounting and administration for bringing in food, grain, oil, and textiles from distant parts of the empire into Rome. No emperor in Rome did more to improve the lives of the people in Rome than Pope Gregory.

Additionally, Gregory removed unworthy priests from office, forbade taking money for many services and healed schisms. Furthermore, Gregory sent St. Augustine of Canterbury and 40 monks to convert England. Gregory also helped evangelize Germanic tribes (Arians) and bring them back to the faith.

Regarding liturgy, Gregory undertook major reforms and even today, the Church has beautiful music associated with his liturgical reforms called Gregorian chant. A fun fact is that Gregory is credited with the "Alleluia" acclamation that is sung before the gospel is read.

Gregory wrote a book called *Pastoral Care*, which elaborated on the qualities and duties of a bishop. For Gregory, bishops were mainly physicians whose main duties were to preach and enforce discipline.

After fourteen years of tireless work as pope, Gregory died March 12, 604 AD (64 years old). Along with Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome, Gregory is one of the four doctors of the Western Church. Only two other popes have the title great: Pope Leo (440-461) and Nicholas I (858-867).

What can this saintly pope teach us today? First, his humility was unparalleled. Gregory famously adopted the title *Servant of the Servants of God*. For Gregory, power was not a tool for status but as an absolute duty to serve others.

Additionally, Gregory stepped up in hard times. Using his organizational skills, he cared for the hungry and vulnerable, and found ways to negotiate peace.

Furthermore, Gregory saw the connection between liturgy and life. For Gregory, worship of God in beautiful liturgy (sacred music and warm reverence) translated to honoring God by serving the poor.

There is good reason that Pope Gregory is known as St. Gregory the Great! His deep faith and hard work helped him work through *many* problems facing the Church and the city of Rome. Our time has its own chaos. However, God always blesses us with all the graces we need to rise to our calling of becoming joyful saints when times get difficult! Like Gregory, may you remain close to Christ in prayer and work hard to bring stability and new life to our culture that needs it.

~St. Gregory, pray for us!