

## Saints Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, Bishops and Doctors—Memorial

St. Basil: 329–379

Patron Saint of monks, hospital administrators, reformers, and Russia

St. Gregory: c. 329–389

Patron Saint of harvests and poets

Pre-Congregation canonizations

Liturgical Colour: White

### Quotes:

*Much time had I spent in vanity, and had wasted nearly all my youth in the vain labour which I underwent in acquiring the wisdom made foolish by God. Then once upon a time, like a man roused from deep sleep, I turned my eyes to the marvellous light of the truth of the Gospel, and I perceived the uselessness of the “wisdom of the princes of this world, that come to naught” (1 Cor. 2:6) I wept many tears over my miserable life and I prayed that guidance might be vouchsafed me to admit me to the doctrines of true religion. ~Letter of Saint Basil #223*

*For nothing seemed to me so desirable as to close the doors of my senses, and, escaping from the flesh and the world, collected within myself...to live superior to visible things, ever preserving in myself the divine impressions pure and unmixed with the erring tokens of this lower world... ~Orationes of Saint Gregory 2:7*

**Reflection:** Saints Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzen were among the most devoted defenders of the faith in the fourth century. Both were bishops and both are now saints and doctors of the Church. These two men met while studying in Caesarea Cappadocia and strengthened their tight friendship in Athens. After Basil’s death, Gregory wrote of their bond, “We seemed to have one soul, inhabiting two bodies” (*Orationes of Saint Gregory* 43:20).

Both saints came from families of saints. Basil’s maternal grandmother was a martyr; his paternal grandmother, his parents, and three of his siblings are also saints. Gregory’s father was converted to Catholicism by his wife. After his conversion, he was ordained a priest and then consecrated as Bishop of Nazianzen. He served as bishop for about forty-five years, living into his nineties. These saintly parents had three children, all of whom became saints.

At the time that Saints Gregory and Basil lived, the Church, the body of Christ, was suffering from the pandemic of Arianism, a heresy that denied the divinity of Christ. This heresy was like a disease infecting the Church. Arianism entered the bloodstream of Christ’s body and weakened every limb and muscle, causing convulsions, violent outbursts, and deep divisions among both bishops and the faithful. The clear teaching and brave episcopal leadership of Saints Basil and Gregory helped the Church to heal, to eradicate this heresy, and to restore unity of faith in the East. But not all warmly welcomed their efforts. They both suffered greatly. From the emperor, many bishops, and other clergy and laity, they received many abuses, calumnies, physical attacks, and threats. Through it all, they remained faithful to their preaching and calm and focused in their resolve, restoring a deeper and more ancient unity to Christ’s faithful. Today, their voluminous writings are among the most inspiring, insightful, and convincing teachings of the early Church, particularly as they pertain to Christ’s divinity and the Most Holy Trinity.

These two men did not become saints simply because they were smart. They were also holy. And their holiness came from a life of deep prayer. After they both received an excellent education at the finest universities, they mutually sought to live as hermits, with Basil leading

the way by forming what would become the model for monasticism in the East. They both spent years in solitude and prayer at different stages of their lives. Their interior communion with God through prayer, more than anything else, prepared them for their common mission. Consider following the example of these two great saints by turning to God in prayer. Though you might not be called to become a hermit, you can certainly set aside time every day to focus on a deeper life of prayer. As you do so, you will discover God calling you to approach Him more closely, and then entrusting you with some greater mission to be accomplished for His glory.

**Prayer:** *Saints Gregory and Basil, you were called by God to be a light in the midst of darkness during a time of great turmoil within the Church. Please pray for me, that I will never live enveloped in the darkness of this world but will always carry the light of Christ to scatter falsehood and sin, so that God may be glorified and souls may be saved. Saints Basil and Gregory, pray for me. Jesus, I trust in You.*