**St. Gregory of Nyssa**

Date of birth unknown; died after 385 or 386.

He belongs to the group known as the "Cappadocian Fathers", a title which reveals at once his birthplace in [Asia Minor](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01782a.htm) and his [intellectual](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08066a.htm) characteristics. Gregory was born of a deeply religious [family](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05782a.htm), not very rich in worldly goods, to which circumstances he probably owed the [pious](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12748a.htm) training of his youth. His mother Emmelia was a [martyr's](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09736b.htm) daughter; two of his brothers, Basil of Cæsarea and [Peter of Sebaste](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11773c.htm), became [bishops](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02581b.htm) like himself; his eldest sister, Macrina, became a model of [piety](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12748a.htm) and is [honoured](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07462a.htm) as a saint. Another brother, Naucratius, a lawyer, inclined to a life of asceticism, but died too young to realize his desires. A letter of Gregory to his younger brother, Peter, exhibits the feelings of lively gratitude which both cherished for their elder brother Basil, whom Gregory calls "our father and our master". Probably, therefore, the difference in years between them was such as to have enabled Basil to supervise the [education](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05295b.htm) of his younger brothers. Basil's training was an antidote to the lessons of the [pagan](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11388a.htm) [schools](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13554b.htm), wherein, as we [know](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm) from a letter of [St. Gregory of Nazianzus](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07010b.htm), Gregory of Nyssa spent some time, very probably in his early youth, for it is [certain](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03539b.htm) that while still a youth Gregory exercised the [ecclesiastical](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03744a.htm) office of [rector](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12676c.htm). His [family](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05782a.htm), it would seem, had endeavoured to turn his thoughts towards the [Church](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03744a.htm), for when the young man chose a secular career and began the study of rhetoric, Basil remonstrated with him long and earnestly; when he had failed he called on Gregory's friends to influence him against that objectionable secular calling. It was all in vain; moreover, it would seem that the young man married. There exists a letter addressed to him by [Gregory of Nazianzus](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07010b.htm) condoling with him on the loss of one Theosebeia, who must have been his wife, and with whom he continued to live, as with a sister, even after he became [bishop](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02581b.htm). This is also evident from his treatise "De virginitate".

Some think that Gregory spent a certain time in retreat before his [consecration](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04276a.htm) as [bishop](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02581b.htm), but we have no [proof](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12454c.htm) of the fact. His extant letters make no mention of such retirement from the world. Nor are we better informed of the circumstances of his election to the [See of Nyssa](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11172c.htm), a little town on the banks of the Halys, along the road between Cæsarea and [Ancyra](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01464b.htm). According to [Gregory of Nazianzus](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07010b.htm) it was Basil who performed the episcopal [consecration](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04276a.htm) of his brother, before he himself had taken possession of the See of Sozima; which would place the beginning of Gregory of Nyssa's episcopate about 371. Was this brusque change in Gregory's career the result of a sudden vocation? [St. Basil](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02330b.htm) tells us that it was [necessary](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10733a.htm) to overcome his brother's repugnance, before he accepted the office of [bishop](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02581b.htm). But this does not help us to an answer, as the episcopal charge in that day was beset with many dangers. Moreover in the fourth century, and even later, it was not uncommon to express dislike of the episcopal [honour](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07462a.htm), and to fly from the prospect of election. The fugitives, however, were usually discovered and brought back, and the [consecration](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04276a.htm) took place when a show of resistance had saved the candidate's [humility](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07543b.htm). Whether it was so in Gregory's case, or whether he really did feel his own unfitness, we do not [know](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08673a.htm). In any case, St. Basil seems to have regretted at times the constraint thus put on his brother, now removed from his influence; in his letters he complains of Gregory's naive and clumsy interference with his (Basil's) business. To Basil the synod called in 372 by Gregory at [Ancyra](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01464b.htm) seemed the ruin of his own labours. In 375 Gregory seemed to him decidedly incapable of ruling a Church. At the same time he had but faint praise for Gregory's [zeal](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15753a.htm) for [souls](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14153a.htm).

A Synod of [Nyssa](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11172c.htm) (376) deposed him, and he was reduced to wander from town to town, until the death of [Valens](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15253b.htm) in 378. The new emperor, Gratian, published an edict of tolerance, and Gregory returned to his [see](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05001a.htm), where he was received with [joy](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07131b.htm). A few months after this (January, 379) his brother Basil died; whereupon an era of activity began for Gregory. In 379 he assisted at the Council of Antioch which had been summoned because of the Meletian [schism](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13529a.htm). Soon after this, it is supposed, he visited Palestine. There is reason for [believing](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02408b.htm) that he was sent officially to remedy the disorders of the [Church](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03744a.htm) of Arabia. But possibly his journey did not take place till after the Council of Constantinople in 381, convened by [Emperor Theodosius](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14577d.htm) for the welfare of religion in that city. It asserted the [faith](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05752c.htm) of Nicæa, and tried to put an end to [Arianism](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01707c.htm) and [Pneumatism](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12174a.htm) in the East. This council was not looked on as an important one at the time; even those present at it seldom refer to it in their writings. Gregory himself, though he assisted at the council, mentions it only casually in his funeral oration over [Meletius of Antioch](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10161b.htm), who died during the course of this assembly.

Most of his writings treat of the [Sacred Scriptures](https://www.newadvent.org/bible). He was an ardent admirer of [Origen](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11306b.htm), and applied constantly the latter's principles of [hermeneutics](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07271a.htm). Gregory is ever in quest of allegorical interpretations and mystical meanings hidden away beneath the literal sense of texts… In a brief tractate on the [witch](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15674a.htm) of Endor he says that the [woman](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15687b.htm) did not see Samuel, but only a [demon](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04710a.htm), who put on the figure of the [prophet](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12477a.htm). Besides a [homily](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07448a.htm) on the sixth Psalm, he wrote eight [homilies](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07448a.htm) on Ecclesiastes, in which he taught that the [soul](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14153a.htm) should rise above the senses, and that [true](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm) peace is only to be found in contempt of worldly greatness.

**St. Jerome**

Born at Stridon, a town on the confines of [Dalmatia](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04606b.htm) and Pannonia, about the year 340-2; died at [Bethlehem](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02532e.htm), 30 September, 420.

He went to [Rome](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13164a.htm), probably about 360, where he was [baptized](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02258b.htm), and became [interested](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08075a.htm) in [ecclesiastical](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03744a.htm) matters. From [Rome](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13164a.htm) he went to [Trier](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15042a.htm), famous for its [schools](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13554b.htm), and there began his [theological](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14580x.htm) studies. Later he went to [Aquileia](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01661c.htm), and towards 373 he set out on a journey to the East. He settled first in [Antioch](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01570a.htm), where he heard [Apollinaris of Laodicea](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01617a.htm), one of the first [exegetes](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05692b.htm) of that [time](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14726a.htm) and not yet separated from the [Church](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03744a.htm). From 374-9 Jerome led an [ascetical](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01767c.htm) life in the [desert](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04749a.htm) of Chalcis, southwest of [Antioch](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01570a.htm). [Ordained](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11279a.htm) [priest](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12406a.htm) at [Antioch](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01570a.htm), he went to [Constantinople](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04301a.htm) (380-81), where a friendship sprang up between him and [St. Gregory of Nazianzus](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07010b.htm). From 382 to August 385 he made another sojourn in [Rome](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13164a.htm), not far from [Pope Damasus](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04614a.htm). When the latter died (11 December, 384) his position became a very difficult one. His harsh criticisms had made him bitter enemies, who tried to ruin him. After a few months he was compelled to leave [Rome](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13164a.htm). By way of [Antioch](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01570a.htm) and Alexandria he reached [Bethlehem](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02533a.htm), in 386. He settled there in a [monastery](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04340c.htm) near a [convent](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04340c.htm) founded by two [Roman](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13164a.htm) ladies, [Paula](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11582a.htm) and Eustochium, who followed him to Palestine. Henceforth he led a life of [asceticism](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01767c.htm) and study; but even then he was troubled by controversies which will be mentioned later, one with Rufinus and the other with the [Pelagians](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11604a.htm).

**Biblical Reflection:**

In Letter 31 St. Jerome tells us, “… we must be careful to celebrate our holy day not so much with abundance of food as with exultation of spirit. For it is altogether unreasonable to wish to honor a martyr by excess who himself, as you know, pleased God by fasting.” What impact does this concept have upon your desire going forward in terms of how you celebrate Holy Days and Feast Days?

Since Christ is the Word Incarnate, and the Word became Flesh, feasting upon the Lord is done in reality (in the Eucharist) and in the Hearing. “He who has ears o hear, let them hear.”[LUK 8:8] and, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” [Rev 2:8] seem to be telling us to “wake up! Pay attention! Pray that we always seek Christ in our actions, our thoughts and our words, rejecting the world as men see it and embracing the things that matter to God for our salvation.

**Catechism Reflection:**

Gifts – The CCC refers to the “Gift of Faith”, “Gifts of the Holy Spirit [wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and Fear of the Lord]”, the gift of Graces (all types), and the gift of the Decalogue [ten commandments]. Which of these types of gifts or presents are being offered to the readers of the letters? Notice the lack of attachment to the world of materialism. What could we do to better divorce ourselves and our families from worldly gifts?

**Spiritual Reflection:**

Both SS. Jerome and Gregory of Nyssa appear to dive into the spiritual aspects of the gifts they receive or plan to give to their readers. Is this the correct way to send and receive gifts as a Catholic? Would this elevate your mind and thoughts to a more pure focused assent towards Love of Neighbor? Are you read y for the consequences and blowback from such a movement? If you are afraid, why?