

Readings for March 11th – Gregory the Great

Psalm 66 (To the leader. A Song. A Psalm)

¹ Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;
² sing the glory of his name;
give to him glorious praise.
³ Say to God, 'How awesome are your deeds!
Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you.
⁴ All the earth worships you;
they sing praises to you,
sing praises to your name. *'Selah*
⁵ Come and see what God has done:
he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.
⁶ He turned the sea into dry land;
they passed through the river on foot.
There we rejoiced in him,
⁷ who rules by his might for ever,
whose eyes keep watch on the nations—
let the rebellious not exalt themselves. *Selah*
⁸ Bless our God, O peoples,
let the sound of his praise be heard,

Genesis 18:1-15

¹ The Lord appeared to Abraham* by the oaks* of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. ³ He said, 'My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. ⁵ Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.' So they said, 'Do as you have said.' ⁶ And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, 'Make ready quickly three measures* of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.' ⁷ Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. ⁸ Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate. ⁹ They said to him, 'Where is your wife Sarah?' And he said, 'There, in the tent.' ¹⁰ Then one said, 'I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.' And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?' ¹³ The Lord said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, and say, "Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?" ¹⁴ Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.' ¹⁵ But Sarah denied, saying, 'I did not laugh'; for she was afraid. He said, 'Oh yes, you did laugh.'

Mark 10:42-45

⁴²So Jesus called them and said to them, ‘You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ⁴³But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.’

Gregory the Great, Bishop & Theologian, 604

Gregory was born into a patrician family about 540 and became Prefect of Rome in 573. Shortly thereafter, however, he retired to a monastic life in a community which he founded in his ancestral home on the Coelian Hill. Pope Pelagius II made him Ambassador to Constantinople in 579, where he learned much about the larger affairs of the church. Not long after his return home, Pope Pelagius died of the plague, and in 590, Gregory was elected as his successor.



Gregory wrote eloquently about the demands of the pastoral office and the dangers of seeking it too rashly. He said: “Those who aspire to the priesthood usually delude themselves into thinking that they are seeking it out of a desire to perform good works, although this actually stems from pride and a desire to accomplish great things. Thus one thing takes place in their conscious mind, but another motive is hidden secretly within. For the mind frequently lies to itself about itself, pretending that it loves the good work when it does not, and that it does not care for worldly glory when in fact it does. The mind often has appropriate trepidation about seeking office, but once a leadership position has been secured, it assumes that it has achieved what it rightly deserved. When it begins to enjoy its newfound superiority, it quickly forgets all of the spiritual thoughts that it once had. Therefore, when thoughts begin to stray, it is good to direct them back to the past, and for a person to consider how he behaved while still under authority. In this way he will judge himself more accurately, for no one can learn humility in a position of leadership who did not learn it when he was in a position of subjection. No one will know how to flee from praise when it abounds if he secretly yearned for praise when it was absent. Therefore, let each person judge his own character on the basis of his past life so that the fantasy of his thoughts will not deceive him.”

Gregory’s pontificate was one of strenuous activity. He organized the defense of Rome against the attacks of the Lombards and fed its populace from papal granaries in Sicily. In this, as in other matters, he administered “the patrimony of St. Peter” with energy and efficiency. His ordering of the church’s liturgy and chant has molded the spirituality of

Western Christianity until the present day. His writings provided succeeding generations with a number of influential texts, especially his *Pastoral Care*, which remains to this day a classic text on the work of Christian ministry. Gregory understood well the intricacies of the human heart, and the ease with which growth in holiness may be compromised by self-deception. He wrote: “The pastor must understand that vices commonly masquerade as virtues. The person who is not generous claims to be frugal, while the one who is a prodigal describes himself as generous. Thus, it is necessary that the director of souls discern between vices and virtues with great care.”

In the midst of all his cares and duties, Gregory prepared and fostered the evangelizing mission to the Anglo-Saxons under Augustine and other monks from his own monastery. For this reason, the English historian Bede justly called Gregory “The Apostle of the English.” Gregory died on March 12, 604, and was buried in Saint Peter’s Basilica. His life was a true witness to the title he assumed for his office: “Servant of the servants of God.”