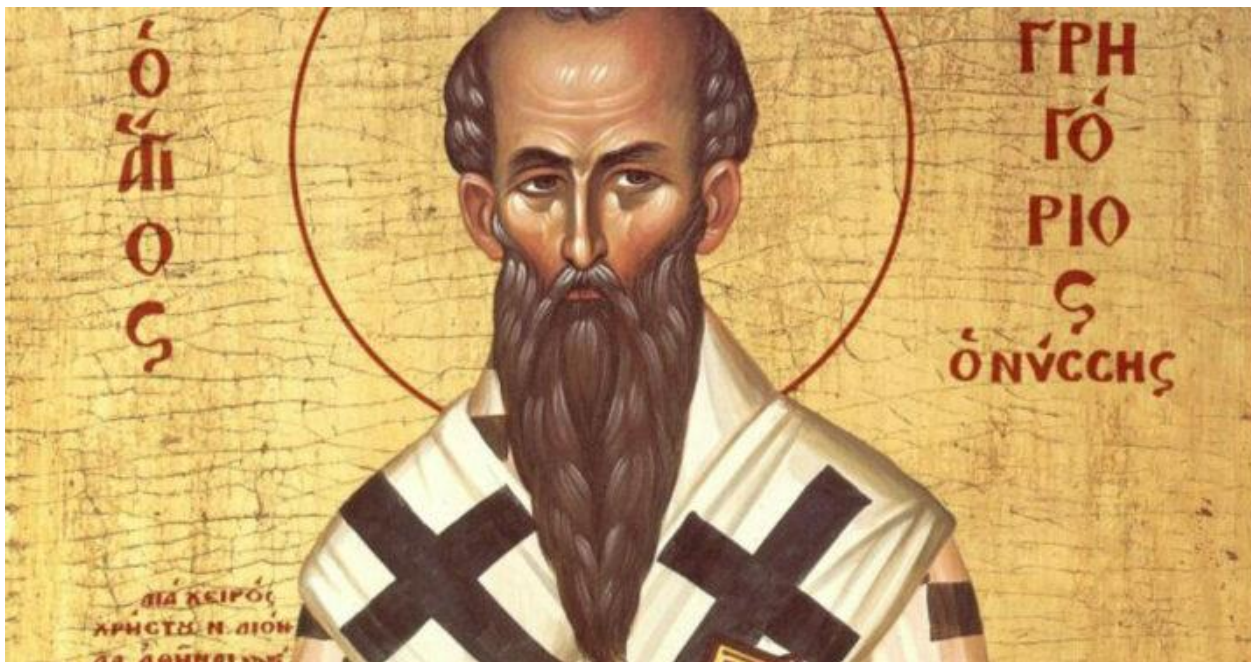


Tuesday 19 July 2022

St Gregory of Nyssa



Gregory of Nyssa was born around the year 330 AD in Caesarea in today's Turkey. He was the child of an aristocratic Christian family.

Unlike his older (and better-known) brother Basil, he was academically undistinguished, but ultimately proved to be the most original of the group of the theologians known as the 'Cappadocian Fathers'. He was introduced to the spiritual life by his elder sister Macrina who exercised a formative influence upon him, and with whom he maintained close bonds of friendship throughout his life. It was she who, after the death of their father, converted the household into a sort of monastery on one of the family estates. Basil systemised this approach is the father of eastern monasticism.

Gregory married a deeply spiritual woman, Theosebia, and at first refused ordination, choosing to pursue a secular career. He was ordained only later in life and, in 372 AD, was chosen to be bishop of Nyssa. He was deeply affected when both his brother Basil and sister Macrina died in 379 AD but a profound spirituality emerged out of his darkness. For Gregory, God is met not as an object to be understood, but as a mystery to be loved.

He died in the year 394 AD.

Sermon © Revd Dr Paul Monk.

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The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration appear at the end.

The hymns are YouTube links. To hear the hymns please hover the mouse over each link, press Ctrl and then return.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page, <http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 Immortal, invisible
Immortal, invisible

(please click on this link to hear the hymn)
(different version)

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Christ calls us to share the heavenly banquet of his love with all the saints in earth and heaven. Therefore, knowing our unworthiness and sin, let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God’s commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name. Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The Gloria

This Gloria is sung to the tune of 'Cwm Rhondda'. Click [here](#) for the tune.

All Glory be to God in Heaven,
Songs of joy and peace we bring,
Thankful hearts and voices raising,
To creation's Lord we sing.
Lord we thank you, Lord we praise you,
Glory be to God our King:
Glory be to God our King.

Lamb of God, who on our shoulders,
Bore the load of this world's sin;
Only Son of God the Father,
You have brought us peace within.
Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy,
Now your glorious reign begin:
Now your glorious reign begin.

**You O Son of God are Holy,
You we praise with one accord.
None in heav'n or earth is like you,
Only you are Christ the Lord.
With the Father and the Spirit,
Ever worshipped and adored:
Ever worshipped and adored.**

The Collect for St Gregory of Nyssa

Lord of eternity, creator of all things,
in your Son Jesus Christ
you open for us the way to resurrection
that we may enjoy your bountiful goodness:
may we who celebrate your servants Gregory
press onwards in faith to your boundless love
and ever wonder at the miracle of your presence among us;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the book of Wisdom of Solomon

Who can learn the counsel of God, or who can discern what the Lord wills? For the reasoning of mortals is worthless, and our designs are likely to fail; for a perishable body weighs down the soul, and this earthy tent burdens the thoughtful mind. We can hardly guess at what is on earth, and what is at hand we find with labour; but who has traced out what is in the heavens? Who has learned your counsel, unless you have given wisdom and sent your holy spirit from on high? *Wisdom 9:13-17*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

As it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him'—these things God has

revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. *1 Corinthians 2:9-13*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 Jesus lives!

[\(please click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

All Glory to you O Lord.

Jesus said to his disciples, 'I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.' *John 17:6; 18-24*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

Jesus was a master communicator. Our limited examples—from a mere four Gospels—demonstrate choice examples of metaphor, simile, and parable. Conveying the message was so important that he used anything and everything to hand to share his message. It's easy to imagine him standing on a Judean hillside, looking

around and being inspired by the everyday sights: the Kingdom of Heaven is like a seed or glorious lilies; and he himself was like a light, a shepherd, a vine, and so on.

Some of Jesus' examples have aged badly: what point is Jesus making when he says a *Samaritan* is good? And who today would even recognise a shepherd? There is a bigger problem still. All these descriptions ultimately break down because God is a spirit beyond space and time. That's why some descriptions employ negative concepts: God cannot be seen and is in-visible. God cannot die and is im-mortal. These descriptions are true but are not particularly useful.

Descriptions of God generally fall into two broad classes: Positive descriptions (which say something along the lines of 'God is like ...', 'The Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to ...') are sometimes called by the Greek title of *cataphatic*. Virtually all of Jesus' teaching is cataphatic by nature. The opposite are negative descriptions, which we sometimes call *apophatic*. Jesus himself seems not to have used this kind of description, but they appear in the rest of the New Testament. How else can we describe 'the silence of the perpetual choir in heaven' (Revelation 8:1). Later theology can be almost entirely apophatic.

Gregory of Nyssa was a master of this kind of theology. He lived in an era when the Church was countering heresy and error, making it important to define the faith in ever more rigorous ways. The pure faith of the church was otherwise at risk.

Gregory was not keen on cataphatic descriptions for the obvious reason that a statement such as, 'The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed' (Matthew 13:31) can be ambiguous. What if you don't know what a mustard seed is like? Worse, what if we think we know all about mustard seeds but we're wrong? Worse again, what if mustard seeds in my part of the world are different from the mustard seeds in yours? The scope for error is obvious.

Gregory's answer was simple. If human words and ways of thinking are prone to misunderstanding, we should let God Himself tell us what He is like. He paraphrased St Paul in today's second reading, which is why his ways of thinking refer to the Holy Spirit so often. God knows God better than we do, so let Him teach us.

But Gregory's approach is also full of danger. What if a human soul does not know how to 'hear' God the Holy Spirit? Worse, what if the soul thinks it is listening to God but is not? Gregory therefore expended much effort in teaching people how to listen in spiritual ways, with all the appropriate checks and balances.

At the heart of his spiritual teaching is the concept of spiritual darkness (or 'unknown'). The arguments can sound complicated but they are in fact very simple. He starts by saying that God is infinite and, because we are extremely finite, we can never truly understand God. At best, we understand a very small part of Him so all attempts at describing God are at best limited. They can be dangerous when

we try to define God and build on those definitions. We must start with humility.

The best way to 'understand' God and 'know' Him is therefore to ignore the conscious mind. We forget mustard seeds and shepherds. In fact, Gregory suggests we forget words and concepts altogether because they are so earth-bound. He then suggests a progression in our understanding from the moment of first conversion (which continued after we die) towards the unreachable knowledge of God. That progression involves moving away from the more physical toward the more spiritual.

Next, if God is love (and scripture insists that He is: the classic definition occurs in 1 John 4) then love is the lens through which we can best seek God. Immersion in love is immersion in God. Any form of discipleship that leads to greater awareness of love can become a potent vehicle for spiritual growth; conversely, any prayer, study, or way of being that does not consider love as central should be ignored or at least relegated. As the medieval classic, *The Cloud of Unknowing* says,

I would leave all that I can think
and choose to love that thing that I cannot think.
For why; He may well be loved, but not thought.
By love may He be gotten and holden;
but by thought never.

Our task as Christians is to live the life of Jesus, which always means following God. We therefore need to know God and, knowing Him, we listen, obey, and follow. To that end, we must hone our ways of living and listening, much like re-tuning a radio. Gregory would say the best way of 're-tuning' a human soul always involves love.

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

All This is our faith.

We believe and trust in one God,

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Prayers of intercession

O Good Shepherd,
Who carries the whole flock on your shoulders,
Where are you pasturing your flock?

Show me the place of peace,
lead me to the good grass that will nourish me,
call me by name so that I hear your voice,
Answer me,
For you are the One my soul loves.

I call you 'the One my soul loves'
because your name is above every name
and above all understanding and no one can utter or comprehend it.

How could I not love you,
when you loved me so much?
Even though I was stained dark with sin,
You laid down your life for the sheep of your flock.
A greater love cannot be imagined, than exchanging your life for my freedom!

Show me where you pasture your flock,
so that I can find that saving pasture too,
and fill myself with the food of heaven without which no-one can come to eternal life,
and run to the spring and be filled with the drink of God.
You give it, as from a spring, to those who thirst—
water pouring from your side,
water that is a spring welling up to eternal life.

If you lead me to pasture here,
you will make me lie down at noon,
sleeping at peace and taking my rest in light unconquered by any shade.
For the noon has no darkness and the sun stands far above the mountain peaks.
You bring your flock to lie in this light,
You bring your children to rest in you.

Show me how I should sleep and how I should graze,
and where the path is to my noonday rest.
Do not let me fall away from your flock
and become lost.

O Good shepherd,
Who carries the whole flock on your shoulders. *Gregory of Nyssa*

All Amen

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

The peace

Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given,
and his name shall be called the Prince of Peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 Jesus, remember me (please click on this link to hear the hymn)
Jesus, remember me (different version)
Jesus, remember me (different again)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

The Dismissal

The peace of God which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God,
and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord;
and the blessing of God the Almighty,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be with you now and remain with you always.

All Amen.

HYMN 4 Let all mortal flesh keep silent (click on this link to hear the hymn)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ. Amen.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
And now we give thanks, most gracious God,
surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses
and glorified in the assembly of your saints.
The glorious company of apostles praise you.
The noble fellowship of prophets praise you.
The white-robed army of martyrs praise you.
We, your holy Church, acclaim you.
In communion with angels and archangels,
and with all who served you on earth and worship you now in heaven,
we raise our voice to proclaim your glory,
for ever praising you and saying:

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.

He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with Gregory of Nyssa and all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

All **Our Father in heaven,**
 hallowed be your name,
 your kingdom come,
 your will be done,
 on earth as in heaven.
 Give us today our daily bread.
 Forgive us our sins
 as we forgive those who sin against us.
 Lead us not into temptation
 but deliver us from evil.

 For the kingdom, the power,
 and the glory are yours
 now and for ever. Amen.

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

All **Though we are many, we are one body,**
 because we all share in one bread.

All **Lamb of God,**
 you take away the sin of the world,
 have mercy on us.

Lamb of God,
 you take away the sin of the world,
 have mercy on us.

Lamb of God,
 you take away the sin of the world,
 grant us peace.

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us. Amen.

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

God of truth,
whose Wisdom set her table
and invited us to eat the bread and drink the wine
of the kingdom:
help us to lay aside all foolishness
and to live and walk in the way of insight,
that we may come with your servants Gregory and Macrina
to the eternal feast of heaven;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen

All Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.