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Seasoning the Seasons™

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Saint Gregory the Great

Saint Gregory the Great, Pope and Doctor of the Church

Saint Gregory the Great was born around the year 540 and was the son of a well-to-do, aristocratic family. His father, Gordianus, was a senator. Gregory was well-educated and also was involved in public service. From around the years 572-574 he served as prefect of Rome.



St. Gregory (San Gregorio Magno)
Antonello da Messina, Circa 1472
Museo Nazionale, Palermo, Italy

When his father died, Gregory sold his father's property. He gave money to the poor and also established seven monasteries – six in Sicily and one in Rome. He entered the monastery in Rome around 574-575 as a Benedictine monk. He was ordained and became one of the seven deacons of Rome.

Pope Pelagius II (579-590) sent Gregory to Constantinople in 579 as his deputy or nuncio. Gregory served in Constantinople until 585 or 586, when he returned to the monastery in Rome. Back in Rome, he continued to serve as an advisor to Pope Pelagius II. When the Pope died in 590, Gregory was elected to succeed him, and became Pope Gregory I. He was the first monk to become a pope.

Even though Pope Gregory suffered from ill health during his papacy, he had a very fruitful pontificate. An accomplished statesman, he negotiated peace with the Lombards and acted as the civil ruler of Italy. He reorganized the papal estates and the Roman curia. He also looked after and tended to the poor and needy.

Pope Gregory also was instrumental in the evangelization of Great Britain. In 596 he sent the monk, Augustine (Saint Augustine of Canterbury), and forty other monks as missionaries to Great Britain. This is why there are so many churches in Great Britain named for Saint Gregory the Great.

Saint Gregory the Great was also a very prolific writer, and he wrote more than 850 letters during his papacy. In his *"Dialogues"*, the second book contains his famous biography of Saint Benedict. He also wrote *"Pastoral Care"* in which he reflected on the bishop as the shepherd of souls. This book became the "handbook" for bishops during the Middle Ages. He also wrote numerous homilies and reflections on Scripture, many of which are still in existence. These include homilies/commentaries on the Gospels, the Book of Ezekiel, the Song of Songs, I Samuel, and the Book of Job.



Pope Gregorius I dictating the Gregorian Chants
 Hartker of Sankt-Gallen, Circa 1000
 Antiphonary of Hartker of the monastery of
 Saint Gall (Cod. Sang. 390, p. 13)

Saint Gregory the Great is known for his reform of the Liturgy. Gregorian chant is named for him, as it was thought (though this is sometimes questioned) that he compiled and arranged some of these chants. Because of this he is known as the patron saint of music.

Pope Gregory I died on March 12, 604. He was considered a saint almost immediately following his death. In the year 1295, Pope Boniface VIII proclaimed Saint Gregory the Great a Doctor of the Church. Along with Saints Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome, he is considered one of the four great Doctors of the Western Church.

We celebrate Saint Gregory the Great's feast day (Memorial) on September 3. In art he is often depicted with the papal tiara and a dove representing the Holy Spirit. Celebrate Gregory's feast day by listening to Gregorian Chant and enjoying an Italian pastry with an English cup of tea!