

Lives of Saints

St Gregory the Great

540? - 604?

Feast day: 3rd September



“Perhaps it is not after all so difficult for a man to part with his possessions, but it is certainly most difficult for him to part with himself.”

**St Gregory
the Great**

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I was born into a wealthy family. My mother and two of my aunts were themselves saintly, and I was devoted to God from my youth. I loved to meditate on the Scriptures and to listen attentively to the conversations of my elders. Before I was 30, I was already the prefect of Rome, the highest civil dignity in the city. However, after five years in office, around the year 574, I resigned, founded six monasteries on my Sicilian estate, and became a Benedictine monk in my own home at Rome.

I was ordained a priest, and became one of the pope's seven deacons, and also served six years in the East as papal nuncio in Constantinople. I was finally recalled to become abbot and I was content to be a monk. But in 590, at the age of 50, I was elected pope by the clergy and people of Rome. I was direct and firm. I removed unworthy priests from office, forbade taking money for many services, and emptied the papal treasury to ransom prisoners of the Lombards and to care for persecuted Jews and the victims of plague and famine. I was very concerned about the conversion of England, so I sent on a mission 40 monks from my own monastery.

I lived in a time of perpetual strife with invading Lombards and difficult relations with the East. Moreover, I suffered almost continually from indigestion and, at intervals, from attacks of slow fever, as well as gout. In spite of these infirmities, I hardly ever rested. Once I was called to public service, I gave my considerable energies completely to my work. Among other things, I wrote a book called Pastoral Care, on the duties and qualities of a bishop. In my own down-to-earth preaching, I was skilled at applying the daily Gospel to the needs of my listeners. I will especially be remembered for my reform of the liturgy and for strengthening respect for doctrine.