

May 10

MEDITATION ON SAINT GREGORY OF NAZIANZEN

126.1 First Point

While a student at Athens, Saint Gregory applied himself more to the perfection of his soul than to learning literature. He had such great concern to avoid sin that he paid special attention to shun bad companions and particularly persons of the opposite sex; he felt sure that this is one of the occasions which contributes the most to make us sinners. At this period he gladly spent much time with Saint Basil, with whom he formed such a close friendship, that when Saint Basil retired into the solitude of a hermitage in Pontus, Saint Gregory went to find him there and lived with him an angelic life.

How fortunate it is to live far from occasions of offending God! To have this is an advantage. A person ought, therefore, to thank God frequently and even daily for this grace, because it is one of the main means of salvation.

Bad companions are so dangerous, especially in youth, that there is nothing to which you should pay more attention than to prevent those you teach from keeping such company. Nor is there anything you should recommend more strongly to them than to become close friends with the best of their companions, the most pious, and the best behaved.

126.2 Second Point

This saint, having been chosen to govern the Church of Constantinople, suffered a great deal from the opposition of the Arians, who persecuted him viciously in various ways. They accused him of being an idolater who wanted to introduce several gods. At this the people wished to stone him, and he was brought before judges who had been stirred up against him to have him condemned.

Yet he always remained a firm and indomitable defender of the true faith. He preached with so much zeal and so effectively that during the three years he lived in that city he converted a large number of heretics. By the time he left the city it was purged not only of Arianism and all the other errors with which it had been infested on his arrival, but also of many of the vices which had reigned there previously, as this saint himself testifies.

Such are the usual consequences of persecutions suffered by those who labor for the salvation of souls. The more they are burdened by difficulties in their apostolic labors, the more conversions God brings about through their ministry, and the more effectively they procure the salvation of souls.

Do not be surprised, therefore, if in doing your work you meet with difficulties and contradictions. The more you suffer, the more you should be encouraged to fulfill your duties well, because you can then be sure that God will pour out abundant blessings on the work you do.

126.3 Third Point

This saint resigned his bishopric not long after he had entered it in order to calm down the trouble caused by the Arians concerning his election. He withdrew entirely from contact with the world and applied himself assiduously to prayer, which became his main occupation. He lived austere in constant mortification, especially of his tongue, because he recognized that this is one of the most necessary mortifications. He even says, out of humility, that his tongue escaped him so readily that he experienced much trouble restraining it, and that for this purpose he took great care to watch over it. Once he even imposed on himself a penance of not talking for forty days, because he thought he had spoken too much.

The work you do during the day does not prevent you from living in seclusion; love this seclusion and willingly preserve it after the example of this saint, who sanctified himself by means of it. It will help you very much to acquire the perfection of your state and procure piety for your disciples. But if you do not appreciate a secluded life, and if you apply yourself but little to prayer, you will not possess the fervor necessary to inspire your students with the spirit of Christianity.

Also, control your tongue; such self-control will make it easy for you to practice recollection and remember the presence of God. It will also be an excellent means for you to keep yourself in silence, order, the exact practice of your spiritual exercises, the faithful observance of your rules, self-control, tranquility, and peace. These great advantages should induce you not to give free rein to your tongue.

Gregory Nazianzen (ca 329 - 390) was born at Arianzus in Cappadocia, the son of the bishop of Nazianzus, when it was normal for clergy to be married in that country. He studied in his native land, in Palestine, in Alexandria, and for ten years in Athens, where he formed a close friendship with Saint Basil. (See De La Salle's meditation for June 14). He spent time as a hermit in the desert with Basil, but left it to help his aging father. He accepted ordination as a priest with great reluctance, but wrote a beautiful treatise on the priesthood as an apology for his reluctance. He was by nature too gentle to become assertive in his administration as a bishop, which marred his friendship with Basil and led him to resign from his later role as bishop of Constantinople. However, he did oppose the Arian heresy with vigor and his writings have earned for him the title of Doctor of the Church. His feast has now been joined with that of Saint Basil and is celebrated on January 2. During his lifetime he was called The Theologian because of his learning and eloquence.