

Life of Gregory the Great: 540-604

1. Life and Biography

- a. Gregory was born *circa* 540.
- b. Urban Prefect
 - i. In 573, Gregory was named *praefectus urbi*, urban prefect, of Rome
- c. Monastic Retreat:
 - i. On account of the temptations that Gregory experienced as *praefectus*, in 574, he “left the world.” He explains, “*At length being anxious to flee all these temptations, I sought the harbor of the monastery.*” Preface to the *Moralia*.
- d. Deacon of Rome:
 - i. In 579, Gregory’s withdraw from the world, however, was short-lived. In 579, Pope Pelagius II ordained him a deacon and sent him to Constantinople as, a papal legate.
- e. 590 Called to the chair of Peter: 64th Pope
 - i. Start of Papal Temporal Administration
- f. English Mission
 - i. Writings.
 1. Homilies on Ezekiel, 591-3.
 2. Forty Gospel Homilies, circa 593.
 3. Dialogues 594.
 4. Gregory’s papal correspondence.
 5. *Song of Songs*, (594–598)
 6. *Liber Regulae Pastoralis*, 590
 7. *Moralia*, 580-587

2. Pastoral Rule

- a. *ars est artium*; **Slide 11**
 - i. PR, 1.1 *No one ventures to teach any art unless he has learned it after deep thought (meditatione). With what rashness, then, would the pastoral office be undertaken by the unfit, seeing that the government of souls is the art of arts (ars est artium regimen animarum)!*
- b. Four Sections of the *Rule*; **Slide 12**
 - i. P.R. 1.1 The Rule has four sections, which are outlined in the preface:
 1. For, as necessity demands, [1] one must consider carefully how each person comes to the height of leadership,
 2. [2] how he should live,
 3. [3] how he should teach;
 4. [4] how with great consideration, he should consider daily his own weakness
- c. Monastic Virtues; **Slide 13**.
 1. Adoption of Ascetic Virtues;

- a. He writes, *“his flesh must be mortified by abstinence,”*
“The bishop should be discreet in silence and profitable in speech,” *“the ruler should ever be pure in thought.”*

- ii. **Slide 14.**

- 1. PR 1.10 *“The one coming to rule . . . must devote himself entirely to setting a good example (ad exemplum vivendi). He must die to all passions of the flesh and by now lead a spiritual life.”* *The priest/bishop must set “a good example of living (ad exemplum vivendi).*

- d. Action and Contemplation, **Slide 15**

- i. Relationship between Action and Contemplation

- 1. And the Lord himself to argue for the importance of the mixed life.
 - a. PR 2.5 *the Truth himself, manifested to us by assuming our human nature, engaged in prayer on the mountain and worked miracles in the towns. He thus showed the way to be followed by good rulers, who, though they strive after the highest things by contemplation, should nevertheless by their compassion share in the needs of the weak. Then, indeed, charity rises to sublime heights, when in pity it is drawn by the lowly things of the neighbor, **and the more kindly it stoops to infirmity, the mightier is its reach to the highest.***

- b. Part III of the *Pastoral Rule*; **slide 16**

- 1. PR 3.1 *“Long before us, Gregory Nazianzus of blessed memory taught that the same exhortation is not suited for everyone because the same quality of character does not pertain to each person.”*

3. The Moralia

- a. Bible as a mirror; **Slide 17**

- i. Moralia 2.1 *“Sacred Scripture is offered like a kind of mirror to the eyes of our mind, that we may see our interior face in it. For there we recognize our ugliness and our beauty. There we measure our progress; there we see how far we are from our goal.”*

- b. The Hero of the Text: Job

- i. His virtue and patience **slide 18.**

- 1. Moralia 3.3.3 *“It was indispensable that the extent of his virtue should be made known, so that all might imitate him. If he had not been tempted, he would not be such a model of virtue for others. Accordingly, it came to pass that the very power of the blow he received displayed his virtues to all people as something to be imitated; his trials revealed that virtue in him that in times of prosperity had been hidden. The virtue of patience grew out of*

those trials and the glory of his reward was greater on account of the pain of the blows.

- c. Esau Represents the love of the world; **Slide 19**
 - 1. Gen 25:27, *And Esau was a cunning hunter a man of the field and Jacob was a plain man dwelling in tents...or it is said in the other translation, he dwelt at home.*
 - a. *For what is represented by Esau's hunting but the life of those who giving loose to themselves in external pleasures, follow the flesh? And moreover he is described to be a man of the field, for the lovers of this world cultivate the eternal in the same proportion that they leave uncultivated their internal parts.*
- d. The importance of humility; **Slide 20, 21**
 - i. Paul was unaware of his status
 - 1. *Mor. 26.26.45: As if he was unaware that he was superior to his brethren when he said, 'we have made ourselves little in your midst' (1 Thess 2:7); and again, 'we are your servants through Jesus Christ' (2 Cor 4:5).*