

**NASHOTAH HOUSE SEMINARY**  
**Morning Eucharist | The Feast of Gregory of Nazianzus**  
**John 10:22-30 & Acts 11:19-26**

When I began doing ministry I would often have pastors approach me and say, “If you can do anything else, do that.” At first, I thought this was a hollow deterrent, but I found that most often this was said out of care and a profound understanding of what it means to pastor God people, preach God’s Word, and administer God’s sacraments. There seems to be a presumption that some who trod this path toward priesthood have hopes of power and authority, they want the glory and may not understand the sacrifice that defines it.

You see glory is often thought of as one being held up and praised for compelling attributes and great skill. To be given glory, in the mind of some, is to be accepted, validated, and highly regarded. Many young, aspiring pastors and priests want this very thing. It’s often not a secret to anyone, except to them.

And if someone hasn’t, they probably will, tell yo this very thing, “If you can do anything else, anything other than becoming a priest or pastor, do that.”

I thought this was an old worn-out trope and then I got a few years of ministry under my belt, and I found myself saying the same thing to young men and women who would talk to be about their desire and call to ministry. I’d tell em’ “if you can do anything else, do that!”

So maybe I should just say to you, “if you can do anything else, do that!”

But you’re here; you discerned with God and your community; hopefully, you’ve figured out, like I have, that there is nothing else you can do. It’s the path of Jonah or the path to priesthood.

I hope that I’ve outgrown the shallow notions of glory I once denied, yet probably had all the same. What I have come to understand is that we will all get glory, whether we want it or not. But the glory we will be gifted with will not leave us feeling validated and accepted, rather, it will wash over us and with it will be weight and sacrifice, fear and trembling, rather than acceptance and validation. If it is the glory of Christ, it will come with the life of Christ. I’d like to think this is why I communicate to you right now what has been communicated to me so often; the call before us is weighty, we must not enter into lightly.

Gregory of Nazianzus, who we commemorate today did not enter this life of ministry lightly. In fact, he fought it and dodged it, and ran from it even after his father, a bishop, ordained him against his will. Gregory wanted to live a solitary, hermitic life of devotion. But through his study of the scripture and his friend Basil, he decided that there was nothing he could do but be the priest God was calling him to be. Gregory went back to his father and took up the vocation of a priest and theologian whcih God had called him to, and in this life, he found union with Christ in the weight of His glory.

Gregory the Theologian, as he is also known as, was a hugely important definer and defender of the Nicene faith. As one of the Cappadocian Fathers, there is much of his life and work that would be worth contemplating. However, it his contribution to Trinitarian theology and theosis that I would like to briefly mention.

Gregory built on and contributed to, very important aspect of our theology; Things like...

The relationship among the divine persons of the Trinity as “consubstantial” (of one being). He picked this up and defined and defended it vigorously.

He said that the Son was eternally generated, that Spirit eternally proceeds; I believe these are terms he coined himself.

Gregory’s effort to be precise in his Trinitarian language was a critical contribution to the development of Trinitarian theology.

In our Gospel today Jesus says a couple things that got him into trouble and that lead to the Pharisees wanting to stone him...

v.28 “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.”

v.30 “The Father and I are one.”

The Pharisees rightly notice what Jesus is doing; he was claiming unity with the father, even more, Jesus was declaring his divine oneness with the father. Or as the Pharisees put it, “you are declaring yourself God.”

Gregory’s theology could almost be summed up with one word, unity.

In his Trinitarian theology he teaches divine unity; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—One God.

But this theology of unity also is between God and humanity. We, according to Gregory, are to draw near to the Trinity and participate in it. Norman Russell, guru of the Eastern Fathers and the doctrine of theosis, points out that “theosis” is a term coined by Gregory to speak of this unity the early Church has taught from its earliest days.

In classic patristic fashion Gregory says things like;

“Let us become as Christ is since Christ became as we are; let us become gods for his sake since he became man for our sake.”

Statements like this that many of the early church fathers share make this evangelical kid a little uncomfortable until I ponder what they actually mean and connect it with passages like the one

immediately after ours today in John, verses 34 and 35. Jesus' own words, quoting scripture are using this very language.

Maybe you'll recall our text from Acts, and the name given to these early followers of Jesus, "Christians." The world was taking note of the unity the early Church had with the life of Christ, and the name kind stuck.

Gregory says, "God became a human being in order that human beings could become god" and the priest had no higher vocation than that of "being a god and making us into gods."

What Gregory is getting with these enigmatic words is his big idea, union with God, through Christ; it was a yearning for participation in the divine nature, in the divine Trinitarian life. Hopefully, for those us here at seminary this is what it means to be a priest; in reality, this is what it means to be a Christian, unity with Christ.

Are we seeking that unity with God?

Have we taken up this path to make a name for ourselves or to take on the name of Christ, of "Christian" — one who's unity with Christ is so thorough that we are known by his name and bear only his glory.

There is one more thing I would like to point out. Gregory sees the whole of his theology, this theology of unity producing a solidarity among God's people. He says,

"We are all one in the Lord, rich and poor, slaves and free, healthy and sick alike; one is the head from which all derive, Jesus Christ. And as for the members of one body, each is concerned with the other and all with all."

Our unity with Christ should compel us to unity with one another, for there is no division in Christ. That's probably a good word in the world we live in, at The House we find ourselves in. How are we, with all his power, in us, seeking unity with Christ and his body, the Church?

Let us remember Gregory's great exhortation, "Let us seek to be like Christ, because Christ also became like us."

Saint Gregory of Nazanzius, Pray for us.  
Christ, Help us.

Amen.

May, 8 2017

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[ A few other bits from Gregory to share if possible ]

“Remember God more often than you breathe.”

“The main prerequisite for pastoral ministry, then, is the transforming knowledge of God in Christ that is mediated by the spiritual study of Scripture.”

"If anyone does not believe that Holy Mary is the Mother of God, such a one is a stranger to the Godhead."

"The first of all beautiful things is the continual possession of God."

“Worship the Trinity, which I call the only true devotion and saving doctrine.”