

0329-0390 – Gregorius Nazianzenus – In sanctum pascha et in tarditatem

On Easter and His Reluctance.

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GREGORY NAZIANZEN.

Oration I.

On Easter and His Reluctance.

I. It is the Day of the Resurrection, and my Beginning has good auspices. Let us then keep the Festival with splendour,²⁵²⁹ and let us embrace one another. Let us say Brethren, even to those who hate us; much more to those who have done or suffered aught out of love for us. Let us forgive all offences for the Resurrection's sake: let us give one another pardon, I for the noble tyranny which I have suffered (for I can now call it noble); and you who exercised it, if you had cause to blame my tardiness; for perhaps this tardiness may be more precious in God's sight than the haste of others. For it is a good thing even to hold back from God for a little while, as did the great Moses of old,²⁵³⁰ and Jeremiah²⁵³¹ later on; and then to run readily to Him when He calls, as did Aaron²⁵³² and Isaiah,²⁵³³ so only both be done in a dutiful spirit;—the former because of his own want of strength; the latter because of the Might of Him That calleth.

II. A Mystery²⁵³⁴ anointed me; I withdrew a little while at a Mystery, as much as was needful to examine myself; now I come in with a Mystery, bringing with me the Day as a good defender of my cowardice and weakness; that He Who to-day rose again from the dead may renew me also by His Spirit; and, clothing me with the new Man, may give me to His New Creation, to those who are begotten after God, as a good modeller and teacher for Christ, willingly both dying with Him and rising again with Him.

III. Yesterday the Lamb was slain and the door-posts were anointed,²⁵³⁵ and Egypt bewailed her Firstborn, and the Destroyer passed us over, and the Seal was dreadful and reverend, and we were walled in with the Precious Blood. To-day we have clean escaped from Egypt and from Pharaoh; and there is none to hinder us from keeping a Feast to the Lord our God—the Feast of

²⁵²⁹ Isa. lxvi. 5.

²⁵³⁰ Ex. iv. 10.

²⁵³¹ Jer. i. 6.

²⁵³² Ex. iv. 27.

²⁵³³ Isa. i. 6.

²⁵³⁴ *Mystery*, according to NICETAS, is frequently used by S. Gregory in the sense of *Festival*. He also explains the *Anointing* as meaning the Imposition of hands at Ordination.

²⁵³⁵ Ex. xii. A fine piece of mystical interpretation.

our Departure; or from celebrating that Feast, not in the old leaven of malice and wickedness, but in the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth,²⁵³⁶ carrying with us nothing of ungodly and Egyptian leaven.

IV. Yesterday I was crucified with Him; today I am glorified with Him; yesterday I died with Him; to-day I am quickened with Him; yesterday I was buried with Him; to-day I rise with Him. But let us offer to Him Who suffered and rose again for us—you will think perhaps that I am going to say gold, or silver, or woven work or transparent and costly stones, the mere passing material of earth, that remains here below, and is for the most part always possessed by bad men, slaves of the world and of the Prince of the world. Let us offer *ourselves*, the possession most precious to God, and most fitting; let us give back to the Image what is made after the Image. Let us recognize our Dignity; let us honour our Archetype; let us know the power of the Mystery, and for what Christ died.

V. Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us. Let us become God's for His sake, since He for ours became Man. He assumed the worse that He might give us the better; He became poor that we through His poverty might be rich;²⁵³⁷ He took upon Him the form of a servant that we might receive back our liberty; He came down that we might be exalted; He was tempted that we might conquer; He was dishonoured that He might glorify us; He died that He might save us; He ascended that He might draw to Himself us, who were lying low in the Fall of sin. Let us give *all*, offer *all*, to Him Who gave Himself a Ransom and a Reconciliation for us. But one can give nothing like oneself, understanding the Mystery, and becoming for His sake all that He became for ours.



VI. As you see, He offers you a Shepherd; for this is what your Good Shepherd,²⁵³⁸ who lays down his life for his sheep, is hoping and praying for, and he asks from you his subjects; and he gives you himself double instead of single, and makes the staff of his old age a staff for your spirit. And he adds to the inanimate temple a living one; to that exceedingly beautiful and heavenly shrine, this poor and small one,²⁵³⁹ yet to him of great value, and built too with much sweat and many labours. Would that I could say it is worthy of his labours. And he places at your disposal all that belongs to him (O great generosity!—or it would be truer to say, O fatherly love!) his hoar hairs, his youth, the temple, the high priest, the testator, the heir, the discourses which you were longing for; and of these not such as are vain and poured out into the air, and which reach no further than the outward ear; but those which the Spirit writes and engraves on tables of stone, or of flesh, not

²⁵³⁶ 1 Cor. v. 8.

²⁵³⁷ 2 Cor. viii. 9.

²⁵³⁸ NICETAS says that this refers to S. GREGORY'S Father, who had ordained him Priest, to assist him in the Cure of Souls, and whose one desire was that his Son might succeed him in the Bishopric.

²⁵³⁹ S. GREGORY'S father had, according to the same authority, rebuilt the Church at Nazianus with great splendour. He thinks that the expression "heavenly" may refer to the great dome. The "living temple" is of course S. Gregory himself.

merely superficially graven, nor easily to be rubbed off, but marked very deep, not with ink, but with grace.

VII. These are the gifts given you by this august Abraham, this honourable and reverend Head, this Patriarch, this Restingplace of all good, this Standard of virtue, this Perfection of the Priesthood, who to-day is bringing to the Lord his willing Sacrifice, his only Son,²⁵⁴⁰ him of the promise. Do you on your side offer to God and to us obedience to your Pastors, dwelling in a place of herbage, and being fed by water of refreshment;²⁵⁴¹ knowing your Shepherd well, and being known by him;²⁵⁴² and following when he calls you as a Shepherd frankly through the door; but not following a stranger climbing up into the fold like a robber and a traitor; nor listening to a strange voice when such would take you away by stealth and scatter you from the truth on mountains,²⁵⁴³ and in deserts, and pitfalls, and places which the Lord does not visit; and would lead you away from the sound Faith in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the One Power and Godhead, Whose Voice my sheep always heard (and may they always hear it), but with deceitful and corrupt words would tear them from their true Shepherd. From which may we all be kept, Shepherd and flock, as from a poisoned and deadly pasture; guiding and being guided far away from it, that we may all be one in Christ Jesus our Lord, now and unto the heavenly rest. To Whom be the glory and the might for ever and ever. Amen.

Introduction to Oration II.

IT is generally agreed that this oration was not intended for oral delivery. Its object was to explain and defend S. Gregory's recent conduct, which had been severely criticised by his friends at Nazianzus. He had been recalled by his father probably during the year A.D. 361 from Pontus, where he had spent several years in monastic seclusion with his friend S. Basil. His father, not content with his son's presence at home as a support for his declining years, and feeling assured of his fitness for the sacred office, had proceeded, with the loudly expressed approval of the congregation, in spite of Gregory's reluctance, to ordain him to the priesthood on Christmas Day A.D. 361. S. Gregory, even after the lapse of many years, speaks of his ordination as an act of

²⁵⁴⁰ S. GREGORY had an elder sister GORGONIA, and a younger brother CÆSARIUS, so that this expression must not be taken too literally, but is rather to be read in connection with the "promise," his Mother having looked upon his birth as a special answer to prayer, and having dedicated him to God from his infancy.

²⁵⁴¹ Ps. xxiii. 2.

²⁵⁴² John x. 14.

²⁵⁴³ Ezek. xxxiv. 6.