

The principal theological writings of Basil are his *On the Holy Spirit*, a lucid and edifying appeal to Scripture and early Christian (to prove the divinity of the Holy Spirit), and his *Refutation of the Apology of the Impious Eunomius*, written in 363 or 364, three books against Eunomius of Cyzicus, the chief exponent of Anomoian Arianism. He was a famous preacher, and many of his homilies, including a series of Lenten lectures on the Hexaëmeron (the Six Days of Creation), and an exposition of the psalter, have been preserved. Some, like that against usury and that on the famine in 368, are valuable for the history of morals; others illustrate the honor paid to martyrs and relics; the address to young men on the study of classical literature shows that Basil was lastingly influenced by his own education, which taught him to appreciate the propaedeutic importance of the classics.

In his exegesis, Basil was a great admirer of Origen and the need for the spiritual interpretation of Scripture. In his work on the Holy Spirit, he asserts that "to take the literal sense and stop there, is to have the heart covered by the veil of Jewish literalism. Lamps are useless when the sun is shining." It is in the ethical manuals and moral sermons that the practical aspects of his theoretical theology are illustrated. In his Sermon to the Lazicans, Basil explains how it is our common nature to treat our neighbor's natural needs (e.g., hunger, thirst) as our own, even if he is a separate individual. Later theologians explicitly explain this as an example of how the saints become an image of the one common nature of the persons of the Trinity. His three hundred letters reveal a rich and observant nature, which, despite the troubles of ill-health and ecclesiastical unrest, remained optimistic, tender and playful. His principal efforts as a reformer were directed towards the improvement of the liturgy, and the reformation of the monastic institutions of the East. His examples and teachings effected a noteworthy moderation in the austere practices of monastic life. He is also credited with coordinating the duties of work and prayer to ensure a proper balance between the two. His influence even extended to the Western Church and influenced Saint Benedict when he wrote his rule. He is also a Doctor of the Church for defining the terms "ousia" (essence, substance), and for defining the classic formulation of three Persons in one nature. His feast day was moved from the date of his death (Jan. 1, 379 AD.), to the date of June 14, a date believed to be of his ordination as Bishop. He is called Great because he conquered the hearts and souls for Jesus Christ. His whole life was dedicated to Jesus and the message of Christianity. He had the humility of Moses, the zeal of Elijah, the piety of Peter, the eloquence of John the Theologian, and the dedication of Paul.

*(excerpted from: //en.wikipedia.org; www.theologic.com; www.religionfacts.com)

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Saint Basil the Great

Feast Day: June 14



*"I had wasted much time on follies and spent nearly
all of my youth in vain labors,
and devotion to the teaching of a wisdom
that God had made foolish.
Suddenly, I awoke as out of a deep sleep.
I beheld the wonderful light of the Gospel truth,
and I recognized the nothingness of
the wisdom of the princes of this world."*

(From a letter written by Saint Basil describing his spiritual awakening)

Saint Basil the Great

*Saint Basil was born around the year 330 AD in the city of Caesarea Mazaca in Cappadocia, Asia Minor (now known as Kayseri, Turkey). He was born into the wealthy family of Basil the Elder, a famous rhetoric, and Emmelia of Caesarea. It was a large household, consisting of ten children, the parents, and Basil's grandmother, Macrina the Elder. His parents were known for their piety, and his maternal grandfather was a Christian martyr, executed in the years prior to Constantine I's conversion. Four of Basil's siblings are known by name, and considered to be saints by various Christian traditions. His older sister Macrina the Younger was a well known nun. His younger brother Peter served as bishop of Sebaste in Armenia. His brother Naucratus was an anchorite, and inspired much of Basil's theological work. Perhaps the most influential of Basil's siblings was his younger brother Gregory who was appointed by Basil to be the bishop of Nyssa, and who produced a number of writings defending Nicene theology and describing the life of early Christian monastics.

Shortly after Basil's birth, the family moved to the estate of his grandmother Macrina, in the region of Pontus. There, Basil was educated by his father and grandmother. Following the death of his father during his teenage years, Basil returned to Caesarea c. 350-351 to begin his formal education. There he met Gregory of Nazianzus, who would become a lifetime friend. Together they went on to study in Constantinople, where they would have listened to the lectures of Libanius. Finally, the two spent almost six years in Athens where they met a fellow student who would become the emperor Julian the Apostate. It was at Athens that Basil first began to think about a life focused on Christian principles. When he returned to Caesarea from Athens, Basil's life changed radically after he encountered Eustathius of Sebaste. He gave up his legal and teaching profession in order to devote his life to God.

After receiving the sacrament of baptism, Basil traveled in 357 to Palestine, Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia to study ascetics and monasticism. The ideal of solitary life held little appeal to him so he turned his attention toward communal religious life. After dividing his fortune among the poor, Basil began gathering around him a group of like-minded disciples, including his brother Peter. Together they founded a monastic settlement on his family estate at Arnesi in Pontus.

It was here that Basil wrote his works regarding monastic communal life, which are accounted as being pivotal in the development of the monastic tradition of the Eastern Church and have led to his being called the "father of Eastern communal monasticism." In 358 he wrote to his friend, Gregory of Nazianzus, asking him to join

him in Arnesi. Gregory eventually agreed to come; together, they collaborated on the production of the *Philocalia*, an anthology drawn from Origen. Gregory then decided to return to his family home in Nazianzus. Basil attended the Council of Constantinople in 360. It was here that he first sided with Homoiousians, a Semi-Arian faction who taught that the Son was of like substance with the Father, neither the same (one substance) nor different from him. The Homoiousians opposed the Arianism of Eunomius but refused to join with the supporters of the Nicene Creed, who professed that the members of the Trinity were of one substance (*homoousios*). This stance put him at odds with his bishop, who had subscribed to the Nicene form of agreement. Some years later Basil became a supporter of the Nicene Creed.

In 362 Basil was ordained a deacon by Bishop Meletius of Antioch. He was summoned by Eusebius to his city, and was ordained presbyter of the Church in 365. Basil and Gregory Nazianzus spent the next five years combatting the Arian heresy, which threatened to divide the region of Cappadocia. Their success against the Arians confirmed for both of them that their future lay in administrative work of the Church. Basil next took on functional administration of the Diocese of Caesarea where he became an effective manager of the diocese. In 370, after the death of Eusebius, Basil was consecrated bishop on June 14, 370. As bishop, he organized a soup kitchen and distributed food to the poor during a famine following a drought. He gave away his personal family inheritance to benefit the poor of his diocese.

His letters show that he actively worked to reform thieves and prostitutes. They also show him encouraging his clergy not to be tempted by wealth or the comparatively easy life of a priest, and that he personally took care in selecting worthy candidates for holy orders. He also had the courage to criticize public officials who failed in their duty of administering justice. At the same time, he preached every morning and evening in his own church to large congregations. In addition to all the above, he built a large complex just outside Caesarea, called the *Basiliad*, which included a poorhouse, hospice, and hospital, and was regarded at the time as one of the wonders of the world. His zeal for orthodoxy did not blind him to what was good in an opponent; and for the sake of peace and charity he was content to waive the use of orthodox terminology when it could be surrendered without a sacrifice of truth.