

Saint Basil the Great and the Cappadocian Fathers



Patrology Lectures

■ Year 1:

1. The Apostolic Fathers
2. School of Alexandria
3. St Athanasius the Apostolic
4. St Cyril

■ Year 2:

1. St Basil the Great
2. St John Chrysostom
3. St Augustine
4. St Gregory Nazianzen

Cappadocian Fathers

- St Basil the Great
- St Gregory Nazianzen
- St Gregory of Nyssa











What do you know about St Basil?





The Crucifixion of Christ, painted in the Basilica of St. Basil, 12th century.

THE
DIVINE LITURGY
OF
ST. BASIL

4 VOLUMES

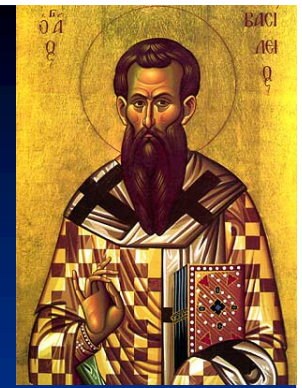
INSTITUTE
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Why learn about St Basil?

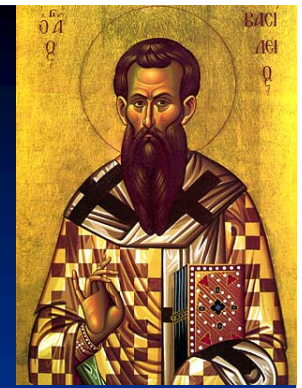
- Learn from his life and writings
- Learn about the man who wrote our liturgy
- Who thinks they know more about Christ than St Basil?
 - If not, you have something to learn from him.
- Christianity not like “science”:
 - We are not more advanced than the early fathers, just because we have had more “time”

Parentage and Birth



- Born in Caesarea in 330 AD
- Christian parents: Basil and Emmelia
- 10 children: 3 bishops and 4 saints
 - Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Peter of Sebaste
 - St Macrina
- Basil heavily influenced by his grandmother, Macrina
 - Said that he never forgot the picture of Christian perfection that Macrina taught him

Education

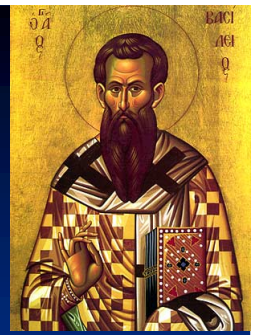


- Grew up on country estate - Annesi
- Age 10 - Caesarea → school
- Age 13 - Antioch → law and rhetoric
- Age 17 - Constantinople → further study
- Age 21 to 26 - Athens - intellectual capital of the Eastern world:
 - Studied rhetoric, history, poetics, geometry, astronomy, classic literature under greatest scholars of the time
 - Basil was laden “with all the learning attainable by the nature of man” (per Gregory)

Friendship to Gregory Nazianzen



- Gregory was in Athens when Basil arrived
- Formed very close relationship
- Both loved the Lord deeply, and encouraged each other in the spiritual path
- They lived very pure lives
- Refused to keep company with sinners

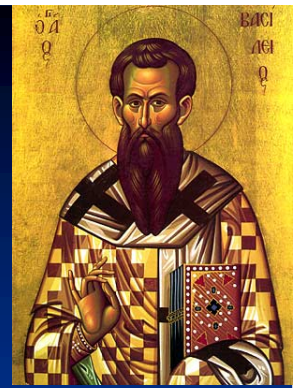


- St Gregory wrote:

- “Neither did we keep company with scholars that were impious, rude or impudent, but with those that were the best and most peaceable, and those whose conversation brought us much profit”
- “...it was an illusion to seek the company of sinners on pretext to reform or convert them: it is far more to be feared they will communicate their poison to us”

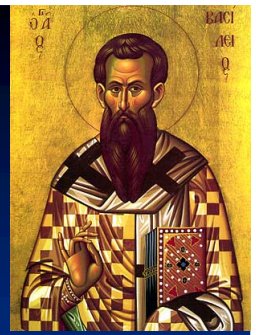
- They also stayed away from unholy places:
 - “We knew only two streets....the first of which led us to the church and to the holy teachers who there attended the service of the altar.....The other street with which we were acquainted, but which we held in much less esteem, was the road to the schools and to our masters in the sciences”
 - “We left to others the streets which lead to the theatre, to spectacles, feastings, and diversions. We made it our only and great affair: it was our only aim....to be called and to be Christians.”

Stray and Return



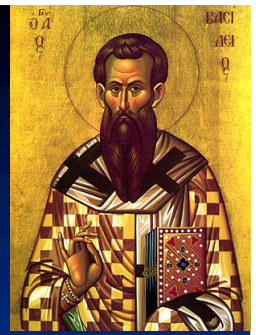
- Age 25 - Returned to Caesarea:
 - Widely respected in Athens as outstanding student
 - In Caesarea became a Professor of rhetoric
 - However, success affected him:
 - Became worldly and self-sufficient
 - Youngest brother (Naucratus) died and this had profound impact on Basil
 - Resigned from academia and went and learned from his sister Macrina self sacrifice and pursuit of virtues
 - She returned to Annesi to establish a convent

Monasticism



- Basil's eyes were uncovered to see the Gospel
- Wept many tears and asked for God's guide:
 - "Then I read the Gospel, and saw that a great means of reaching perfection was the selling of one's goods, the sharing of them with the poor, the giving up of all care for this life, and the refusal to allow the soul to be turned towards things of the earth"
- Decided to become a monk
- 357 AD - Travelled to Egypt, Syria, Palestine to visit the monasteries and learn from them

In Egypt.....



- “I was amazed by their persistence in prayer and their capacity to triumph over sleep. Subdued by no natural necessity, they ever kept the soul’s purpose high and free. In hunger, in thirst, in cold, in nakedness, they never yielded to the body, and indeed they paid not a moment’s attention to the body. Always, as though they lived in a flesh which did not belong to them, they showed how a man can sojourn for a while in this life, while having his true citizenship and home in heaven.”

Monasticism

- Agreed with Pachomian community model
- 358 AD - Selected area of land near Annesi and started a monastery (abbot until 362 AD)
- Laid down a thorough rule of life for the monks covering every aspect of their lives
- Over years the rules were compiled in 2 volumes:
 - Shorter Rules for Monks
 - Longer Rules for Monks - >200 pages long
 - Extremely detailed in every aspect of monk's life
 - Core - Every waking moment of the monk's life should be dedicated to God.
 - Aim - To produce a factory of saints

■ Portrait of a monk:

- “...appearance neglected; hair tangled; dress not carefully tended. They should wear tunics not drawn close to the body: the belt should not be tied above the buttocks, like a woman’s, nor should it be left slack...like an idler’s. The stride should not be sluggish...nor should it be pompous. The only object of the dress should be to form a sufficient covering in summer and winter.”

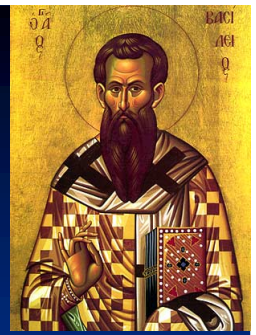
■ Discipline:

- A monk who was disobedient to his superior should be first warned privately, then before the brethren, and then “with many tears and lamentations ... must cut him off from the body as a corrupted and useless member.”
- NB – Despite intricate rules, all based on exhorting monks to focus on God incessantly.

Basil's personal monastic qualities

- Sold all his property
- Owned one tunic and one coat
- Slept on the ground, many nights in watchful prayer
- Endured winter without a fire
- Ate bread and water (adding herbs on feast days!)
- Treated his body as a slave, so that it did not treat his soul as a slave
- Ruled his monastery very firmly

Ecclesiastical offices



- 362 (33yo) – ordained priest by Bishop Eusebius
 - Appointed in high administration position in Diocese and so stepped down as abbot of monastery
 - Returned to monastery for 2 years due to tensions with Bishop Eusebius
 - Recalled to duties when Arianism spread to defend

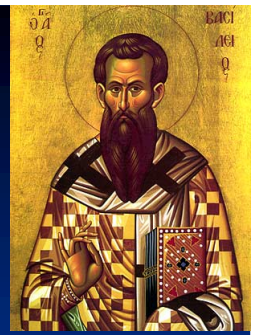
- 370 (41yo) – ordained Bishop of Caesarea
 - Gregory - “The world has received a bishop and a gladiator”
 - Athanasius - Caesarea possessed a bishop every province should envy

Defender of the Faith - Internal

- Many abuses of power had arisen within the church.
- Fought against corruption.
- Attacked bishops, priests and deacons who were corrupt.
- Trained clergy very strictly such that they became a model of priesthood
- Very saddened:

“Terrible among us is the famine of love”

Defender of Faith - Internal



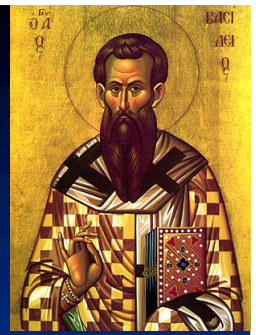
- Two years after becoming a bishop:
 - “The teachings of the true faith have been overthrown... Gone is the dignity of the priesthood. None tend the flock of the Lord with wisdom. Proud men squander the money intended for the poor on their own pleasure and in the giving of gifts. No longer is there the strict observance of the canons... Everyone follows the whims of his own heart, and wickedness has no bounds at all.”

- How honestly will you serve the Lord?

Defender of the Faith - External

- Emperor Valens was an Arian, as well as the Patriarch of Constantinople
- Antioch was divided
- St Athanasius was alive, but very old, while Rome was far away and did not assist
- Valens marched through the Empire forcing churches to adopt Arianism
- 372 - Valens sent prefect (Modestus) to Caesarea
- Modestus demanded Basil adopt Arianism

Defender of Faith - External



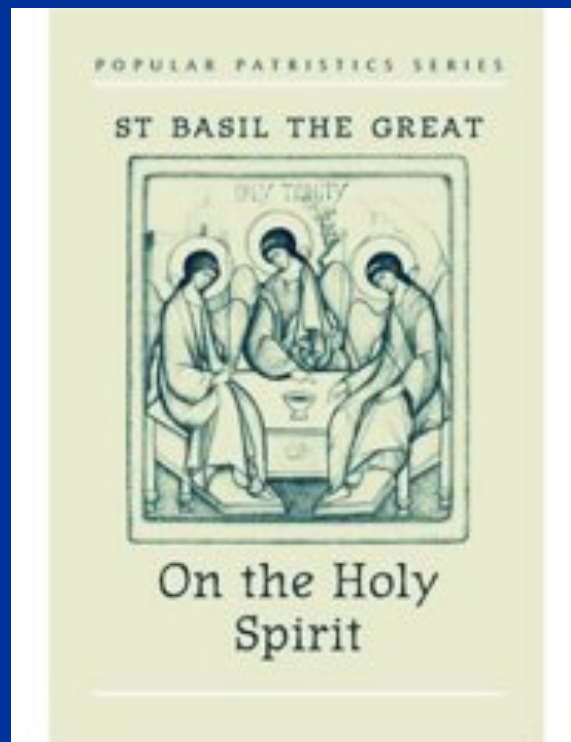
- Basil: "...I shall not honour you more than God"
- Modestus: "Do you know what I can do to you?"
- Basil: "What can you do?"
- Modestus: "What! You dare to say that?....I can confiscate your possessions, banish you, torture you, put you to death?"
- Basil: " Is that all? None of these things trouble me! You cannot confiscate my possessions, for I have none, unless you want to take the threadbare clothes I am wearing... Banishment – exile – what have these to do with me? Everywhere on God’s earth I am at home! You cannot exile me from the grace of God... Torture cannot touch me, for I have no longer a body to torture...As for death, it is welcome to me, for it will bring me sooner into His blessed presence, close to Him whom I serve."

- Modestus: “ No one ever addressed Modestus in such manner until now.”
- Basil: “Probably you never met a bishop until now, otherwise surely you would have come upon people who speak in this way. In all other matters we are humbler than anyone...and we show no arrogance to the very least of people....When God is at stake, we despise all else! Fire, sword, wild beasts have no terror for us: indeed we delight in them! Insult us, threaten us, do as you will, exercise the magnitude of your power! But let the emperor hear my words! You will never persuade us to join forces with impiety, though you threaten your worst!”
- Modestus: “I will give you until tomorrow to think it over”
- Basil: “Tomorrow you will find I have not changed.”

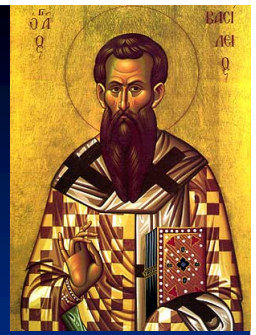
(Account based on writings of Gregory Nazianzen)

Defender of the Faith - External

- Eunomius taught that the Holy Spirit was not equal to God the Father or the Son
- Basil wrote 5 books rejecting this heresy

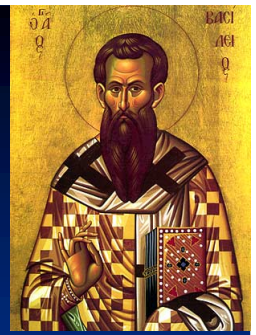


Attempted Banishment



- Valens banished Basil to exile
- When Basil arose to leave, Valen's son fell ill
- Valen's wife thought it was because of God's displeasure with the treatment of Basil, and asked Basil to pray - the son got better
- Valens then tried to write another letter of banishment, but the quill split three times and he could not write it

Care for the Poor



- As priest and bishop, Basil was concerned for the poor
- Built a very large hospital to care for the poor and sick, of any belief. Gregory wrote:
 - “...it might deservedly be reckoned among the miracles of the world; so numerous were the poor and sick that came there, and so admirable were the care and order with which they were served...”
- Basil frequently visited the hospital to comfort, care and preach to the sick

- Wrote numerous homilies of the obligations of the rich to care for the poor:

- “Hunger is the most pitiable of all ills, the worst of miseries, the most fearful of deaths. The point of the sword brings death quickly...the teeth of wild beasts put an end to the miseries of men much sooner. Hunger is a long, slow punishment....It is like a creeping disease, with death ever imminent, but always delayed. It drains the natural moisture of the body...it consumes the flesh and gradually exhausts the strength....The knees no longer support the body....The voice grows reedy....The hollow stomach contracts....cleaving to the spine.

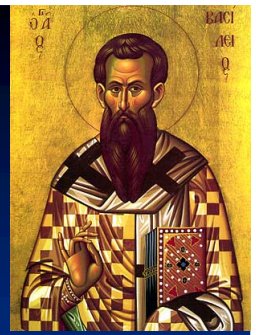
What kind of punishment, do you think, is deserved by a man who passes the hungry without giving them a sign?”

■ Also:

- “If you are reduced to your last loaf of bread and a beggar appears at your door, then take that loaf from your closet and lift your hands to Heaven and say this prayer: “O Lord, I have but this one loaf, which you see before You. Hunger lies in wait for me, but I worship Your commandments more than all other things, and therefore this little I have I give to my brother, who suffers from hunger. Now help Your servant who is in danger...and do not defer Your favour too long.”

And if you should say this, then the bread you gave in your poverty will be changed for an abundant harvest.

Writings

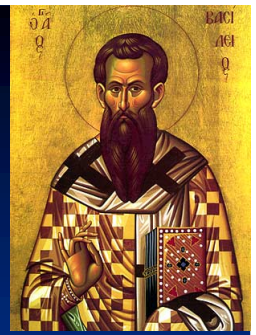


1. Dogmatic

- 5 books against Eunomius heresy

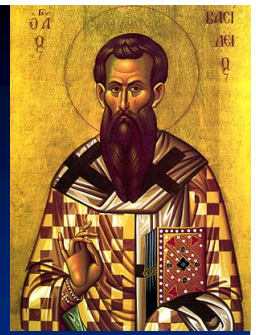
2. “The six days of creation”

- Describes the works of God at the beginning of creation
- Takes Genesis 1 line by line, word by word.
- St Gregory Nazianzen wrote: “When I take this book in my hands, and hear those words, I am brought face to face with my Creator. I begin to understand the method of creation, and feel more awe than I ever felt before, when I looked at God’s work through my own eyes alone”



- Let there be light....

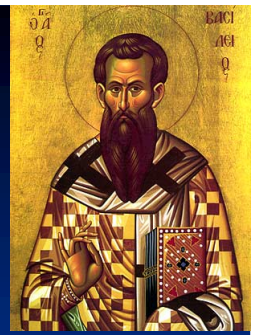
- “For the heavens until then were enveloped in darkness, and now quite suddenly they appeared in the beauty they still wear in our own eyes; and all the air was lighted up, light and air commingling together, and splendidly and speedily did they disperse in all directions, as far as they could go. Light sprang up to the very heavens, and all the extent of the world was suddenly bathed in light, north, south, east and west. And the waters shone, glittering, sending forth quivering flashes of reflected light from their clear surfaces.”



- Let the earth bring forth grass....

- “Then in a moment did the earth flower in obedience to God’s laws, and all the stages of growth were instantaneously completed, and all the seeds gave fruit. The meadows lay deep in grass, the fields were like waving seas of harvest, and the wheat shook on the stem; and every little herb and shrub and flower arose out of the earth in abundance. There was no failure at the first harvest....All this was in the days before men were condemned to eat their bread by the sweat of their brows”

Writings



2. Commentary - 13 homilies on the Psalms
3. Sermons - 24, many on responsibilities of the wealthy
4. Ascetical - longer and shorter monastic rules
5. Liturgical - St Basil's Liturgy
6. Correspondence - 366 letters

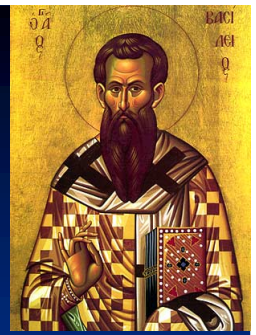
Letter to the fallen virgin...

- “The Lord wishes to cleanse you from the trouble of your sickness and to show you light after darkness. The good Shepherd, Who left them that had not wandered away, is seeking after you. If you give yourself to Him He will not hold back. He, in His love, will not disdain even to carry you on His own shoulders, rejoicing that He has found His sheep which was lost. The Father stands and awaits your return from your wandering. Only come back, and while you are yet afar off, He will run and fall upon your neck, and, now that you are cleansed by repentance, will enwrap you in embraces of love.”

Letter to the fallen virgin...

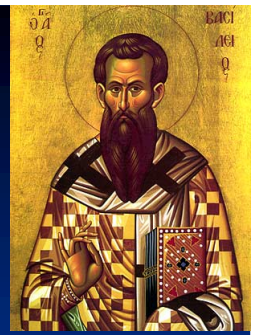
- “He will clothe with the chief robe the soul that has put off the old man with all his works; He will put a ring on hands that have washed off the blood of death, and will put shoes on feet that have turned from the evil way to the path of the Gospel of peace. He will announce the day of joy and gladness to them that are His own, both angels and men, and will celebrate your salvation far and wide. For “verily I say unto you,” says He, “there is joy in heaven before God over one sinner that repenteth.”

Departure



- Spent most of his life ill
- Completely white beard at 40, and looked older than his years
- 1st January 379 AD fell very ill and died
- Crowds of Christians, Jews and pagans gathered to lament → his charitable works made all feel he was their father

Lessons



- Child - importance of family environment
- Youth:
 - Pious - friendship with Christians
 - Studious - pursuit of learning
- Monk:
 - Intense focus on God
 - Father of Eastern monasticism
- Bishop:
 - Strict honesty in the service
 - Care for the poor
 - Rejection of false teachings

Lessons

■ Writings:

- Gregory: “When I read his treatise of the Creation, I seem to behold my Creator striking all things out of nothing; when I run over his writings about the heretics, I think the fire of Sodom sparkles in my view, flashes upon the enemies of the faith, and consumes their criminal tongues to ashes. When I consider his treatise of the Holy Spirit, I find the God working within me, and I am no longer afraid of speaking the truth; when I look into the explanations of the Holy Scriptures, I dive into the most profound abyss of mysteries...His moral discourses assist me to purify both my body and soul, that I may become a worthy temple of God and an instrument of His praises, to make known His glory and His power.”

Questions

