

Reflection Monday Christmas Season St Basil & St Gregory Nazianzen 2023

St Basil the Great was born in 330 at Caesarea in Cappadocia, of a Christian family. A brilliant scholar and a virtuous man, he became a hermit but was made bishop of Caesarea in 370. He fought against the Arians and wrote many notable works, in particular the monastic rule that bears his name and which many monks in the East follow to this day. He was generous to the poor. He died on 1st January 379.

St Gregory Nazianzen was born in 330, near Nazianzus. He travelled widely in search of knowledge. He followed his friend Basil into the wilderness, but he too was ordained and later made a bishop. He was elected Bishop of Constantinople in 381 but because of the factional fighting within the Church he retired to Nazianzus, where he died on 25th January 389 or 390. He is known as "Gregory the Theologian" in honour of his learning and eloquence.

We do well to heed the words of Jesus that there is only one teacher, Jesus. A preacher can only open people to a way of looking at scripture that allows them to hear Jesus speaking to them. This may be in images, thoughts, pictures, poetry, dreams. It may also be that something later in the day speaks to you of what you heard in the scriptures earlier. A good preacher does not tell you what to think or do but invites you to make the scripture your own.

Pope Francis: *Preaching long, spiritually empty homilies can reduce the Word of God to a mere set of abstract concepts that fail to awaken one's soul.*

Many homilies can be abstract, and instead of awakening the soul, they put it to sleep.

Preaching runs this risk, without the anointing of the Spirit, of impoverishing the Word of God descending into moralism and abstract concepts; it presents the Gospel with detachment, as if it were outside time, far from reality. This is not the way."