

Homily for January 2nd 2020

Feast of Saints Basil and Gregory Nazianzus

Today we celebrate two fourth century saints, Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus. They were the closest of friends, bishops and allies against the greatest theological threat to the 4th Century Church, the pervasive influence of the Arian heresy. According to the **Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church** Arianism denied the full Divinity of Jesus Christ, so called after its author, Arius. He said that the Son of God was not eternal but created before the ages by the Father from nothing as an instrument for the creation of the world; He was therefore not God by nature, but a creature, and so susceptible of change, even though different from all other creatures in being the one direct creation of God. ¹

Saints Basil and Gregory would have known the passage from 1st John that we read today. Interestingly, the man who was Basil's theological mentor, St Athanasius, also a 4th century Bishop combating Arianism, is the 1st Church Father to list the 27 books that make up the New Testament, that would have included therefore 1st John:

In light of the Oxford Dictionary's definition of Arianism listen again to these words from today's reading:

Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. the one who denies the Father and the Son.23 No one who denies the Son has the Father; everyone who confesses the Son has the Father also.24 Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father.25 And this is what he has promised us, eternal life. ²

Basil and Gregory knew that Arianism was influenced by the anti-Christ because it denied the eternal relationship that exists between the Father and the Son - the relationship Saint John affirms here. To deny the full divinity of Christ would so undermine the beliefs of the Christian faithful. Therefore, as Bishops of the Church, Basil and Gregory contested throughout their lives in opposition to the pervasive and pernicious influence of Arianism. For to deny the full divinity of the Son, says

¹ Cross, F. L., & Livingstone, E. A. (Eds.). (2005). In *The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church* (3rd ed. rev., p. 100). Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

² *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.* (1993). (1Jn 2:22-25). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

St. John, is to deny the Father. And if we cannot abide with confidence in the wonderful truth of the incarnation we have no assurance of the gift of eternal life

Throughout their lives, Basil and Gregory were in the minority. Most Bishops and indeed the Emperors were Arian. Like John the Baptist they never tired of being the voice crying in the wilderness, always pointing people to Jesus, the one who in his person is fully Man and fully God.

We are so thankful that because of men like Basil and Gregory, today we can gather for the Eucharist knowing that the Church unambiguously affirms that Jesus is both human and divine. For in the one substance of the Eucharist we affirm the while still in the form of bread, the consecrated host is truly the Body of Christ. For here is the extension through space and time what happened on that 1st Christmas when the Word was indeed made flesh.

Because of Bishops like Basil and Gregory who championed what had been heard from the beginning, that God became man in order to draw us into God, we can confidently and humbly receive Jesus as we abide in Him through our daily participation in the Eucharist and so experience the gift of eternal life.