

# ON ALL THE SAINTS

*By Gregory Thaumaturgus c. A.D. 250. Ante Nicene Fathers VI. Orig. published by Joannes Aloysius Mingarelli, Bologna, A.D. 1770. Updated to modern English by Cody Ilardo.*

*Here is a sermon attributed to Gregory Thaumaturgus (Gk. Γρηγόριος ὁ Θαυματουργός, “Gregory the Wonder-worker”), a leader in the 3rd century church and a bishop. Find in it a message on the faithfulness of the martyrs dying from persecution at that time, and a powerful and beautiful description of Jesus’ coming and victory over sin, death, and the enemy.*

I wanted to remain silent, and not to make a public display of my unskilled speech. For silence is a significant matter when one is not skilled in speech. And to refrain from utterance is indeed an admirable thing, where there is a lack of training; and truly he who knows how to cover his ignorance by abstaining from public speaking is the best philosopher. Knowing, then, the feebleness of my tongue, I would have preferred that course of action.

Nevertheless, the eyes of the onlookers push me to speak. Since, then, this solemn day is an important one among our celebrations, and the spectators gather into a crowd, and our church is one of elevated fervor in the faith, I will face the task of starting this sermon with confidence. And this I will attempt boldly, because the Father requests it, and the church is with me, and the example of the holy martyrs strengthen what is weak in me.

For these have inspired old men to accomplish with love the long journey of life, and constrained them to support their failing steps by the staff of the Word; and they have stimulated women to finish their course like the young men, and have even brought with them those of tender years, yes even crawling children.

In this way the martyrs showed their power, leaping with joy in the presence of death, laughing at the sword, making a joke out of the wrath of princes, grasping at death as the start of deathlessness, making victory their own by their fall. They, through the body, take their leap to heaven, letting their limbs be scattered around in order that they may hold their souls, and, bursting the prison bars of life, that they might open the gates of heaven.

And if anyone does not believe that death has been abolished, that Hades is trampled under foot, that the chains of it are broken, that the tyrant is bound, let him look on the martyrs making sport of the presence of death, and taking up the joyful song of the victory of Christ. O the marvel! Since the hour when Christ defeated Hades, men have danced in triumph over death. “O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your

victory?" Hades and the devil have been defeated, and stripped of their ancient armor, and cast out of their special authority.

Just as Goliath had his head cut off with his own sword, so also with the devil. He has been the father of death, and is put to flight through death; and he finds that the very thing which he often used as the weapon of his deceit, has become the mighty instrument of his own destruction.

Yes, one could say that casting his hook at the Godhead, and trying to seize what he often enjoyed, he is himself caught while he considers himself the captor, and discovers that in the place of the man he has touched the God. That is why the martyrs leap on the head of the dragon, and despise all types of torture. For since the Second Adam has brought up the first Adam out of the depths of Hades, as Jonah was delivered out of the whale, and Christ has set forward Adam, a citizen of heaven who was deceived, to the shame of the deceiver, the gates of Hades have been shut and the gates of heaven opened. This offers an unimpeded entrance to those who rise there through faith. In old times, Jacob saw a ladder reaching to heaven, and the angels ascending and descending upon it. But now, having been made a man for man's sake, He who is the friend of man has crushed with the foot of His divinity his who is the enemy of man. He has lifted up man with the hand of His Christhood, and has made trackless space to be walked on by the feet of man.

Back then, Jacob saw angels ascending and descending; but now the Angel of great counsel neither ascends nor descends; for to where shall he change his position, He who is everywhere, and fills all things, and holds in His hands the ends of the world? Indeed, once He descended, and once He ascended; not, however, through any change of nature. He condescended in generous philanthropy in His Christhood; and is seated as the Word of the Father, and as the Word He dwells in the womb, as the Word He is found everywhere, and is never separated from the God of the universe.

In the past, the devil mocked the nature of man with great laughter, and he has had joy over the times of our suffering on his festival days. But the laughter is only a three-day pleasure for him, while his wailing is eternal; and his great laughter has prepared an even greater wailing and ceaseless tears, and inconsolable weeping, and a sword in his heart.

This sword did our Leader forge against the enemy in the fire of the virgin furnace, in the manner He wished, and gave it its point by the energy of His invincible divinity, and quenched it in the water of an undefiled baptism, and sharpened it by enduring sufferings without anger, and made it bright by the mystical resurrection. With it, by Himself, he put to death the vengeful adversary, together with his whole army. What words, then, could express our joy or the enemy's misery? For he who was an

archangel is now a devil; he who once lived in heaven is now seen crawling like a serpent on the earth; he who once was celebrating with the cherubim, is now shut up in pain in the guard house with the swine. And we also will cause him to flee if we mind those things which are contrary to his choice, by the grace and kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory and the power unto the ages of the ages. Amen.