

**0329-0390 – Gregorius Nazianzenus – Ad patrem**

**Oration XII**

**To His Father, When He Had Entrusted to Him the Care of the Church of Nazianzus.**

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## Oration XII.

To His Father, When He Had Entrusted to Him the Care of the Church of Nazianzus.

*THIS Oration was delivered A.D. 372. Two years earlier Valens had divided Cappadocia into two provinces. Anthimus, Bishop of Tyana, asserting that the ecclesiastical provinces were regulated by those of the empire, claimed metropolitical rights over the churches of Cappadocia Secunda, in opposition to S. Basil, who had hitherto been metropolitan of the undivided province. S. Basil, with the intention of vindicating the permanence of his former rights, created a new see at Sasima, on the borders of the two provinces, and with great difficulty prevailed upon S. Gregory to receive consecration as its first Bishop. S. Gregory, who had "bent his neck, but not his will,"<sup>3027</sup> was for a long time reluctant to enter upon his Episcopal duties, and at last was prevailed upon by S. Gregory of Nyssa, S. Basil's brother, to make an attempt to do so. When, however, he found that Anthimus was prepared to bar his entrance by force of arms, he returned home, definitely resigned his see, and once more betook himself to the life of solitude which he so dearly loved. Recalled hence, he consented,<sup>3028</sup> at his father's earnest entreaty, to undertake provisionally the duties of Bishop-coadjutor of Nazianzus: and pronounced this short discourse on the occasion of his installation.*

1. I OPENED my mouth, and drew in the Spirit,<sup>3029</sup> and I give myself and my all to the Spirit, my action and speech, my inaction and silence, only let Him hold me and guide me, and move both hand and mind and tongue whither it is right, and He wills: and restrain them as it is right and expedient. I am an instrument of God, a rational instrument, an instrument tuned and struck by that skilful artist, the Spirit. Yesterday His work in me was silence. I mused on abstinence from speech. Does He strike upon my mind today? My speech shall be heard, and I will muse on utterance. I am neither so talkative, as to desire to speak, when He is bent on silence; nor so reserved and ignorant as to set a watch before my lips<sup>3030</sup> when it is the time to speak: but I open and close my door at the will of that Mind and Word and Spirit, Who is One kindred Deity.

2. I will speak then, since I am so bidden. And I will speak both to the good shepherd here, and to you, his holy flock, as I think is best both for me to speak, and for you to hear to-day. Why is it that you have begged for one to share your shepherd's toil? For my speech shall begin with you, O dear and honoured head, worthy of that of Aaron, down which runs that spiritual and priestly

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<sup>3027</sup> Carmina Hist., xi., 487.

<sup>3028</sup> Ib., 492–525.

<sup>3029</sup> Ps. cxix. 131.

<sup>3030</sup> Ps. cxli. 3.

ointment upon his beard and clothing.<sup>3031</sup> Why is it that, while yet able to stablish and guide many, and actually guiding them in the power of the Spirit, you support yourself with a staff and prop in your spiritual works? Is it because you have heard and know that even with the illustrious Aaron were anointed Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron?<sup>3032</sup> For I pass over Nadab and Abihu,<sup>3033</sup> lest the allusion be ill-omened: and Moses during his lifetime appoints Joshua in his stead, as lawgiver and general over those who were pressing on to the land of promise? The office of Aaron and Hur, supporting the hands of Moses on the mount where Amalek was warred down<sup>3034</sup> by the Cross,<sup>3035</sup> prefigured and typified long before, I feel willing to pass by, as not very suitable or applicable to us: for Moses did not choose them to share his work as lawgiver, but as helpers in his prayer and supports for the weariness of his hands.

3. What is it then that ails you? What is your weakness? Is it physical? I am ready to sustain you, yea I have sustained, and been sustained, like Jacob of old, by your fatherly blessings.<sup>3036</sup> Is it spiritual? Who is stronger, and more fervent, especially now, when the powers of the flesh are ebbing and fading, like so many barriers which interfere with, and dim the brilliancy of a light? For these powers are wont, for the most part, to wage war upon and oppose one another, while the body's health is purchased by the sickness of the soul, and the soul flourishes and looks upward when pleasures are stilled and fade away along with the body. But, wonderful as your simplicity and nobility have seemed to me before, how is it that you have no fear, especially in times like these, that your spirit will be considered a pretext, and that most men will suppose, in spite of our spiritual professions, that we are undertaking this from carnal motives. For most men have made<sup>3037</sup> the office to be looked upon as great and princely, and accompanied with considerable enjoyment, even though a man have the charge and rule over a more slender flock than this, and one which affords more troubles than pleasures. Thus far of your simplicity, or parental preference, if it be so, which makes you neither admit yourself, nor readily suspect in others anything disgraceful; for a mind hardly roused to evil, is slow to suspect evil. My second duty is briefly to address this people of yours, or now even of mine.

4. I have been overpowered, my friends and brethren, for I will now, though I did not at the time, ask for your aid. I have been overpowered by the old age of my father, and, to use moderate terms, the kindness of my friend. So, help me, each of you who can, and stretch out a hand to me who am pressed down and torn asunder by regret and enthusiasm. The one suggests flights,

<sup>3031</sup> Ib. cxxxiii. 2.

<sup>3032</sup> Lev. viii. 2.

<sup>3033</sup> Ib. x. 1.

<sup>3034</sup> Exod. xvii. 12.

<sup>3035</sup> *The Cross*. The stretching out of Moses' hands was a type of the outstretched hands of our Lord Jesus, and His "intercession for the transgressors," upon the Cross.

<sup>3036</sup> Gen. xxvii. 28.

<sup>3037</sup> *Made*, by the manner in which they have sought for and exercised it.

mountains and deserts, and calm of soul and body, and that the mind should retire into itself, and recall its powers from sensible things, in order to hold pure communion with God, and be clearly illumined by the flashing rays of the Spirit, with no admixture or disturbance of the divine light by anything earthly or clouded, until we come to the source of the effulgence which we enjoy here, and regret and desire are alike stayed, when our mirrors<sup>3038</sup> pass away in the light of truth. The other wills that I should come forward, and bear fruit for the common good, and be helped by helping others; and publish the Divine light, and bring to God a people for His own possession, a holy nation, a royal priesthood,<sup>3039</sup> and His image cleansed in many souls. And this, because, as a park is better than and preferable to a tree, the whole heaven with its ornaments to a single star, and the body to a limb, so also, in the sight of God, is the reformation of a whole church preferable to the progress of a single soul: and therefore, I ought not to look only on my own interest, but also on that of others.<sup>3040</sup> For Christ also likewise, when it was possible for him to abide in His own honour and deity, not only so far emptied Himself as to take the form of a slave,<sup>3041</sup> but also endured the cross, despising the shame,<sup>3042</sup> that he might by His own sufferings destroy sin, and by death slay death.<sup>3043</sup> The former are the imaginings of desire, the latter the teachings of the Spirit. And I, standing midway between the desire and the Spirit, and not knowing to which of the two I should rather yield, will impart to you what seems to me the best and safest course, that you may test it with me and take part in my design.

5. It seemed to me to be best and least dangerous to take a middle course between desire and fear, and to yield in part to desire, in part to the Spirit: and that this would be the case, if I neither altogether evaded the office, and so refused the grace, which would be dangerous, nor yet assumed a burden beyond my powers, for it is a heavy one. The former indeed is suited to the person of another, the latter to another's power, or rather to undertake both would be madness. But piety and safety would alike advise me to proportion the office to my power, and as is the case with food, to accept that which is within my power and refuse what is beyond it, for health is gained for the body, and tranquillity for the soul, by such a course of moderation. Therefore I now consent to share in the cares of my excellent father, like an eaglet, not quite vainly flying close to a mighty and high soaring eagle. But hereafter I will offer my wing to the Spirit to be borne whither, and as, He wills: no one shall force or drag me in any direction, contrary to His counsel. For sweet it is to inherit a father's toils, and this flock is more familiar than a strange and foreign one; I would even add, more precious in the sight of God, unless the spell of affection deceives me, and the force of habit robs me of perception: nor is there any more useful or safer course than that willing rulers should rule

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<sup>3038</sup> 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

<sup>3039</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 9.

<sup>3040</sup> Phil. ii. 4.

<sup>3041</sup> Ib. ii. 7.

<sup>3042</sup> Heb. xii. 2.

<sup>3043</sup> Ib. ii. 14.



willing subjects: since it is our practice not to lead by force, or by compulsion, but by good will. For this would not hold together even another form of government, since that which is held in by force is wont, when opportunity offers, to strike for freedom: but freedom of will more than anything else it is, which holds together our—I will not call it rule, but—tutorship. For the mystery of godliness<sup>3044</sup> belongs to those who are willing, not to those who are overpowered.

6. This is my speech to you, my good men, uttered in simplicity and with all good will, and this is the secret of my mind. And may the victory rest with that which will be for the profit of both you and me, under the Spirit's guidance of our affairs, (for our discourse comes back again to the same point,)<sup>3045</sup> to Whom we have given ourselves, and the head anointed with the oil of perfection, in the Almighty Father, and the Only-begotten Son, and the Holy Spirit, Who is God. For how long shall we hide<sup>3046</sup> the lamp under the bushel,<sup>3047</sup> and withhold from others the full knowledge of the Godhead, when it ought to be now put upon the lampstand and give light to all churches and souls and to the whole fulness of the world, no longer by means of metaphors, or intellectual sketches, but by distinct declaration? And this indeed is a most perfect setting forth of Theology to those Who have been deemed worthy of this grace in Christ Jesus Himself, our Lord, to Whom be glory, honour, and power for ever. Amen.

## Oration XVI.

On His Father's Silence, Because of the Plague of Hail.

*This Oration belongs to the year A.D. 373. A series of disasters had befallen the people of Nazianzus. A deadly cattle plague, which had devastated their herds, had been followed by a prolonged drought, and now their just ripened crops had been ruined by a storm of rain and hail. The people flocked to the church, and finding S. Gregory the elder so overwhelmed by his sense of these terrible misfortunes that he was unable to address them, implored his coadjutor to enter the pulpit. The occasion gave no time for preparation, so S. Gregory poured out his feelings in a discourse which was in the fullest sense of the words *ex tempore*. Its present form, however, as Benoît suggests, may be due to a later polishing of notes taken down at the time of delivery.*

<sup>3044</sup> 1 Tim. iii. 16.

<sup>3045</sup> *The same point*, i.e. from which it started, § 1.

<sup>3046</sup> *Hide*, etc. S. Gregory here alludes to the "economy" which refrained from distinctly declaring the Divinity of the Holy Ghost. Cf. Or. xliii., 68. This declaration of his was afterwards commented on by his audience and others, cf. Epist. 58, in which his mode of teaching is contrasted with that of S. Basil.

<sup>3047</sup> S. Matt. v. 15.