

Feast of St Gregory the Great 3/9/26

A taste of what St Gregory the Great was about, from his *Regula Pastoralis*, or rule of pastoral care.

'The master of an earthly household, in distributing the ranks and duties to his servants, appoints some to rule and others to be ruled. He orders the one group to supply necessities to the rest and these others to take what is given. Now it sometimes happens that those who rule give offence, and those others who are ruled remain in favour with the father of the household. Those who are the dispensers incur anger those who subsist on what is dispensed continue without falling into disfavour.'

From part 3, ch 20: *'How to admonish those who give away what is their own and those who seize what belongs to others'* and there is much more in a similar vein, much, much, more, with Gregory trying to cover an immense range of possibilities, of all the nuances which wielding power demands. He's writing from experience rather than theory, and this works a sea-change in the way learning is presented in the mediaeval period. It's a sort of 'folk preaching' accessible to all, or rather to those prepared to receive it, including even such as King Alfred the Great, who ordered it and the *Dialogues* to be translated into English, such was Gregory's esteem among the English, but not, it seems, in Rome, where his reputation was neglected, perhaps because of his more monastic experiential approach, which those of a more clerical mind resented, or in the words of one biographer, Jeffrey Richards:

'The new culture, strongly influenced by the monastic ideal and grounded in Gregory's concept of a pastoral episcopate, emphasised simple truths -suffering, spirituality, and goodness - rather than the mastery of abstruse points of theological dogma.' (p261 *'Consul of God: the life and times of Gregory the Great'*).

The sort of approach that Jesus took to both appoint and disappoint Peter in today's gospel passage which is followed abruptly by Peter's mistaken desire to protect Jesus from harm. Jesus's rebuke to him is, *"Get behind me, Satan"*, for *"You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."* This is Gregory's relevance for us today: trying to be in tune with the way God, the way Christ thinks, in all its subtlety and directness, without fear or favour - a monastic ideal we too would, hopefully, have to offer.

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