

## On the arrival of the Egyptians

This Oration was preached at Constantinople in 380, under the following circumstances:

Peter, Patriarch of Alexandria, had sent a mission of five of his Suffragans to consecrate the impostor Maximus to the Throne occupied by **Gregory**. This had led to much trouble, but in the end the intruder had been expelled and banished. Shortly afterwards an Egyptian fleet, probably the regular corn ships, had arrived at Constantinople, apparently on the day before a Festival. The crews of the ships, landing next day to go to Church, passed by the numerous Churches held by the Arians, and betook themselves to the little Anastasia. St. Gregory felt himself moved to congratulate them specially on such an act, after what had recently passed, and accordingly pronounced the following discourse.

I. I Will address myself as is right to those who have come from Egypt; for they have come here eagerly, having overcome illwill by zeal, from that Egypt which is enriched by the River, raining out of the earth, and like the sea in its season, — if I too may follow in my small measure those who have so eloquently spoken of these matters; and which is also enriched by Christ my Lord, Who once was a fugitive into Egypt, and now is supplied by Egypt; the first, when He fled from Herod's massacre of the children; and now by the love of the fathers for their children, by Christ the new Food of those who hunger after good; the greatest alms of corn of which history speaks and men believe; the Bread which came down from heaven and giveth life to the world, that life which is indestructible and indissoluble, concerning Whom I now seem to hear the Father saying, Out of Egypt have I called My Son.

II. For from you hath sounded forth the Word to all men; healthfully believed and preached; and you are the best bringers of fruit of all men, specially of those who now hold the right faith, as far as I know, who am not only a lover of such food, but also its distributor, and not at home only but also abroad. For you indeed supply bodily food to peoples and cities so far as your lovingkindness reaches; and you supply spiritual food also, not to a particular people, nor to this or that city, circumscribed by narrow boundaries, though its people may think it very illustrious, but to almost the whole world. And you bring the remedy not for famine of bread or thirst of water, which is no very terrible famine — and to avoid it is easy; but to a famine of hearing the Word of the Lord, which it is most miserable to suffer, and a most laborious matter to cure at the present time, because iniquity hath abounded, and scarce anywhere do I find its genuine healers.

III. Such was Joseph your Superintendent of corn measures, whom I may call ours also; who by his surpassing wisdom was able both to foresee the famine and to cure it by decrees of government, healing the ill-favored and starving kine by means of the fair and fat. And indeed you may understand by Joseph which you will, either the

great lover and creator and namesake of immortality or his successor in throne and word and hoary hair, our new Peter, not inferior in virtue or fame to him by whom the middle course was destroyed and crushed, though it still wriggles a little weakly, like the tail of a snake after it is cut off; the one of whom, after having departed this life in a good old age after many conflicts and wrestlings, looks upon us from above, I well know, and reaches a hand to those who are laboring for the right: and this the more, in proportion as he is freed from his bonds; and the other is hastening to the same end or dissolution of life, and is already drawing near the dwellers in heaven, but is still so far in the flesh as is needed to give the last aids to the Word, and to take his journey with richer provision.

IV. Of these great men and doctors and soldiers of the truth and victors, you are the nurslings and offspring; of these neither times nor tyrants, reason nor envy, nor fear, nor accuser, nor slanderer, whether waging open war against them, or plotting secretly; nor any who appeared to be of our side, nor any stranger, nor gold — that hidden tyrant, through which now almost everything is turned upside down and made to depend on the hazard of a die; nor flatteries nor threats, nor long and distant exiles (for they only could not be affected by confiscation, because of their great riches, which were — to possess nothing) nor anything else, whether absent or present or expected, could induce to take the worse part, and to be anywise traitor to the Trinity, or to suffer loss of the Godhead. On the contrary indeed, they grew strong by dangers, and became more zealous for true religion. For to suffer thus for Christ adds to one's love, and is as it were an earnest to high-souled men of further conflicts. These, O Egypt, are thy present tales and wonders.

V. Once thou didst praise me thy Mendesian Goats, and thy Memphite Apis, a fatted and fleshy calf, and the rites of Isis, and the mutilations of Osiris, and thy venerable Serapis, a log that was honored by myths and ages and the madness of its worshippers, as some unknown and heavenly matter, however it may have been aided by falsehood; and things yet more shameful than these, multiform images of monstrous beasts and creeping things, all of which Christ and the heralds of Christ have conquered, both the others who have been illustrious in their own times, and also the Fathers whom I have named just now; by whom, O admirable country, thou art more famous today than all others put together, whether in ancient or modern history.

VI. Wherefore I embrace and salute thee, O noblest of peoples and most Christian, and of warmest piety, and worthy of thy leaders; for I can find nothing greater to say of thee than this, nor anything by which better to welcome thee. And I greet thee, to a small extent with my tongue, but very heartily with the movements of my affections. O my people, for I call you mine, as of one mind and one faith, instructed by the same Fathers, and adoring the same Trinity. My people, for mine thou art, though it seem not so to those who envy me. And that they who are in this case may be the deeper wounded, see, I give the right hand of fellowship before so many witnesses, seen and

unseen. And I put away the old calumny by this new act of kindness. O my people, for mine thou art, though in saying so I, who am least of all men, am claiming for myself that which is greatest. For such is the grace of the Spirit that it makes of equal honor those who are of one mind. O my people, for mine thou art, though it be afar, because we are divinely joined together, and in a manner wholly different to the unions of carnal people; for bodies are united in place, but souls are fitted together by the Spirit. O my people, who didst formerly study how to suffer for Christ, but now if thou wilt hearken unto me, wilt study not to do aught, but to consider the power of doing to be a sufficient gain, and to deem that thou art offering a sacrifice to Christ, as in those days of thy endurance so in these of meekness. O people to whom the Lord hath prepared Himself to do good, as to do evil to thine enemies. O people, whom the Lord hath chosen to Himself out of all peoples; O people who art graven upon the hands of the Lord, to whom saith the Lord, Thou art My Will; and, Thy gates are carved work, and all the rest that is said to them that are being saved. O people; — nay, marvel not at my insatiability that I repeat your name so often; for I delight in this continual naming of you, like those who can never have enough of their enjoyment of certain spectacles or sounds.

VII. But, O people of God and mine, beautiful also was your yesterday's assembly, which you held upon the sea, and pleasant, if any sight ever was, to the eyes, when I saw the sea like a forest, and hidden by a cloud made with hands, and the beauty and speed of your ships, as though ordered for a procession, and the slight breeze astern, as though purposely escorting you, and wafting to the City your city of the Sea. Yet the present assembly which we now behold is more beautiful and more magnificent. For you have not hastened to mingle with the larger number, nor have you reckoned religion by numbers, nor endured to be a mere unorganized rabble, rather than a people purified by the Word of God; but having, as is right, rendered to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, ye have offered besides to God the things that are God's; to the former Custom, to the latter Fear; and after feeding the people with your cargoes, you yourselves have come to be fed by us. For we also distribute corn, and our distribution is perhaps not worth less than yours. Come eat of my Bread and drink of the Wine which I have mingled for you. I join with Wisdom in bidding you to my table. For I commend your good feeling, and I hasten to meet your ready mind, because ye came to us as to your own harbor, running to your like; and ye valued the kindred Faith, and thought it monstrous that, while they who insult higher things are in harmony with each other and think alike, and think to make good each man's individual falsehood by their common conspiracy, like ropes which get strength from being twisted together; yet you should not meet nor combine with those who are of the same mind, with whom it is more reasonable that you should associate, for we gather in the Godhead also. And that you may see that not in vain have you come to us, and that you have not brought up in a port among strangers and foreigners, but amongst your own people, and have been well guided by the Holy Ghost; we will discourse to you briefly concerning God; and do you recognize your own, like those who distinguish their kindred by the ensigns of their arms.

VIII. I find two highest differences in things that exist, viz.: — Rule, and Service; not such as among us either tyranny has cut or poverty has severed, but which nature has distinguished, if any like to use this word. For That which is First is also above nature. Of these the former is creative, and originating, and unchangeable; but the other is created, and subject and changing; or to speak yet more plainly, the one is above time, and the other subject to time. The Former is called God, and subsists in Three Greatest, namely, the Cause, the Creator, and the Perfecter; I mean the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, who are neither so separated from one another as to be divided in nature, nor so contracted as to be circumscribed by a single person; the one alternative being that of the Arian madness, the other that of the Sabellian heresy; but they are on the one hand more single than what is altogether divided, and on the other more abundant than what is altogether singular. The other division is with us, and is called Creation, though one may be exalted above another according to the proportion of their nearness to God.

IX. This being so, if any be on the Lord's side let him come with us, and let us adore the One Godhead in the Three; not ascribing any name of humiliation to the unapproachable Glory, but having the exaltations of the Triune God continually in our mouth. For since we cannot properly describe even the greatness of Its Nature, on account of Its infinity and undefinableness, how can we assert of It humiliation? But if any one be estranged from God, and therefore divideth the One Supreme Substance into an inequality of Natures, it were marvelous if such an one were not Cut in sunder by the sword, and his portion appointed with the unbelievers, reaping any evil fruit of his evil thought both now and hereafter.

X. What must we say of the Father, Whom by common consent all who have been preoccupied with natural conceptions share, although He hath endured the beginnings of dishonor, having been first divided by ancient innovation into the Good and the Creator. And of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, see how simply and concisely we shall discourse. If any one could say of Either that He was mutable or subject to change; or that either in time, or place, or power, or energy He could be measured; or that He was not naturally good, or not Self-moved, or not a free agent, or a Minister, or a Hymnsinger; or that He feared, or was a recipient of freedom, or was not counted with God; let him prove this and we will acquiesce, and will be glorified by the Majesty of our Fellow Servants, though we lose our God. But if all that the Father has belongs likewise to the Son, except Causality; and all that is the Son's belongs also to the Spirit, except His Sonship, and whatsoever is spoken of Him as to Incarnation for me a man, and for my salvation, that, taking of mine, He may impart His own by this new commingling; then cease your babbling, though so late, O ye sophists of vain talk that falls at once to the ground; for why will ye die O House of Israel? — if I may mourn for you in the words of Scripture.

XI. For my part I revere also the Titles of the Word, which are so many, and so high and great, which even the demons respect. And I revere also the Equal Rank of the

Holy Ghost; and I fear the threat pronounced against those who blaspheme Him. And blasphemy is not the reckoning Him God, but the severing Him from the Godhead. And here you must remark that That which is blasphemed is Lord, and That which is avenged is the Holy Ghost, evidently as Lord. I cannot bear to be unenlightened after my Enlightenment, by marking with a different stamp any of the Three into Whom I was baptized; and thus to be indeed buried in the water, and initiated not into Regeneration, but into death.

XII. I dare to utter something, O Trinity; and may pardon be granted to my folly, for the risk is to my soul. I too am an Image of God, of the Heavenly Glory, though I be placed on earth. I cannot believe that I am saved by one who is my equal. If the Holy Ghost is not God, let Him first be made God, and then let Him deify me His equal. But now what deceit this is on the part of grace, or rather of the givers of grace, to believe in God and to come away godless; by one set of questions and confessions leading to another set of conclusions. Alas for this fair fame, if after the Layer I am blackened, if I am to see those who are not yet cleansed brighter than myself; if I am cheated by the heresy of my Baptizer; if I seek for the stronger Spirit and find Him not. Give me a second Font before you think evil of the first. Why do you grudge me a complete regeneration? Why do you make me, who am the Temple of the Holy Ghost as of God, the habitation of a creature? Why do you honor part of what belongs to me, and dishonor part, judging falsely of the Godhead, to cut me off from the Gift, or rather to cut me in two by the gift? Either honor the Whole, or dishonor the Whole, O new Theologian, that, if you are wicked, you may at any rate be consistent with yourself, and not judge unequally of an equal nature.

XIII. To sum up my discourse: — Glorify Him with the Cherubim, who unite the Three Holies into One Lord, and so far indicate the Primal Substance as their wings open to the diligent. With David be enlightened, who said to the Light, In Thy Light shall we see Light, that is, in the Spirit we shall see the Son; and what can be of further reaching ray? With John thunder, sounding forth nothing that is low or earthly concerning God, but what is high and heavenly, Who is in the beginning, and is with God, and is God the Word, and true God of the true Father, and not a good fellow- servant honored only with the title of Son; and the Other Comforter (other, that is, from the Speaker, Who was the Word of God). And when you read, I and the Father are One, keep before your eyes the Unity of Substance; but when you see, "We will come to him, and make Our abode with him," remember the distinction of Persons; and when you see the Names, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, think of the Three Personalities.

XIV. With Luke be inspired as you study the Acts of the Apostles. Why do you range yourself with Ananias and Sapphira, those vain embezzlers (if indeed the theft of one's own property be a vain thing) and that by appropriating, not silver nor any other cheap and worthless thing, like a wedge of gold, or a didrachma, as did of old a rapacious soldier; but stealing the Godhead Itself, and lying, not to men but to God,

as you have heard. What? Will you not reverence even the authority of the Spirit Who breathes upon whom, and when, and as He wills? He comes upon Cornelius and his companions before Baptism, to others after Baptism, by the hands of the Apostles; so that from both sides, both from the fact that He comes in the guise of a Master and not of a Servant, and from the fact of His being sought to make perfect, the Godhead of the Spirit is testified.

XV. Speak of God with Paul, who was caught up to the third Heaven, and who sometimes counts up the Three Persons, and that in varied order, not keeping the same order, but reckoning one and the same Person now first, now second, now third; and for what purpose? Why, to shew the equality of the Nature. And sometimes he mentions Three, sometimes Two or One, because That which is not mentioned is included. And sometimes he attributes the operation of God to the Spirit, as in no respect different from Him, and sometimes instead of the Spirit he brings in Christ; and at times he separates the Persons saying, "One God, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him;" at other times he brings together the one Godhead, "For of Him and through Him and in Him are all things;" that is, through the Holy Ghost, as is shown by many places in Scripture. To Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.