

Homily: Sept. 3, 2022

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

We celebrate and give thanks for God's marvelous work through St. Pope Gregory the Great, a famous leader of the church and, de facto, leader of Italy from 590 to 604. Rome and the whole country of Italy were a mess from war, famine, and plague. Pope Gregory regulated liturgy and promoted plainchant, which we know now as Gregorian Chant. He encouraged monastic life and sponsored the first successful mission to the British Isles. Hence his name, "Gregory the Great" though he wished to be called, "Servant of the servants of God." In spite of his name, he was a truly humble person. We stand before God as people who often or sometimes want all the praise and glory for ourselves. So we call out, "Lord, have mercy."

As we heard in the first reading, Paul admonishes the Corinthians whose community was suffering from pride. Some boasted about their achievements, and some considered themselves better than other Christians. Division was the unchristian result. As a remedy, Paul called them to follow the example of the apostles and "stay with what is written so that none of you will be inflated with pride." In other words, stay with the wonderful story of Jesus, a man of true humility and meekness. Be like the apostles, he adds, for they "are fools on Christ's account. . . . and have become like the world's rubbish . . ."

St. Gregory the Great had been the prefect of Rome—an official supervisor. He left that lofty position and turned his estate into a monastery. But, several years later the church leaders chose him as the new pope, a position he accepted "with extreme reluctance," a similar reaction as that of our St. Augustine, who also did not want to leave his monastic life for the sake of becoming the bishop of Hippo. Nonetheless, considering the mess the church and Italian world were in, and his own previous experience as a civil prefect, Gregory agreed to become a leader for both worlds, the Italian society, and the church. He did a fantastic job—because he was humble.

Gregory had learned well from what was written. The Gospel today revealed our humble Jesus and his disciples passing through a field of grain on the Sabbath. They ate grain as they went along. Humble Jesus was not being arrogant and disrespectful but rather obedient to the law of love – the law of doing what is best for others at any moment, including moments regulated by other laws.

Jesus also acknowledged that all he did, said, and had, were given to him by God, his father. St. Paul eventually acknowledged that all he did, said, and had, came from the risen Christ living within him. Therefore, Paul could ask the Corinthian Christians, "What do you possess that you have not received?"

So let us take a moment and humbly acknowledge that all we do, say, and have, come from God.