



## St. Basil the Great

**Born:** 329 or 330 Caesarea, Cappadocia

**Died:** January 1 or 2, 379, Caesarea, Cappadocia

**Venerated:** in Eastern Orthodox Church, Oriental Orthodoxy, Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Communion Lutheranism

**Canonized:** Pre-congregation

**Feast:** January 1 and January 30 (Byzantine Christianity) January 2 (General Roman Calendar; Anglicanism) Thout 6 (Coptic Christianity)(Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod; Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod) June 14 (General Roman Calendar from 13th century to 1969; Episcopal Church) Thout 13 (Coptic Christianity)

**Patronage:** Russia, Cappadocia, Hospital administrators, Reformers, Monks, Education, Exorcism, Liturgists

Saint Basil was born in Asia Minor. Two of his brothers became bishops, and with his mother and his sister, are honored as Saints. He studied with great success in Athens, where he formed a tender and perpetual friendship with Saint Gregory Nazianzen. He then taught oratory. The study of philosophy had already raised him above all worldly ambition, and dreading the honors of the world, he gave up all things to become the father of monastic life in the East. His older sister, Saint Macrina, encouraged him when he abandoned the greater part of his inheritance.

He retired into Pontus, where his sister was Superior of a convent, into which his mother also had entered; there he founded a monastery on the opposite side of the river from the convent, and governed it for four years, from 358 to 362. He founded several other religious houses in the same region, both for men and for women. It was for them that he composed his ascetic works, including his famous Rule, still followed by the monks of the Orient.

He then resigned, leaving his office to his brother, Saint Peter of Sebastus, to retire in

prayer. Saint Gregory came to join his friend for a time, in response to his invitation. Ever afterwards, Basil would recall with regret the peace and happiness they had enjoyed, singing Psalms, studying Scripture, keeping vigil in prayer, and disciplining their flesh by manual work. It was only in 363 that this holy hermit was ordained a priest by Eusebius of Caesarea in Cappadocia.

The Arian heretics, supported by the court, were then persecuting the Church, and Basil was summoned from his retirement by his bishop to give aid against them. His energy and zeal soon mitigated the disorders of the Church, and his solid and eloquent words silenced the heretics. On the death of Eusebius, he was chosen Bishop of Caesarea. His commanding character, his firmness and energy, his learning and eloquence, seconded by his humility and the great austerity of his life, made him a model for bishops. He founded in Caesarea a vast hospital, which Saint Gregory called a new city and which remained in existence for long decades. He went there often to console the suffering, and help them to make good use of their pains.

When Saint Basil was summoned by the emperor Valentius to admit the Arians to Communion, the prefect in charge, finding that soft words had no effect, said to him, Are you mad, that you resist the will before which the whole world bows? Do you not dread the wrath of the emperor, nor exile, nor death? No, said Basil calmly; he who has nothing to lose need not dread loss of goods; you cannot exile me, for the whole earth is my home; as for death, it would be the greatest kindness you could bestow upon me; torments cannot harm me; one blow would end both my frail life and my sufferings. The prefect answered, Never has anyone dared to address me thus. Perhaps, suggested Basil, you never before measured your strength with a Christian bishop. The emperor desisted from his commands.

Saint Basil's entire life was one of suffering, both physical and moral; he lived amidst jealousies, misunderstandings and seeming disappointments. But he sowed the seed which bore good fruit in the future generations. He was God's instrument to resist the Arian and other heretics in the East, and to restore the spirit of discipline and fervor in the Church. He died peacefully in 379 at the age of fifty-one, and is venerated as a Doctor of the Church.

Reflection. Fear God, says the Imitation of Christ, and thou shalt not need to fear any man.