



## WOMEN WHO FOLLOWED THE LORD

*This Month: Gorgonia, the sister of St. Gregory of Nazianzus*

One of the great figures of the early Church is St. Gregory of Nazianzus, also known as Gregory the Theologian. He had a powerful influence on the early Church, including the Church in Armenia which another Gregory had worked to establish. Through his well-thought-out theological writings, he was able to make the faith more deeply and thoroughly understood by many people.

About his own life, Gregory wrote that he had been influenced by two strong women: his mother and his sister. That sister, Gorgonia, was said by Gregory to have been recognized as a wise and gifted counselor by men and women in her family and also in her broader acquaintance. People would treat her advice almost as a law which must not be broken, and they knew that she was able to speak with them on almost any subject, so learned and well-educated was she.

But she also opened her home to those in need, and would share whatever she had with other people, even though she might not have a great abundance for herself. She could chant the psalter and talk about divine revelation as well as anyone, her brother said, and the combination of intelligent faith and acts of kindness made her life a powerful example to many people.

At the time Gorgonia lived, there was a great controversy among some in the Church, for a vocal group felt that the only way to be truly dedicated to God was to remain celibate and not ever marry. This was based in part on the words of St. Paul, for he did write about the need to put one's full concentration on the coming Kingdom and Judgment. But Paul also made room for marriage (not in his own life, but in his counsels to others.) Gorgonia, in the words of her brother St. Gregory, had a good marriage but never allowed it to get in the way of her dedication to the Lord. Gregory writes:

"For though she had entered upon a carnal union [marriage] she was not therefore separated from the spirit, nor, because her husband was her head, did she ignore her first Head...

"What is most excellent and honorable, she also won over her husband to her side, and made of him a good

fellow-servant, instead of an unreasonable master. And not only that, but she further made the fruit of her body, her children and her children's children, to be the fruit of her spirit. She dedicated to God not her single soul, but the whole family and household, and made wedlock illustrious through her own acceptability in wedlock and the fair harvest she had reaped thereby; presenting herself, as long as she lived, as an example to her offspring of all that was good. When summoned hence, leaving her will behind her, she was a silent exhortation to her house."

Then he says that her woman's nature overcame that of man "in the common struggle for salvation, and demonstrated that the distinction between male and female is one of body and not of soul."

This point is one of the most interesting about Gorgonia. As learned as she was, as much as she might have outshone any man with her knowledge and skill, she did not feel that she had to "prove" she was equal to the men around her. She was well aware that in God's sight there really is no difference between the souls of men and women, and aside from God there was nobody she had to please.

There is no doubt that Gorgonia, though she did not leave well-known writings as her brother did or become known as a theologian, had a great influence on him and on all the people who knew her. When people talk about Gregory, they also talk about his sister. We might say, especially in our own day, that she should have been, and deserved to be, in the limelight just as much as he was. But in her own behind-the-scenes way, Gorgonia has had a great influence on the Church, just as Gregory has. If it was done quietly, without titles or recognition, it still was done, this giving of an example of wisdom, learning, and kindness of heart. We in the Church believe that just such people as Gorgonia, who live according to the Lord's will without looking for people to notice what they are doing, will have the greatest of rewards from the Father who "sees in secret" and "rewards openly."

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

### (Reflections on Armenian Names)

The feminine names Bydzar (which means clear or shining and is the Armenian version of Clara or Bertha), Lousadzin (meaning bearer of light), Arpineh and Arshaloys (both referring to the rising of the sun) are some of the many names used among Armenians that have to do with light and the clarity that light brings. These names reflect one of the most basic Christian teachings: that God through His Son, His saints and His teachings, enlightens His people and brings them out of darkness.

Long before the birth of Jesus Christ, the Old Testament prepares us for His coming by these words of God to His holy city, Jerusalem: Arise, shine, for your light has



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