

*St. Basil of Caesarea (Ca.330-379),  
Bishop, Theologian and Father of the  
Church, and one of the Cappadocian  
Fathers*

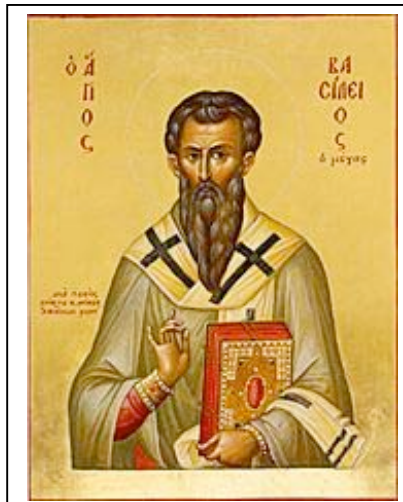
Basil was one of ten children and shortly after his birth the family moved to his grandmother's estate. Certainly his youthful religious life was strongly influenced by his grandmother, Saint Macrina the Elder, and his father, who is known as St. Basil the Elder. It was, in fact, an entire family of saints.

It was only natural that Basil would grow up to become a monk a priest and a saint. He was known for his preaching and theological works, the most remembered of which is "On the Holy Spirit. He was consecrated bishop of Caesarea in 370.



*Left: Cappadocia in Anatolia (Turkey), 500 BC. Pre-dates Basil. Cappadocia is circled.*

Rugged Cappadocia overseen by Mt. Erciyes



*Top: A Greek icon of Basil. Beneath is an icon of the "Cappadocian Fathers": Basil, his brother, Gregory of Nyssa, and his best friend Gregory of Nazianzus.*

Basil, with St. Pachomius, can be considered the father of communal monasticism in distinction to the solitary life of the hermit. He did not overlook the concerns of the world, but gave away his possessions to the poor and among the Greeks is referred to as "Father Christmas."

The Basilian Fathers are an order in the Roman Catholic Church; there is a liturgy of St. Basil in the East and he is known as a "Doctor of the Universal Church." Even St. Benedict referred to him in the epilogue to his Rule.

*Basil and the Poor*

*"The bread which you do not use is the bread of the hungry; the garment hanging in your wardrobe is the garment of him who is naked; the shoes that you do not wear are the shoes of the one who is barefoot; the money that you keep locked away is the money of the poor; the acts of charity that you do not perform are so many injustices that you commit."*



### **Not Quite Right**

Young Basil may have thought he had gotten it right (like these hermits by Albrecht Dürer) when he began a hermitage on his family estate, but his best friend Gregory was not impressed.

Years later, when both men were bishops, Gregory wrote to Basil reminding him of their youthful enthusiasm.

### ***Basil's Big Sister***



St. Macrina the Younger was named for her grandmother, Saint Macrina the Elder. She was to be married, but her intended died and she eventually turned the family home into a monastery. From there Macrina kept close watch on Little Brother Basil and was a strong spiritual influence for him.

Macrina's brother, Gregory of Nyssa, wrote *A Dialogue on the Soul and Resurrection* in her memory.

### ***A Saxon Monk on Saint Basil***

The Monastic Rule of St. Basil preceded that of St. Benedict. St. Aelfric (ca.955-ca.1010), abbot of Eynsham, wrote about Basil in his *Lives of the Saints*:

“He (Basil) wrote also a monastic rule of great purity, which the Easterns, and moreover the Greeks, observe unanimously, although it is severer than that which Benedict afterwards gave us.”

## ***Remembering A Youthful Hermitage***

Letter of Gregory Nazianzus to His Friend Basil,  
NPF, Vol. 7

“Your roofless and doorless hut, your fireless and smokeless hearth, your walls dried by fire, that we may not be hit by the drops of the mud, condemned like Tantalus thirsting in the midst of waters, and that pitiable feast with nothing to eat, to which we were invited from Cappadocia . . . we young and miserable survivors of a wreck. For I remember those loaves and the broth (so it was called), yes, and I shall remember them too, and my poor teeth that slipped on your hunks of bread, and then braced themselves up, and pulled themselves as it were out of mud. You yourself will raise these things to a higher strain of tragedy, having learnt to talk big through your own sufferings . . . for if we had not been quickly delivered by that great supporter of the poor—I mean your mother—who appeared opportunely like a harbor to men tossed by a storm, we should long ago have been dead, rather pitied than admired for our faith in Pontus.”

### ***St. Basil on The Love of God***

“The love of God is not taught. No one has taught us to enjoy the light or to be attached to life more than anything else. And no one has taught us to love the two people who brought us into the world and educated us. Which is all the more reason to believe that we did not learn to love God as a result of outside instruction. In the very nature of every human being has been sown the seed of the ability to love. You and I ought to welcome this seed, cultivate it carefully, nourish it attentively and foster its growth by going to the school of God's commandments with help of His grace.”