

February 27

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Gregory of Narek (ca. 945-1010) monk and hymn writer

According to early Armenian sinaxaria, the memory of Gregory of Narek, a monk and hymnographer who lived from the mid-tenth to the early eleventh century, used to be celebrated today.

Gregory was probably born in the present-day Armenian village of Narek, near Lake Van, around the year 945. His mother died when he was a child, and his father arranged for him to be brought up at the local monastery. There he spent the rest of his life.

At the monastery, the igumen Ananias encouraged him to study. Gregory read all of the great Greek and oriental patristic works and fed his daily meditation with an immense treasury of spiritual reading.

As he constantly alternated work and prayer, Gregory began to demonstrate a strong inclination to express the tradition he had received in his own words, using some of the most beautiful poetic language in Christian history. He composed hymns, treatises, biblical commentary, and panegyrics for all who asked him. As a preacher, he was loved and appreciated by the scholarly and the simple. His Book of Prayers is one of the masterpieces of Christian literature. Nerses of Lambrun called him "an angel clothed in a body."

The Armenian Church now commemorates Gregory together with its "holy translators" in the first half of October.

BIBLICAL READINGS

1 Cor 12:4-11; Mt 7:6-12

George Herbert (1593-1633) priest

On the same day, the Church of England commemorates another great Christian poet, George Herbert. Born in 1593 into the aristocratic Pembroke family, George began his studies at Cambridge in 1614 and went on to become a fellow of Trinity College. Already a public lecturer at the university and a member of parliament at the age of twenty-five, he seemed well on his way towards a political career when, surprising everyone, he moved to the solitude of the "monastic" community of Little Gidding and began to study to be ordained a deacon.

He married, was ordained to the priesthood, and was assigned to the parish of Bermerton, near Salisbury, where he spent the rest of his brief life. At Bermerton he encouraged his parishioners to deepen their spiritual lives by participating in the daily recitation of the liturgy of the hours. He also composed many hymns and liturgical poems.

Despite his early death at the age of forty, he left a rich poetic legacy that has placed him among the greatest Christian hymn writers. Herbert died on this day in 1633.

BIBLICAL READINGS

Mal 2:5-7; Rev 19:5-9; Mt 11:25-39.

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

ANGLICANS:

George Herbert, priest and poet

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (19 amsir/yakkatittit):

Translation of the relics of Marcianus, monk (Orthodox Coptic Church)

Peter II (d. 380), 21st patriarch of Alexandria (Catholic Coptic Church)

LUTHERANS:

Patrick Hamilton (d. 1528), witness to the point of bloodshed in Scotland

MARONITES:

Thalaleus of Syria (d. ca. 460), hermit

Procopius the Decapolite (d. ca. 750)

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

Procopius the Decapolite, monk and confessor

Cyril (d. 869), monk and apostle to the Slavs (Russian and Serbian Churches)