

Three Holy Hierarchs

Many of us probably have a favorite sports team for which we root and follow. We have most likely all gotten into friendly and sometimes maybe not so friendly discussions with other people about whose team is better. Well, things weren't that much different in the 11th century than they are today. The only difference between now and then was that people were arguing over who was the greatest Sainly bishop in the history of the Church, not over sports teams.

One camp in the Church was saying that the greatest bishop of all time was St. Basil who had a great love for the poor and built a hospital, a hospice, and a poorhouse in his diocese. He also wrote the liturgy that bears his name that is celebrated on Sundays during Lent and on other special feast days during the year. In addition, his monastic rule that he wrote also had a great influence on eastern and western monasticism, so much so that he is called by the title, father of eastern monasticism. Finally, St. Basil wrote the definitive defense of the divinity of the Holy Spirit and influenced the teaching on the Holy Spirit that we recite at the creed at every liturgy.

Another camp was saying the St. Gregory the Theologian was the greatest bishop because of his great insights into the relationships between the persons of the Holy Trinity, some of which he wrote in beautiful Greek poetry. He also described the process of deification, by which the Christian grows in mystical union with Christ. In addition, he developed the terminology of procession describing the relationship of the Father to the Holy Spirit and taught the eternity of the Holy Spirit whose actions were somewhat hidden in the Old Testament, but became fully apparent in the New Testament. Finally, he helped develop the understanding of the Holy Trinity as being three persons, but one essence.

The final camp hailed St. John Chrysostom as the greatest bishop. After Christ, he was the greatest preacher who ever lived, earning him the nickname "the Golden-Mouthed." He was a fearless preacher who comforted the afflicted and afflicted the comfortable. He did not fear for his own life, but preached the truth of Christ to those in powerful positions, whether they liked it or not. He also wrote many commentaries explaining the meaning of sacred scripture. His Paschal homily is still read every Pascha some 1,700 years after he first delivered it. Ultimately, he would die in exile from his homeland because he refused to compromise his Christian beliefs. He also wrote the Divine Liturgy most days of the year.

The debate about who was the greatest bishop in the history of the Church raged on until one night all three bishops appeared in a vision to the bishop of Euchaita and told him that they were all equal in God's sight and one was not higher than the other, This bishop then set up a new feast day, the Feast of the Three Holy Hierarchs that we are celebrating today, honoring the three bishops together. O Lord, through the prayers of the Three Holy Hierarchs, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, and St. John Chrysostom, may we also become equal with the Saints.