Scripture: Job 28:20-28
Prayer
Hymn: 349 "Before Jehovah's Awful Throne"

Gregory I can be pictured as a man with one foot in the Ancient and one foot in the Medieval. He was the father of medieval Christianity and almost all the leading principles of later Catholicism can be found in him at least in germ. The popes who took the title "Gregory" did so in hopes of sharing his greatness.

FAMILY BACKGROUND: Born in Rome about 540 to a notable family with a long record of public service. Two popes had come from the family. His father, Gordianus, was a wealthy patrician with large estates in Sicily and a mansion on the Caelian Hill in Rome. His mother, Silvia, was also from a good family. After Gordianus' death, Silvia and two of Gordianus' sisters (Tarsilla and Aemiliana) entered Benedictine nunneries and after their death were declared saints. Gregory was a saint who grew up among saints.

PUBLIC SERVICE: Gregory was probably educated in grammar, rhetoric, dialectic and law—the training for managing a large estate. He probably held a succession of subordinate offices such as a young noble would hold as he embarked on a public career. At about thirty he held the highest civil office in Rome, prefect (or mayor). In his fine robes and chariot drawn by four white horses he was a prominent figure.

GREGORY THE MONK: about 574, after much prayer, Gregory resigned his office, sold his estate, set up six monasteries in Sicily, and turned his palace on the Caelian Hiss into a Monastery of St. Andrew. He took the vows of a monk in this monastery. He ruined his health with his austerities but gained a great reputation for saintliness and was loved by fellow monks. He regarded the years in the monastery as the happiest of his life. Pope Benedict I made him a deacon.

THE POPE'S AMBASSADOR TO CONSTANTINOPLE: About 578 Pope Pelagius II called Gregory form the monastery and made him his nuncio to the Emperor Tiberius in Constantinople to appeal for help against the invading Lombards. Gregory was accompanied by a company of monks from St. Andrews. He spent about six years in Constantinople. He did not learn Greek (the alphabet seems to have been about all the Greek he mastered). He complained of the incompetence of interpreters. He failed to get help against the Lombards. He did secure free status for Naples. He learned much of imperial and church politics. His greatest lesson was that the West would have to protect itself. Leander of Seville persuaded him to start The Moralia (a commentary on Job). In his vigorous controversy with Patriarch Eutychius on the nature of the resurrection body the emperor declared Gregory was right and ordered the works of Eutychius burned.

GREGORY AS ABBOT: Gregory was recalled to Rome about 586. Soon he was made abbot of his monastery. He taught and lectured and the fame of his monastery grew. He completed The Moralia. The pope gave him the task of trying to persuade schismatic bishops in the west to rejoin Rome. He started on a mission to Britain but after three days the Pope recalled him because of pressure from the people.

GREGORY CHOSEN POPE IN 590: The year 589 was a year of disaster—flood followed by plague. Pope Pelagius II died in February, 590. Clergy and people chose Gregory. The mayor of Rome intercepted Gregory's letter begging the emperor, Maurice, not to recognize him. Instead the mayor sent a schedule of Gregory's elevation and asked for approval by the emperor. Gregory was enthroned Sept. 3, 590.
GREGORY AS POPE: 590-604. Fourteen years crowded with vigorous activity despite indigestion, fever, and gout. His Book of Pastoral Care set forth the program he set for himself as well as being the guide book he provided for the clergy in administering the church. Gregory was noted for his minute care of the patrimony of Peter—the vast estates of the church. He exhausted the treasury in his care of the poor.

Gregory reformed the worship service, leaving his imprint on the Mass.

Gregory took great interest in the music of the church, founding a music school and encouraging the style of music known as "The Gregorian Chant."

Gregory was Shepherd of the West: held that Pope was supreme. Exercised jurisdiction over Italy, Sicily, North Africa, Spain, and even tried to secure submission of Franks. Bishops to root out heresy and enforce discipline.

Gregory worked for peace with Lombards.
Gregory respectful to emperor, but firm. Sometimes blamed for letters to Usurper, Phocas, who had murdered Emperor Maurice.
Gregory rebuked Patriarch John the Faster who claimed to be ecumenical patriarch. Gregory's favorite title was "Servant of the Servants of God."

Gregory, the first monk to become pope, gave great encouragement to Benedictine monasteries, and made them most useful agents of pope and church. Gregory's influence made the Benedictines a major force in the west.

Gregory showed great zeal for missionary work. Most famous was his interest in England. Sent Augustine with forty Benedictines to England. Later sent reinforcements.

GREGOR'S WRITINGS:

The Moralia: an allegorical commentary on Job that became the textbook of morals for the Middle Ages.
The Pastoral Care: the handbook of church administration and pastoral care.
Letters: a corpus of over 800 letters survive dealing with all aspects of church life.
Dialogues: Collections of the wonderful tales of saints. Homilies on Ezekiel, Gospels, Epistles.