

before the castle of Canossa where Gregory had retired. Cleverly the King stood shivering in a penitential garb while Countess Matilda, the Pope's hostess, and Saint Hugh of Cluny pleaded for mercy. Gregory knew he should await the Augsburg meeting, but he had been jockeyed by Henry into a position where he simply had to absolve the king.

Once absolved, Henry went back to his old ways. He set up an antipope, the abuse-loving Guibert of Ravenna. He defeated the German nobles, captured Rome, and installed his creature in the Lateran as Clement III. Gregory, besieged in the Castle of Saint Angelo, was rescued by the Normans. Soon afterwards, however, he had to flee Rome. Worn out, the brave old saint died at Salerno, Italy on May 25, 1085. He stated that "I have loved justice and hated iniquity, therefore I die in exile". He was canonized by Benedict XIII in 1728.

The problem of lay investiture was not fully settled for nearly another fifty years, but it may have never been resolved without Pope Gregory VII's dealing with the problem. He is referred to as the "Great Reformer" because he tried to solve problems that were hurting the Church. Opinion is unanimous that no Pontiff since the time of the Apostles undertook more labors for the Church or fought more courageously for her independence. While he was saying Mass, a dove was seen to come down on him; the Holy Spirit thus bore witness to the supernatural views which guided him in the government of the Church.

The Church honors Pope Gregory VII as a saint. He was a successor to Saint Peter and our Holy Father. We can show our love and respect for our Holy Father, who is Christ's representative on earth, by praying that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide him and all those who lead the Catholic Church. \*(excerpted from: rclweb.com; www.cfpeople.org; www.jesus-passion.com; www.magnificat.ca)

## Saint Gregory VII

Feast Day: May 25



### REFLECTION:

**Eight hundred years are passed since St. Gregory died,  
and we see the same conflict renewed before our eyes.**

**Let us learn from him to suffer any persecution  
from the world of the State,  
rather than betray the rights of the Holy See.**

## Saint Gregory VII

\*Pope St. Gregory VII, born Hildebrand of Sovana, in the region in what is now southern Tuscany, in c. 1020, was said to be of humble origins. His birth-name was Hildebrand Bonizi and he was the son of a blacksmith. As a youth he was sent to Rome, and educated at a Roman monastery and the Lateran school, where he became a monk. Among his masters was the erudite Lawrence, archbishop of Amalfi and the future Pope Gregory VI who chose him to be his personal chaplain. After the pope died, Hildebrand entered a monastery to pray and study.

It was a time of great danger for the Church, when the Emperors of Germany were claiming it was their role to elect the successors of Saint Peter, the Vicars of Jesus Christ. They sold ecclesiastic dignities at auction or gave them to unworthy favorites, and many sees were occupied by persons who had obtained them with gold. It was this humble monk who had embraced the Benedictine Rule at the famous monastery of Cluny in France, who was chosen to bring a remedy to the current evils.

Hildebrand served as a strong right arm to the reforming popes. After the death of Alexander II, the demand for him was too great to be resisted. He was consecrated as Gregory VII on June 30, 1073. The Church was badly in need of reform and Pope Gregory saw three major problems: simony, which is the buying and selling of sacred offices and things; the unlawful marriage of the clergy; and lay investiture, which was the practice of kings and emperors appointing bishops and other important Church positions. Pope Gregory wrote official letters explaining that the pope was the bishop of Rome and

the vicar of Christ. In other words, he said, only the pope had the power and the right to appoint bishops. This banning of lay investiture at a Roman synod in 1075, set the stage for a clash with Emperor Henry IV, Emperor of Germany who disagreed with the decision.

Pope Gregory VII immediately called upon the clergy throughout the world to lay down their lives rather than betray the laws of God to the will of princes. Rome was in rebellion due to the ambition of the Cenci, a family of Rome whose history is a series of acts of violence and crimes. Pope Gregory excommunicated them. As a consequence they laid hands on him during the Christmas midnight Mass, wounded him and cast him into prison; the following day the people rescued him.

Gregory was then forced to confront Henry IV who had openly relapsed into simony. Gregory then summoned Henry under the pain of excommunication to appear before a Roman synod to answer charges. Henry's response was to hold his own synod at Worms and have his subservient bishops condemn Gregory. The Pope excommunicated Henry and released his subjects from their allegiance. Saxony rose in arms and Henry's throne quaked when the nobles of Germany gathered at Tribur in October 1076. Gregory's legates persuaded the nobles to give Henry a chance to repent before deposing him. A national diet under the Pope's presidency was summoned at Augsburg, Germany for 1077.

Henry, knowing his unpopularity with many nobles, had no wish to face this assembly. He hurried over the Alps before Gregory could reach Germany. As a suppliant, he appeared