

17. November 2025
THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

**Saint Gregory Thaumaturgus:
Miracles in the service of evangelization**

Today, the traditional calendar commemorates Saint Gregory Thaumaturgus, a saint credited by the Lord with performing extraordinary miracles. In today's meditation, I will recount some of them. We know that the ministry of Our Lord and the apostles was also accompanied by great miracles, manifesting God's loving omnipotence.

While miracles should not occupy a central place in our faith, and we should not seek extraordinary phenomena out of sensationalism, we cannot overlook them—much less deny them. Miracles continue to occur today, as in Lourdes (France), where they are even subjected to scientific investigation.

We can marvel at the many miracles St. Gregory performed in God's name, which validated his message and led many to faith. Indeed, the latter is the greatest miracle that can happen in a person's life: to awaken to true faith and begin to live as a child of God.

Gregory was born into a pagan family at the beginning of the third century. At the age of fourteen, he converted to Christianity. Together with his brother Athenodorus, he studied rhetoric, Latin, and law. They then moved to Caesarea, where they studied natural sciences, philosophy, and biblical exegesis with the renowned Origen. Gregory won the friendship of his teacher and learned from him the practice of virtue and prayer. Encountering Origen proved crucial for Gregory because, while studying pagan books, he realized they could not show him the way to truth.

Upon returning to their homeland, both brothers were ordained bishops. Gregory would have preferred to decline the appointment but was assigned to his hometown of Neocaesarea, which was predominantly pagan. At the time of his consecration, there were only seventeen Christians in the city. The rest lived according to pagan doctrines and worshiped idols. The saint withdrew into solitude to pray and ask God how to instruct his faithful and increase their number.

Then the Virgin Mary appeared to him with the Apostle St. John, and she delegated the latter to instruct Gregory. Gregory could not have had a better teacher. Thus comforted and encouraged, he set to work. From the beginning, great miracles accompanied his ministry. One of the first is recounted as follows:

Before arriving from solitude in the city, he had to spend the night with his traveling companion in a pagan temple, the most famous of all. Satan used to speak through the idols and give various responses. Gregory spent the night in prayer and then blessed the entire building with the sign of the cross, expelling Satan from his dwelling. The next day, when the pagan high priest arrived with his sacrifice, he heard a terrible howling of demons outside the temple, lamenting their expulsion at Gregory's hands and that they could not return. The idolatrous priest sought out the bishop, complained about what he had done, and threatened him. Gregory took the opportunity to teach him how powerful the Christian God was—in whose name he had expelled Satan and all his retinue—and who could also compel them to return. The priest wanted proof. Gregory took a piece of paper, wrote "Enter!" on it, and told him to place it on the altar. Thus, the demons would be forced to return to the temple in the name of Jesus. The priest did so, and it happened just as the holy bishop had predicted. This miracle convinced the pagan, who converted along with his wife and children, and they received holy baptism.

This was the first of many conversions that took place almost daily. The same happened with miracles.

Two brothers fought over a pond full of fish. Each wanted to keep it for himself and became so enraged that they threatened to kill one another. Gregory had managed to calm them down on several occasions. However, when he saw that their mutual anger was reigniting, he prayed to God, and that same night, the pond dried up completely, leaving not a single fish or drop of water. This put an end to all the discord.

It is better not to mock a saint for his gift of performing miracles, as the following story shows:

To mock the saint, a man pretended to be dead by lying down in the road. When Gregory passed by, his friend began to cry falsely and asked him for alms for the burial.

Gregory gave his cloak to the impostor to cover the supposed dead man—who was now truly dead.

One of his most impressive miracles took place during the construction of a church. As the number of Christians increased, Bishop Gregory decided to build a suitable church. They chose a location, but a large mountain in the middle of the site prevented them from building the church to the desired size. What happened then? The saint resorted to prayer, and the unheard-of miracle occurred in the presence of both pagans and Christians: the mountain moved enough to allow the church to be built as planned.

Many other miracles could be recounted. These wonders contributed to the conversion of the pagans. With such signs supporting him, Gregory's preaching was so effective that, when Christian persecution broke out under Emperor Decius in 250, nearly all the inhabitants of the region worshiped Jesus Christ.

As Our Lord said, faith can move mountains—and this literally happened with St. Gregory Thaumaturgus. This is the lesson we must learn from his story: let us ask the Lord for a faith capable of moving mountains!

The phrase that this great saint uttered shortly before his death has become famous in Church history. He asked, "How many infidels remain in the city without converting to Christianity?" They replied, "There are seventeen left," and he exclaimed joyfully, "Thank you, Lord: that was the number of Christians in this city when I came here to preach. At that time, there were only seventeen Christians, and now there are only seventeen pagans. May God preserve them in the true faith and grant all unbelievers throughout the world the light of true faith!"

Amen!

Meditation on today's reading: <https://en.elijamission.net/keeping-fidelity-2/>

