

St. Basil the Great was born at Caesarea of Cappadocia in 330. He was one of ten children of St. Basil the Elder and St. Emmelia. Several of his brothers and sisters are honored among the saints. He attended school in Caesarea, as well as Constantinople and Athens, where he became acquainted with St. Gregory Nazianzen in 352. A little later, he opened a school of oratory in Caesarea and practiced law. Eventually he decided to become a monk and found a monastery in Pontus which he directed for five years. He wrote a famous monastic rule which has proved the most lasting of those in the East. After founding several other monasteries, he was ordained and, in 370, made bishop of Caesaria. In this post until his death in 379, he continued to be a man of vast learning and constant activity, genuine eloquence and immense charity. This earned for him the title of "Great" during his life and Doctor of the Church after his death. Basil was one of the giants of the early Church. He was responsible for the victory of Nicene orthodoxy over Arianism in the Byzantine East, and the denunciation of Arianism at the Council of Constantinople in 381-82 was in large measure due to his efforts. Basil fought simony, aided the victims of drought and famine, strove for a better clergy, insisted on a rigid clerical discipline, fearlessly denounced evil wherever he detected it, and excommunicated those involved in the widespread prostitution traffic in Cappadocia. He was learned, accomplished in statesmanship, a man of great personal holiness, and one of the great orators of Christianity.