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Memorial of St Gregory the Great, pope and doctor of the Church

Date: Wednesday, September 3, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: Colossians 1:1–8
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 52:10–11 | **Response:** Psalm 52:10
Gospel Acclamation: Luke 4:18
Gospel Reading: Luke 4:38–44
Preached at: the Chapel of Emmaus House **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe**.**

Brothers and sisters, good morning. Today we celebrate St Gregory the Great, Pope and Doctor of the Church, whose own missionary zeal helped the Gospel grow from a single seed to a flourishing forest, even in lands where it had never been heard before.

The readings today are about the quiet but unstoppable spread of the Gospel—how it moves from one heart to another, from one household to another, until the Kingdom of God takes root in places and people we never imagined.

In the first reading from the Letter to the Colossians, Paul writes to a young church he has never met, rejoicing that the word of truth, the Gospel, "is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world." But he begins with a quiet phrase that holds deep meaning: "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." This is no mere title; it is a reminder that the Gospel's growth is not human achievement—it is the work of grace. The Gospel does not depend on our strength, but on our surrender.

And yet, God does choose to work through us. Paul speaks of Epaphras, "our beloved fellow servant," who carried the Gospel to Colossae. He is not a famous apostle, not a loud preacher—but a faithful friend. He brought the Gospel not with trumpets but with testimony. He planted it in households. He lived it in love. And Paul rejoices—not just that they believed, but that their belief became love, a love "in the Spirit," a love that bends toward others, especially the forgotten and the poor.

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Our Psalm today puts that same truth in the form of an ancient song: “I am like a growing olive tree in the house of God.” The olive tree is slow to grow, stubborn against the wind, and deep-rooted in poor soil. It does not tower like the cedar, but it endures—year after year, quietly producing oil to heal, to nourish, to give light. In Zimbabwe, where drought and hardship test our patience and hope, this image is instructive. Many have seen crops fail, livestock vanish, and dreams wear thin. Yet faith, like the olive tree, does not need perfect conditions to thrive. It needs deep roots—in God’s mercy, in community, in daily acts of courage.

Catholic Social Teaching reminds us that in such times, the dignity of every person must remain our non-negotiable foundation. This is called the preferential option for the poor—a principle not only of charity, but of justice. The widow, the child, the jobless youth, the refugee who crosses our borders—all must be seen as branches of the same tree, members of the same household.

The Gospel from Luke draws us into the intimacy of Jesus’ ministry. He enters Simon’s house and finds his mother-in-law sick with a fever. And here we see the authority of love: Jesus bends over her, rebukes the illness—not gently, but with command—and she rises. But healing is not the end; it is the beginning. She rises and begins to serve. Her recovery is not private relief—it is restored vocation. That evening, the town crowds the door. He lays His hands on each person. He does not rush. He does not retreat. And when the people try to hold Him there—to keep Him comfortable—He says, “I must proclaim the good news of the Kingdom to the other towns also.” That word—must—is the heartbeat of the Gospel. It sends us forward.

Saint Gregory the Great lived this same pattern. Rome in his day was collapsing—famine, floods, political instability. As Pope, he did not retreat. He opened the Church’s granaries to feed the hungry. He negotiated peace with hostile tribes. He reformed the liturgy so that worship could become both beautiful and accessible. And he sent missionaries, most famously Augustine to England—another Epaphras, planting seeds in foreign soil. Gregory understood the cost of such mission. He once wrote: “To renounce what one has is a minor thing; to renounce what one is, that is asking a lot.” The missionary gives not just their goods, but their life. And that is our deeper calling—to become people through whom Christ can walk, can heal, can speak.

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Let us enter what we might call The Examen of the Healing.

Take a few minutes this week—five minutes of quiet. Begin with gratitude. Where has Christ entered your house, your illness, your story? Ask Him to show you the moment He reached out to lift you. Stay there. Then ask: what service is He inviting me into now? What village lies ahead that I am afraid to go to?

In our Zimbabwe today, "the next village" may be a school without books, a clinic without medicine, or the restless hands of a young man with no job and no purpose. If the Gospel is to grow here as it grew in Colossae, it will not arrive in thunder but in testimony—in lives offered freely, like Epaphras, like Gregory, like the woman who rose to serve.

So we come back to the olive tree. It grows slowly, yes, but it grows. It can survive fire, drought, neglect. And when pruned, it bears more fruit.

Lord, make us like the olive tree, rooted in mercy, resilient in drought, and always ready to offer our oil for the healing of the world.

Through the intercession of St Gregory the Great, may we, like Epaphras and the healed woman, go forth to serve, trusting that your Gospel spreads quietly but inexorably, from heart to heart, from home to village, from nation to neighbour. Amen.

Amen.

Three questions to take into our prayer:

- Where in my life is Christ bending over me now, offering to lift me from fever into service?
- Who is "the next village" in my world—the person or place beyond my comfort that Christ is sending me towards?
- What part of myself—not just what I have—am I being invited to offer for the sake of the Gospel's growth?

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.

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