

August 2010

A.D.:Anno Domini

A Church history supplement for adult Catholics

This Month's Focus: A.D. 100-200



Diocesan Mission Statement

"We the Catholic faithful of the Diocese of Scranton, in union with our Holy Father, the Pope, are called through baptism to share in the mission which Jesus Christ has entrusted to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Priests, deacons, religious and laity, under the leadership of our Bishop, cooperate to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the teaching of the Church to celebrate the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, for the salvation of all, and to witness by grace to the Kingdom of God so as to promote a culture of life, justice and peace."

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Key Events: A.D. 100-200

107: St. Ignatius of Antioch is martyred. Seven of his letters survive to this day.

115: St. Sixtus I is pope.

125: St. Telesphorus succeeds St. Sixtus I as pope. He composes the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* and is martyred in 136.

150: St. Justin Martyr dedicates his *First Apology*—a defense of Christianity in the face of its pagan detractors—to Emperor Antoninus Pius and his two adopted sons, Marcus Aurelius (who would go on to succeed Antoninus as Emperor) and Lucius Verus. This text contains important descriptions of the

celebration of Baptism and the Eucharist.

155: St. Polycarp of Smyrna is martyred. He was a good friend of St. Ignatius of Antioch (a letter from him survives) and met the apostle John during his lifetime. When offered his release if only he would curse Jesus in public, he refused.

161: St. Justin Martyr dedicates his *Second Apology* to the Roman Senate shortly after Marcus Aurelius becomes Emperor. He was soon after arrested and martyred for being a Christian. Told that he would be released if only he would offer sacrifice to the Ro-

man gods, Justin responded, "No one in his right mind gives up piety for impiety."

180: St. Irenaeus, a disciple of St. Polycarp, writes *Against Heresies* (his most famous work), in which he emphasizes the importance of Tradition, Sacred Scripture, and the episcopacy and refutes Gnosticism (a spirituality that sought to downplay the implications of the Incarnation). He was the Bishop of Lyons for 25 years.

200: St. Irenaeus is martyred during the reign of Emperor Septimus Severus.

Key Concept: Apologetics

In 1 Peter 3:15 the Apostle says, "Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you...." We call the defense of what we believe *apologetics* (from the Greek word for "defense-speech"). For obvious reasons, then, this term should not be confused with the concept of asking someone's forgiveness.

Catholic Christian apologetics began to come into its own in the second century AD with St. Justin Martyr's *First* and *Second Apology*, which sought to defend the Christian faith against the false charges of its pagan persecutors (the early Christians were frequently charged with being atheists and cannibals, for instance, due to their belief in one God and the Real Presence in the Eucharist).

Catholic Christian apologetics continues to this day in the work of people such as Scott Hahn, Peter Kreeft, Patrick Madrid, and Karl Keating, to name a few. Everyone is capable of becoming an apologist by growing in their knowledge of the "whats" and "whys" of what we believe. Then we too will be able to "make a defense to anyone who calls [us] to account for the hope in [us]."



St. Ignatius of Antioch heard the apostle St. John preach during his lifetime.

“Where the bishop appears, there let the people be, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.”



St. Ignatius was martyred during the reign of the Emperor Trajan, who ruled from AD 98-117.

Get to Know: St. Ignatius of Antioch (d. A.D. 107)

St. Ignatius of Antioch was the third Bishop of Antioch (the second successor of St. Peter, who led the Christian community there before going to Rome) and heard the apostle St. John during his lifetime. Antioch was also, at that time, the center of missionary outreach to pagans (in addition to Peter and John, St. Paul and St. Barnabas also preached there). Thus, St. Ignatius is an important link to the time of the apostles. For this reason he is usually referred to as an “Apostolic Father” by scholars.

In AD 107, during the reign of Emperor Trajan, St. Ignatius was arrested for being a Christian. A

troop of Roman soldiers marched him from Antioch to Rome where death awaited him in the Colosseum.

While making this journey he was met along the way by Christians from the surrounding communities, who encouraged him and listened to his advice. Ignatius took advantage of their presence to write and distribute seven letters—six to specific Christian communities and one to St. Polycarp of Smyrna. His *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* contains the first known written reference to the Church as the “Catholic Church.”

St. Ignatius’ letters reveal that his

primary concern is to heal divisions within the Church and to imitate Christ to the fullest possible extent. To this end he begs the Christians of Rome not to intercede on his behalf, since he desires to imitate Christ in the giving up of his life for the sake of Truth. He wrote, “I am God’s wheat. I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts so that I may be found the pure bread of Christ. I urge you to entice the wild beasts so that they may become my sepulcher.... Then shall I be truly a disciple of Jesus Christ....”

St. Ignatius was devoured by wild beasts in Rome in AD 107. His feast day is October 17.

In Their Own Words: St. Ignatius’ Letter to the Smyrnaeans

“Let no one be deceived! Even the heavenly powers and the angels in their splendor and the principalities, both ‘visible and invisible’ (Col. 1:16), must either believe in the Blood of Christ, or else face damnation. ‘Let him grasp it who can’ (Mt. 19:12). Let no rank puff up anyone; for faith and love are paramount—the greatest blessings in the world. Observe those who hold erroneous opinions concerning the grace of Jesus Christ who has come to us, and see how they run counter to the mind of God! They concern themselves with neither works of charity, nor widows, nor orphans, nor the distressed, nor those in prison or out of it, nor the hungry or thirsty.

“From Eucharist and prayer they

hold aloof, because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the Flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins, and which the Father in His loving kindness raised from the dead. And so, those who question ‘the gift of God’ (Jn. 4:10) perish in their contentiousness. It would be better for them to have love, so as to share in the resurrection. It is proper, therefore, to avoid associating with such people and not to speak about them either in private or in public, but to study the Prophets attentively and, especially, the Gospel, in which the Passion is revealed to us and the Resurrection shown in its fulfillment. Shun division as the beginning of evil.

“You must all follow the lead of the bishop, as Jesus Christ followed that of the Father; follow the presbytery as you would the Apostles; reverence the deacons as you would God’s commandment. Let no one do anything touching the Church, apart from the bishop. Let that celebration of the Eucharist be considered valid which is held under the bishop or anyone to whom he has committed it. Where the bishop appears, there let the people be, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not permitted without authorization from the bishop either to baptize or hold an agape; but whatever he approves is also pleasing to God. Thus everything you do will be ‘proof against danger and valid’ (Heb. 6:9)” (6-8).