

November 2010

# A.D.:Anno Domini

A Church history supplement for adult Catholics

This Month's Focus: A.D. 400-500



### 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."

### Key Events: A.D. 400-500

**410:** The Visigoths sack Rome under king Alaric.

**430:** St. Augustine dies.

**431:** The third ecumenical council, the Council of Ephesus, is held. The council was called to address the issue of Nestorianism. Nestorius was the Patriarch of Constantinople. He taught that Jesus was a union of two people—one human and one divine—though he himself was neither human or divine. Since he denied the unity of Jesus' human and divine natures in one person, Nestorius taught that you couldn't call Mary the Mother of God (since she was only the mother of

the human body Jesus had). The Council condemned Nestorianism and affirmed the consistent teaching of Scripture and Tradition—Christ is one Person with two natures (human and divine). When the decision of the council was pronounced the people of Ephesus rejoiced and carried the bishops on their shoulders through the city streets.

**445:** Emperor Valentinian III acknowledges papal supremacy.

**451:** The fourth ecumenical council, the Council of Chalcedon, is held. The council was called to primarily address the heresy of Monophysitism, which believed

that Jesus had only one nature—a divine nature. Those who held this position believed that at the Incarnation, Jesus' humanity was absorbed by His divinity like a drop of water in the ocean. The council authoritatively confirmed that Jesus was two natures—human and divine, in one.

**452:** Pope Leo the Great meets Attila the Hun and convinces him not to destroy Rome. It is unknown exactly what was said between the two.

**476:** Official end of the Western Roman Empire (the Eastern portion—Constantinople—doesn't fall until 1453).

### Key Concept: Monasticism

During the fifth century monasticism began to flourish. Monasticism is characterized by a life of prayer and self-denial lived in seclusion from the world and under a fixed "rule" (such as the Rule of St. Benedict) with professed vows. Monastic communities withdraw from the affairs of the world in order to seek God through a life of simplicity and silence. Men and women who

enter the monastic life seek to model themselves on Christ by dedicating themselves to a life of prayer and penance.

There are two types of monastic life. The eremitical, or hermit life, involves individuals withdrawing into loosely organized groups to live an isolated ascetical life. The word "hermit" comes from the Greek words for "desert" or

"lonely." The second and more common form of the monastic life is known as the cenobitical, or common life. This form of monastic life is lived in community.

In the history of monasticism, the most influential individual is St. Benedict, who lived from AD 480-547. His "rule" is used by almost every monastic community because of its moderation.

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**St. Augustine's ordination as both a priest and a bishop was controversial in his day, due to his well-known sinful past.**

*“Instantly, as the sentence ended—by a light, as it were, of security infused into my heart—all the gloom of doubt vanished away.”*



**St. Augustine's conversion would prove to be a pivotal moment in the life of the Church.**

## Get to Know: St. Augustine (A.D. 354-430)

St. Augustine is arguably the most influential theologian in the history of the Church. His early life was a mixture of promise and concern. Born to a pagan father and a Christian mother (St. Monica), Augustine was an excellent student, whose natural abilities enabled him to make a name for himself in the world. At the same time, he was living a life of low morals. For example, he cohabited with a woman for 15 years, with whom he had a son. Augustine, likewise, fell under the influence of the Manichees—a heretical religious sect that believed that life was a constant battle between the forces of darkness

and light.

Around AD 375 Augustine left the Manichees and began an intellectual journey that, with the help of St. Ambrose, led him to embrace Christianity and be baptized in AD 387. Augustine would go on to be ordained a priest in 391 and ordained as bishop in 395.

After his conversion, Augustine wrote many works of a theological and spiritual nature. His two most famous works are *Confessions*, which is his autobiography, and *City of God*, which is a response to pagans who believed Christianity was responsible for the downfall of the Roman Empire.

St. Augustine's writings touched on almost every conceivable issue of Christian faith—the Trinity, grace, the Fall of mankind, Original Sin, repentance, the sacraments, predestination, and atonement. Many of his insights were so profound and well reasoned that they became enshrined as the official position of the Church.

St. Augustine also developed a monastic “rule” that demonstrated his interest in the ascetical life. A number of monastic communities continue to follow his rule today. After his death St. Augustine's legacy continued on, as his was the leading voice in Christian philosophy and theology for 800 years.

## In Their Own Words: St. Augustine *Confessions*

‘I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo, I heard the voice as of a boy or girl, I know not which, coming from a neighboring house, chanting, and oft repeating, “Take up and read; take up and read.” Immediately my countenance was changed, and I began most earnestly to consider whether it was usual for children in any kind of game to sing such words; nor could I remember ever to have heard the like. So, restraining the torrent of my tears, I rose up, interpreting it no other way than as a command to me from Heaven to open the book, and to read the first chapter I should light upon. For I had heard of Antony, that, accidentally coming in while the gospel was being read, he received the admonition as if what was read were addressed to him, “Go and sell that you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come and follow

me” (Mt. 19:21). And by such oracle was he immediately converted unto You. So quickly I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting; for there had I put down the volume of the apostles, when I rose thence. I grasped, opened, and in silence read that paragraph on which my eyes first fell—“Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof” (Rom. 13:13-14). No further would I read, nor did I need; for instantly, as the sentence ended—by a light, as it were, of security infused into my heart—all the gloom of doubt vanished away.

Closing the book, then, and putting either my finger between, or some other mark, I now with a tranquil countenance made it known to Alypius. And he thus

disclosed to me what was wrought in him, which I knew not. He asked to look at what I had read. I showed him; and he looked even further than I had read, and I knew not what followed. This it was, verily, “Him that is weak in the faith, receive” (Rom. 14:1); which he applied to himself, and discovered to me. By this admonition was he strengthened; and by a good resolution and purpose, very much in accord with his character (wherein, for the better, he was always far different from me), without any restless delay he joined me. Thence we go in to my mother. We make it known to her—she rejoices. We relate how it came to pass—she leaps for joy, and triumphs, and blesses You, who art able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think (Eph. 3:20); for she perceived You to have given her more for me than she used to ask by her pitiful and most doleful groanings.’