

October 2010

A.D.:Anno Domini

A Church history supplement for adult Catholics

This Month's Focus: A.D. 300-400



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."

Contact:
Brendan Murphy
Director of Family Life,
Marriage Preparation, &
Adult Faith Formation

(570) 207-2213, ext.
1133
Brendan-Murphy
@dioceseofscranton.org

Key Events: A.D. 300-400

303: Christians endure a great persecution under the Emperors Diocletian and Galerius that lasts until 311.

312: The Battle of Milvian Bridge takes place. Before the battle Constantine, a pagan, saw a vision of the Cross in the sky with the words "in this sign you will conquer." His soldiers put the Cross on their shields and won the battle even though they were outnumbered 4 to 1. Constantine would go on to receive instruction in the Faith. His Edict of Milan (A.D. 313) announced a policy of tolerance towards Christians.

325: First Council of Nicaea

meets and condemns Arianism which taught that there was a time when God the Father existed, but Jesus did not (thus they denied His divinity). The Nicene Creed is formulated at this Council.

330: City of Constantinople is dedicated as the capital of the "New Rome"

337: Emperor Constantine is baptized on his death-bed. That same year St. Julius I, the founder of the Papal Archives, is elected pope.

358: St. Basil the Great founds a Monastic community.

367: St. Athanasius cites the 27

books that will make up the New Testament.

374: St. Ambrose becomes the Bishop of Milan.

380: Emperor Theodosius proclaims Christianity the official religion of the Empire.

381: Council of Constantinople I takes place. The Creed we recite at Mass is completed.

382: St. Jerome begins to translate the Bible into Latin from the original Greek and Hebrew.

395: St. Augustine is ordained Bishop of Hippo.

Key Concept: Ecumenical Council

An ecumenical council is a gathering of all the bishops of the world and is presided over by the pope or his official representative. The term "ecumenical" comes from the Greek word for "the whole inhabited world" (since the bishops come from all over the world). It is based on the example found in Acts 15, where the apostles gathered in Jerusalem to address the question of Gentile converts

and Peter spoke on behalf of the Twelve.

Generally speaking, ecumenical councils are only called when the Church is confronted with major challenges in the realm of faith and morals. The first ecumenical council—the Council of Nicaea I—for instance, was called in A.D. 325 to address the issue of Arianism, which was causing an uproar

among the faithful. The decrees of an ecumenical council, once they are ratified by the pope, are binding on all the Christian faithful.

To date there have been 21 ecumenical councils, with the Second Vatican Council being the most recent. A council's name (Nicaea, Constantinople, Vatican, etc.) is derived from where it is held.



St. Ambrose is often pictured with a bee or beehive, which represents his "honey tongued" speaking ability.

"This is indeed the true flesh of Christ, which was crucified and buried."



St. Ambrose (shown baptizing St. Augustine) wrote *On the Mysteries* for those preparing to enter the Church at the Easter Vigil.

Get to Know: St. Ambrose (A.D. 339-397)

St. Ambrose experienced worldly success at a young age. The son of a government official, he would go on to study law and become the governor of Milan. At the age of 33 things changed quite suddenly for Ambrose. When the bishop of Milan died a fight broke out over who should succeed him.

Ambrose, as governor of the city, begged for peace. In the midst of his discourse the crowd began to roar for him to be their bishop and the visiting bishops obliged. Ambrose objected that he was not yet baptized (he was a catechumen), but when the Emperor confirmed his appointment he threw himself into his new calling.

Upon being installed as bishop, Ambrose sold all of his possessions and gave the money to the poor. He also sought out St. Simplician, who instructed him in Scripture and theology (which he would study in his free time for the remainder of his life).

St. Ambrose was tireless in his endeavors to help all the souls entrusted to him—including the Emperor. In A.D. 390 Ambrose excommunicated the Emperor Theodosius and forced him to do public penance for slaughtering 700 citizens in Thessalonika. Forbidden from entering a church to receive Holy Communion, the Emperor, dressed like any other

penitent, did eight months of penance and public prayer before being reconciled to the Church.

St. Ambrose is also famous for playing a pivotal role in the conversion of St. Augustine who, while still living a worldly life, heard Ambrose preach and was greatly impressed by his personal virtue. Ambrose baptized Augustine at the Easter Vigil in 387.

St. Ambrose died on Easter Saturday in 397 and was one of the four original Doctors of the Church proclaimed by Pope Boniface VIII in 1295 (along with Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory the Great).

In Their Own Words: St. Ambrose's *On the Mysteries*

"If the blessing of a human being had power even to change nature, what do we say of God's action in the consecration itself, in which the very words of the Lord and Savior are effective? If the words of Elijah had power even to bring down fire from heaven, will not the words of Christ have power to change the natures of the elements? You have read that in the creation of the words of Christ have power to change the natures of the elements? You have read that in the creation of the whole world *he spoke and they came to be; he commanded and they were created*. If Christ could by speaking create out of nothing what did not yet exist, can we say that his words are unable to change existing things into something they previously were not? It is no lesser feat to create new natures for things than to change their existing natures. What need is there for argumentation? Let us take what happened in the case of

Christ himself and construct the truth of this mystery from the mystery of the incarnation. Did the birth of the Lord Jesus from Mary come about in the course of nature? If we look at nature we regularly find that conception results from the union of man and women. It is clear then that the conception by the Virgin was above and beyond the course of nature. And this body that we make present is the body born of the Virgin. Why do you expect to find in this case that nature takes its ordinary course in regard to the body of Christ when the Lord himself was born of the Virgin in a manner above and beyond the order of nature? This is indeed the true flesh of Christ, which was crucified and buried. This is then in truth the sacrament of his flesh. The Lord Jesus himself declares: *This is my body*. Before the blessing contained in these words a different thing is named; after the consecration a body is

indicated. He himself speaks of his blood. Before the consecration something else is spoken of; after the consecration blood is designated. And you say: "Amen", that is: "It is true". What the mouth utters, let the mind within acknowledge; what the word says, let the heart ratify. So the Church, in response to grace so great, exhorts her children, exhorts her neighbors, to hasten to these mysteries: *Neighbors, she says, come and eat; brethren, drink and be filled....* Christ is in that sacrament, for it is the body of Christ. It is therefore not bodily food but spiritual. Thus the Apostle too says, speaking of its symbol: *Our fathers ate spiritual food and drank spiritual drink*. For the body of God is spiritual; the body of Christ is that of a divine spirit, for Christ is a spirit. We read: *The spirit before our face is Christ the Lord*. Finally, it is this food that gives strength to our hearts."