

January 2012

A.D.:Anno Domini

A Church history supplement for adult Catholics

This Month's Focus: A.D. 1700-1800



Diocesan Mission Statement

"We, the Catholic community of the Diocese of Scranton, are called through Baptism to imitate the servant leadership of Jesus Christ. In union with our Holy Father, the Pope, we proclaim the Gospel faithfully, celebrate the sacraments joyfully, and boldly promote life, justice, and peace in north-eastern and northcentral Pennsylvania."

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Key Events: A.D. 1700-1800

1701: In England William and Mary's "Act of Settlement" bars Catholics from any political office.

1716: St. Louis de Montfort dies. Beloved by the poor, some denounced him for being too emotional in his preaching and missions. He wrote the classic *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*.

1717: First Grand Masonic Lodge founded in England.

1762: J.J. Rousseau publishes *The Social Contract* which argued that political authority came from the people. His ideas influenced both the French Revolution and

the Bolshevik Revolution.

1772: Denis Diderot publishes *The Encyclopedia*.

1773: The Jesuits are suppressed by Pope Clement XIV. They would eventually be restored by Pope Pius VII 41 years later.

1775: The War of American Independence begins and will last until 1783.

1774: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton is born in New York City. A convert to Catholicism, she founded the Sisters of Charity and is credited with starting the parochial school system. She is the first native-born American citizen to

be named a saint.

1787: St. Alphonsus de Liguori dies. During his life he became famous as a moral theologian and gifted preacher. He founded the Redemptorists, who today serve the Church across the globe.

1787: The Constitution of the United States of America is written

1789: The French Revolution takes place

1792: French Republic established

Key Concept: The Enlightenment

The "Enlightenment" (a name given to the movement by its followers), was an intellectual movement resulting from a whole-hearted enthusiasm for, and faith in, man's use of reason and scientific progress. Most scholars would say that the work of Renee Descartes ("I think, therefore I am") and Sir Francis Bacon paved the way for the movement, which began to flourish in the 18th cen-

ture.

The followers of the Enlightenment had great confidence and faith in the future. They genuinely believed that the study of science and nature would help correct all the problems of society—including poverty, disease, and war.

In the 19th century the work of

Charles Darwin only strengthened the movement, as many came to believe that humanity would continue to evolve and perfect itself, until the world became a veritable paradise. The horrors of World War I and II in the early and mid-20th century brought about the end of any such fantasies, as many recognized that it was precisely scientific advancement that produced bombs and gas houses.



St. Alphonsus' book *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament* went through 40 editions in his lifetime.

Get to Know: St. Alphonsus Ligouri (A.D. 1696-1787)

St. Alphonsus Ligouri was the oldest of seven children, the son of a naval officer. A gifted student, he received a doctorate in both civil and canon law from the University of Naples at the age of 16.

Alphonsus eventually became disillusioned with life in the courtroom. One day while visiting the sick at a local hospital he had a profound mystical experience in which he heard a voice say "Leave the world and give yourself to Me." From that point on he desired to live a life devoted to God, receiving the sacrament of Holy Orders at the age of 30.

As a priest St. Alphonsus quickly

gained a reputation as a compassionate confessor and skilled preacher who made the truths of the faith accessible to all. He once said, "I have never preached a sermon that the poorest old woman in the congregation could not understand." In 1732 he founded the religious congregation known as the Redemptorists. From the outset their primary goal was to imitate Christ while living in community and giving missions for peasants in rural area.

As a theologian St. Alphonsus made his mark primarily in the field of moral theology, where he proposed a vision of Christian morality that found the middle

way between severity and laxity. He also wrote many devotional works that were famous even during his lifetime.

St. Alphonsus had to endure much suffering as well. The Redemptorists had many powerful enemies early in their history; reforms he initiated in his Diocese brought him into conflict with the nobility; members of the Jansenist heresy ceaselessly attacked his writings; he became stricken with arthritis which bent his head into his chest; and he had to endure a "dark night of the soul" late in life. St. Alphonsus was canonized in 1839. A Doctor of the Church, he is the patron of moral theologians.

"...how could He fail to give us along with his Son all good things?"

In Their Own Words: from a homily by St. Alphonsus Ligouri

"All holiness and perfection of soul lies in our love for Jesus Christ our God, who is our Redeemer and our supreme good. It is part of the love of God to acquire and to nurture all the virtues which make a man perfect. Has not God in fact won for himself a claim on all our love? From all eternity he has loved us. And it is in this vein that he speaks to us: "O man, consider carefully that I first loved you. You had not yet appeared in the light of day, nor did the world yet exist, but already I loved you. From all eternity I have loved you." Since God knew that man is enticed by favors, he wished to bind him to his love by means of his gifts: "I want to catch men with the snares, those chains of love in which they allow them-

selves to be entrapped, so that they will love me." And all the gifts which he bestowed on man were given to this end. He gave him a soul, made in his likeness, and endowed with memory, intellect and will; he gave him a body equipped with the senses; it was for him that he created heaven and earth and such an abundance of things. He made all these things out of love for man, so that all creation might serve man, and man in turn might love God out of gratitude for so many gifts. But he did not wish to give us only beautiful creatures; the truth is that to win for himself our love, he went so far as to bestow upon us the fullness of himself. The eternal Father went so far as to give us his only Son. When he saw

that we were all dead through sin and deprived of his grace, what did he do? Compelled, as the Apostle says, by the superabundance of his love for us, he sent his beloved Son to make reparation for us and to call us back to a sinless life. By giving us his Son, whom he did not spare precisely so that he might spare us, he bestowed on us at once every good: grace, love and heaven; for all these goods are certainly inferior to the Son: He who did not spare his own Son, but handed him over for all of us: how could he fail to give us along with his Son all good things?"



There are currently more than 5300 Redemptorists active in 78 countries around the world.