

March 2011

A.D.:Anno Domini

A Church history supplement for adult Catholics

This Month's Focus: A.D. 800-900



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. 800-900

800: Charlemagne is crowned Holy Roman Emperor by Pope St. Leo III. Charlemagne had many faults, but he sincerely strove to be an explicitly Christian ruler. He based many of his civil laws on Canon Law and considered the decisions of Church synods and councils to be binding on his subjects. In an effort to image Christ's humility he had a simple unadorned throne constructed in his palace.

804: Alcuin dies. He was the most influential figure of the Carolingian Renaissance, which was an effort on the part of Charlemagne to reinvigorate the intellectual life of Europe, which had

fallen into decay. Alcuin composed Bible translations, commentaries, liturgical texts, and many other works that pumped new life into the Church and society.

843: The Iconoclasm controversy (see previous issue) ends and the icons are returned to the churches. This event is commemorated as the "Triumph of Orthodoxy."

863: Saints Cyril and Methodius, who were brothers, are commissioned to be missionaries to Slovakia. Before they left they created an alphabet for the Slavs. This alphabet later became the Cyrillic alphabet, named after St. Cyril.

869-70: Council of Constantinople IV, the eighth ecumenical council, takes place. The council settled a dispute over the legitimacy of the Patriarch Photius (who had been installed by the Emperor). Photius planted a lot of the seeds that would lead to the Great Schism between the East and West two centuries later.

871: St. Ludmilla and her husband are baptized. Ludmilla spread the Gospel among the Bohemians. She raised her grandson—St. Wenceslas—after the death of his father and passed the Faith on to him.

Key Concept: *Filioque*

In the Creed we recite every Sunday (the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed) we profess our belief that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father "and the Son" (*Filioque* in Latin). These words were first added to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed at the Third Council of Toledo in 589 as a clarification. The clarification was needed because the Creed could be read by some to

imply that the Spirit comes from the Father *but only through the Son*. Since the Creed was created in an effort to oppose those who denied that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father, it did not focus on explicitly mentioning the Spirit's procession from the Son—which Christians have believed from the beginning. By 800 the *Filioque* was used throughout the empire. It was a point of conten-

tion in the East, however. Constantinople thought it constituted a change to the Creed, instead of a clarification. Even though history shows that the Church Fathers of the East were in agreement with their western counterparts on this issue, the *Filioque* continues to be a point of division between Catholics and the Orthodox.



Saints Cyril and Methodius never let the hardships they faced prevent them from proclaiming the Gospel.

“From now on, I am not the servant of the emperor or of any man on earth, but of almighty God alone.”



Pope Adrian II supported Cyril and Methodius by vouching for their orthodoxy and approving their use of Slavonic in the liturgy.

Get to Know: Saints Cyril (827-869) and Methodius (826-885)

Saints Cyril (whose original name was Constantine) and Methodius were brothers who would become famous for their work among the Slavs. Their family was Greek and had political connections, but the brothers rejected any secular aspirations in order to pursue ordination to the priesthood.

While living in a monastic community the brothers were selected to go and preach the gospel among the Khazars, who lived in the south of Russia. The brothers dutifully learned the language of the people and were successful in converting a large number of them. After this initial success they were chosen to lead mission

activity among the Moravians, who were looking for someone who could speak their language (Slavonic) and celebrate the liturgy in it. The brothers were already fluid in Slavonic, but they also created a written alphabet for the people right before they set off on their journey. This alphabet allowed them to more easily translate the Gospels and liturgical books for the people of the region.

Despite the success of the brothers they encountered animosity and suspicion, particularly among the Germans, who had unsuccessfully tried to evangelize the Moravians. They were particularly criticized for celebrating the liturgy in the

Slavonic language. Pope Adrian II, however, met with the brothers, praised their orthodoxy, and gave them permission to continue to celebrate the liturgy in Slavonic. Cyril died, however, before they left Rome, leaving Methodius to continue their work.

Despite support from the Pope, Methodius continued to be harassed by local authorities. After he was named Archbishop he was forcibly imprisoned for three years before Pope John VIII was able to have him released. Despite these and other hardships, Methodius was extremely successful in his apostolic work among the Moravians up to his death in 885.

In Their Own Words: The Last Days of St. Cyril

At one point during his extended illness, [Constantine/Cyril] experienced a vision of God and began to sing this verse: “My spirit rejoiced and my heart exulted because they told me we shall go into the house of the Lord”. Afterward he remained dressed in the vestments that were to be venerated later, and rejoiced for an entire day, saying: “From now on, I am not the servant of the emperor or of any man on earth, but of almighty God alone. Before, I was dead, now I am alive and I shall live for ever. Amen”. The following day, he assumed the monastic habit and took the religious name Cyril. When the time came for him to set out from this world to the peace of his heavenly homeland, he prayed to God with his hands outstretched and his

eyes filled with tears: “O Lord, my God, you have created the choirs of angels and spiritual powers; you have stretched forth the heavens and established the earth, creating all that exists from nothing. You hear those who obey your will and keep your commands in holy fear. Hear my prayer and protect your faithful people, for you have established me as their unsuitable and unworthy servant. Keep them free from harm and the worldly cunning of those who blaspheme you. Build up your Church and gather all into unity. Make your people known for the unity and profession of their faith. Inspire the hearts of your people with your word and your teaching. You called us to preach the Gospel of your Christ and to encourage them to lives and works pleasing

to you. I now return to you, your people, your gift to me. Direct them with your powerful right hand, and protect them under the shadow of your wings. May all praise and glorify your name, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen”. Once he had exchanged the gift of peace with everyone, he said: “Blessed be God, who did not hand us over to our invisible enemy, but freed us from his snare and delivered us from perdition”. He then fell asleep in the Lord at the age of forty-two. The Patriarch commanded all those in Rome, both the Greeks and Romans, to gather for his funeral. They were to chant over him together and carry candles; they were to celebrate his funeral as if he had been a pope. This they did.