

The Early Church Fathers

The early Church Fathers were bishops, priests, deacons and laymen of the early Catholic Church. Most of them are canonized saints but not all. Towards the end of his life one of the best known Church Fathers, Tertullian, left the Catholic Church and joined a schismatic sect known as the Montanists.

“The Fathers lived and wrote during the first eight centuries of Church history. Some of their writings were composed to instruct and / or to encourage the faithful. Other writings were composed to explain or defend the faith when it was attacked or questioned. In reading the Early Fathers we see a Church with bishops in authority over priests and deacons. We see a church that baptized infants and believed in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. We see a Church that believed in the primacy of Rome, the intercession of the saints in heaven and the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Thus we are lead to the inescapable conclusion that the early Church was the Catholic Church.” From *StayCatholic.com*

It is because of their writings that many Protestants have become Catholic.



Cardinal John Henry Newman, a convert from the Anglican Church wrote:

“To go deep in history is to cease to be a Protestant.”

Here are some of the writings from the early Church Fathers.



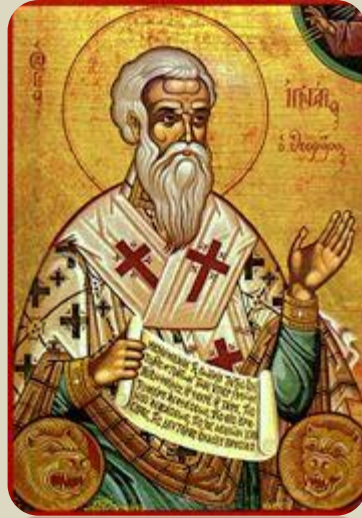
Saint Clement of Rome Died AD 99

Justified by faith

“And we, too, being called by His will in Jesus Christ, are not justified by ourselves. Nor are we justified by our own wisdom, understanding, godliness,, or works that we have done in holiness of heart. **Rather, we are justified by that faith** through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men” *Clement First Epistle Chapter 32*

Justified NOT by faith alone

“Let us do all those things which pertain to holiness, avoiding all evil-speaking, all abominable and impure embraces, together with all drunkenness, seeking after change, all abominable lusts, detestable adultery, and execrable pride. "For God," says [the Scripture], then, to those to whom grace has been given by God. Let us clothe ourselves with concord and humility, ever exercising self-control, standing far off from all whispering and evil-speaking, **being justified by our works**, and not our words.” *Clement of Rome First Epistle*



SAINT IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH DIED AD 108

The Catholic Church

"You must all follow the bishop as Jesus Christ follows the Father, and the presbytery (priests) as you would the Apostles. Reverence the deacons as you would the command of God. Let no one do anything of concern to the Church without the bishop. Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is celebrated by the bishop, or by one whom he appoints (a presbyter/priest). Wherever the bishop appears, let the people be there; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church." *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*

The Eucharist

They (the heretics) abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they do not admit that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, the flesh which suffered for our sins and which the Father, in His graciousness, raised from the dead." *Ignatius to the Church in Smyrna*



SAINT JUSTIN MARTYR AD 100-165

On the Mass

“And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons.” *Dialogue with Trypho*
CHAPTER LXVII

The Eucharist

“And this food is called among us Eucharist of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is so living as Christ has enjoined. For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Savior, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh.” *Dialogue with Trypho* CHAPTER LXVI

Born again in Baptism

“I will also relate the manner in which we dedicated ourselves to God when we had been made new through Christ; lest, if we omit this, we seem to be unfair in the explanation we are making. As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true....Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water.... For Christ also said, Now, that it is impossible for those who have once been born to enter into their mothers' wombs, is manifest to all... there is pronounced over him who chooses to be **born again**..... *CHAPTER LXI -- CHRISTIAN BAPTISM*

Justified by faith and works

“And when a certain man came to Him and said, "Good Master," He answered and said, are not found living as He taught, be understood to be no Christians, even though they profess with the lip the precepts of Christ; for not those who make profession, **but those who do the works, shall be saved**, according to His word: "Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that does the will of My Father which is in heaven. *Dialogue with Trypho CHAPTER XVI*



Saint Irenaeus died AD 202

Mary as the New Eve

“Even though Eve had Adam for a husband, she was still a virgin. ... By disobeying, she became the cause of death for herself and for the whole human race. In the same way, Mary, though she also had a husband, was still a virgin, and by obeying, she became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race. ... The knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by Mary’s obedience. What Eve bound through her unbelief, Mary loosed by her faith.” *Against Heresies* Book 3.22

Born again, regenerated in Baptism

And dipped himself," says [the Scripture], "seven times in Jordan." It was not for nothing that Naaman of old, when suffering from leprosy, was purified upon his being baptized, but it served as an indication to us. For as we are lepers in sin, we are made clean, by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord, from our old transgressions; being spiritually regenerated as new-born babes, even as the Lord has declared: "Except a man be born again through water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. *Irenaeus AD 190 Fragment 34*



ORIGEN AD 185-254

On Purgatory

“If a man departs this life with lighter faults, he is condemned to fire which burns away the lighter materials, and prepares the soul for the kingdom of God, where nothing defiled may enter. For if on the foundation of Christ you have built not only gold and silver and precious stones but also wood and hay and stubble, what do you expect when the soul shall be separated from the body? Would you enter into heaven with your wood and hay

and stubble and thus defile the kingdom of God; or on account of these hindrances would you remain without and receive no reward for your gold and silver and precious stones? Neither is this just. It remains then that you be committed to the fire which will burn the light materials; for our God to those who can comprehend heavenly things is called a cleansing fire. But this fire consumes not the creature, but what the creature has himself built, wood, and hay and stubble. It is manifest that the fire destroys the wood of our transgressions and then returns to us the reward of our great works. (*Patres Graeci*. XIII, col. 445, 448 [A.D. 185-232]).

On baptizing infants

"For this reason, moreover, the Church received from the apostles the tradition of baptizing infants too." Homily on Romans, V:9

Intercession of saints:

“But not the high priest [Christ] alone prays for those who pray sincerely, but also the angels... as also the souls of the saints who have already fallen asleep (*On Prayer II*)

Hippolytus died AD 235

Liturgy in the Mass

“The deacons shall then bring the offering to him; and he, imposing his hand on it, along with all the presbytery, shall give thanks, saying: “The Lord be with you.” And all shall respond, “And with your spirit.”Let us give thanks to the Lord.” “It is right and just.”Remembering, therefore, his death and resurrection, we offer to you the bread and the cup, giving thanks to you, because you have accounted us worthy to stand before you and minister to you. And we pray that you might send your Holy Spirit upon the offering of the holy Church.” *Apostolic Tradition*

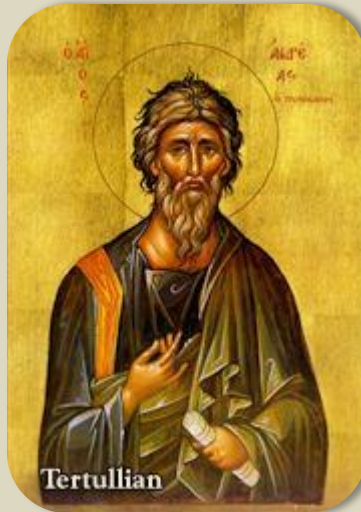


Women cannot be ordained

“When a widow is to be appointed, she is not to be ordained....Hands are not to be imposed upon her, because she does not offer the oblation and she does not conduct the Liturgy. Ordination is for the clergy because of the Liturgy but a widow is appointed for prayer and prayer is the duty of all. *Apostolic Tradition*

Baptism

“Baptize first the children and if they can speak for themselves let them do so. Otherwise, let their parents or other relatives speak for them”. *Apostolic Tradition*



TERTULLIAN AD 160-225

The sign of the cross

"In all our travels and movements, in all our coming in and going out, in putting on our shoes, at the bath, at the table, in lighting our candles, in lying down, in sitting down, whatever employment occupies us, we mark our forehead with the sign of the cross." *The Crown 3*

On Praying for the dead

"We offer **sacrifices for the dead** on their birthday anniversaries " (*The Crown 3:3* [A.D. 211]).

"A woman, after the death of her husband . . . **prays for his soul** and asks that he may, while waiting, find rest; and that he may share in the first resurrection. And each year, on the anniversary of his death, **she offers the sacrifice**" (*Monogamy 10:1-2* [A.D. 216]).

Confession

[Regarding confession, some] flee from this work as being an exposure of themselves, or they put it off from day to day. I presume they are more mindful of modesty than of salvation, like those who contract a disease in the more shameful parts of the body and shun making themselves known to the physicians; and thus they perish along with their own bashfulness
Repentance 10:1



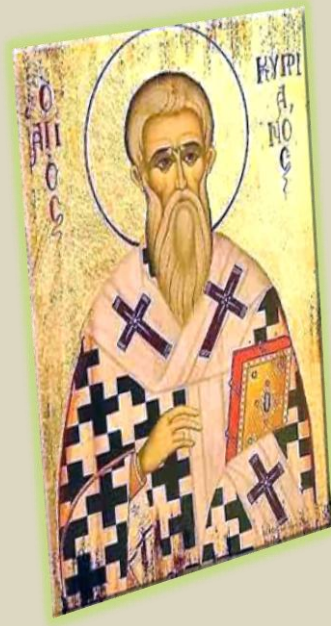
SAINT GREGORY THE WONDER WORKER (AD 213-270)

On Mary as Ark of the Covenant

“Let us chant the melody that has been taught us by the inspired harp of David, and say, ‘Arise, O Lord, into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy sanctuary.’ For the Holy Virgin is in truth an ark, wrought with gold both within and without, that has received the whole treasury of the sanctuary” (*Homily on the Annunciation to the Holy Virgin Mary*).

Trinity

"There is one Holy Spirit, having substance from God, and who is manifested through the Son; image of the Son, perfect of the perfect; life, the cause of living; holy fountain; sanctity, the dispenser of sanctification; in whom is manifested God the Father who is above all and in all, and God the Son who is through all. Perfect Trinity, in glory and eternity and sovereignty neither divided nor estranged" *Confession of Faith*



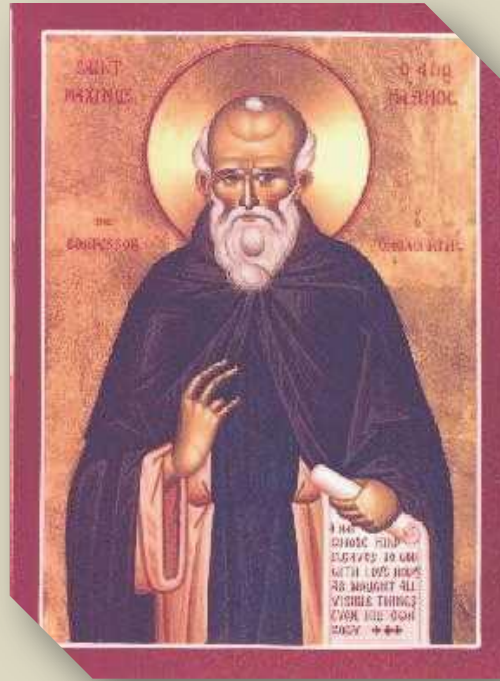
SAINT CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE DIED AD 258

On Purgatory

“It is one thing to stand for pardon, another thing to attain to glory; it is one thing, when cast into prison, not to go out thence until one has paid the uttermost farthing; another thing at once to receive the wages of faith and courage. It is one thing, tortured by long suffering for sins, to be cleansed and long purged by fire; another to have purged all sins by suffering. It is one thing, in fine, to be in suspense till the sentence of God at the day of judgment; another to be at once crowned by the Lord” (*Letters* 51[55]:20 [A.D. 253]).

The Church

The Lord says to Peter: “I say to you,” he says, “that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it” On him [Peter] he builds the Church, and to him he gives the command to feed the sheep, and although he assigns a like power to all the apostles, yet he founded a single chair, and he established by his own authority a source and an intrinsic reason for that unity... If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he deserts the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church? (*The Unity of the Catholic Church* 4, first edition: A.D. 251).



SAINT CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA DIED AD 215

On Apostolic Tradition

“For those are slothful who, having it in their power to provide themselves with proper proofs for the divine Scriptures from the Scriptures themselves, select only what contributes to their own pleasures. And those have a craving for glory who voluntarily evade, by arguments of a diverse sort, the things delivered by the blessed apostles and teachers, which are wedded to inspired words; opposing the divine tradition by human teachings, in order to establish the heresy.” *Stromata Book VII*

Separation not Remarriage

“That Scripture counsels marriage, however, and never allows any release from the union is expressly contained in the law: "You shall not divorce a wife, except for reason of immorality." And it regards as adultery the marriage of a spouse, while the one from whom a separation was made is still alive. "Whoever takes a divorced woman as wife commits adultery," it says: "for if anyone divorces his wife, he debauches her"; that is, he compels her to commit adultery. And not only does he that divorces her become the cause of this, but also he that takes the woman and gives her the opportunity of sinning; for if he did not take her, she would return to her husband.” *Miscellanies 2:23:145:3*



SAINT ATHANASIUS AD 296-373

On Mary as Ark of the Covenant

“O noble Virgin, truly you are greater than any other greatness. For who is your equal in greatness, O dwelling place of God the Word? To whom among all creatures shall I compare you, O Virgin? You are greater than them all O [Ark of the] Covenant, clothed with purity instead of gold! You are the ark in which is found the golden vessel containing the true manna, that is, the flesh in which divinity resides” (*Homily of the Papyrus of Turin*).

Sabbath or Sunday

“The Sabbath was the end of the first creation, the Lord's day was the beginning of the second, in which he renewed and restored the old in the same way as he prescribed that they should formerly observe the Sabbath as a memorial of the end of the first things, so we honor the Lord's day as being the memorial of the new creation.” *On Sabbath and Circumcision 3*

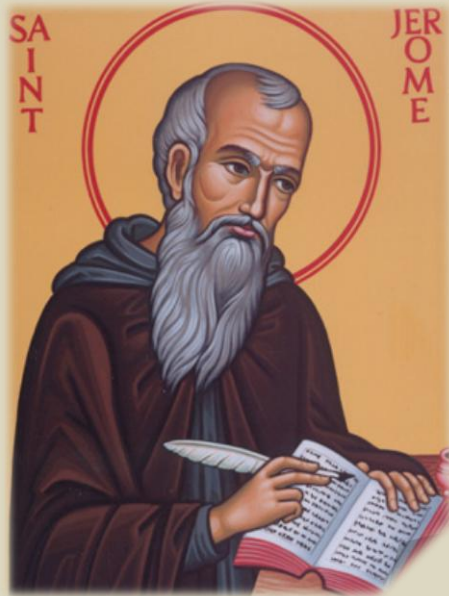


SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM AD 347-407

Confession

“See what great honor the grace of the Spirit has vouchsafed to priests; since by their agency these Rites are celebrated, and others nowise inferior to these both in respect of our dignity and our salvation. For they who inhabit the earth and make their abode there are entrusted with the administration of things which are in Heaven, and have received an authority which God has not given to angels or archangels. For it has not been said to them, 'Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven.' They who rule on earth have indeed authority to bind, but only the body: whereas this binding lays hold of the soul and penetrates the heavens; and what priests do here below God ratifies above, and the Master confirms the sentence of his servants.” *The Priesthood*, 3:5

“Great is the dignity of priests, 'Whose sins you forgive,' He says, 'they are forgiven them' [John 20:23]...The things that are placed in the hands of the priest, it belongs to God alone to give....” (Homilies on John 86:4)



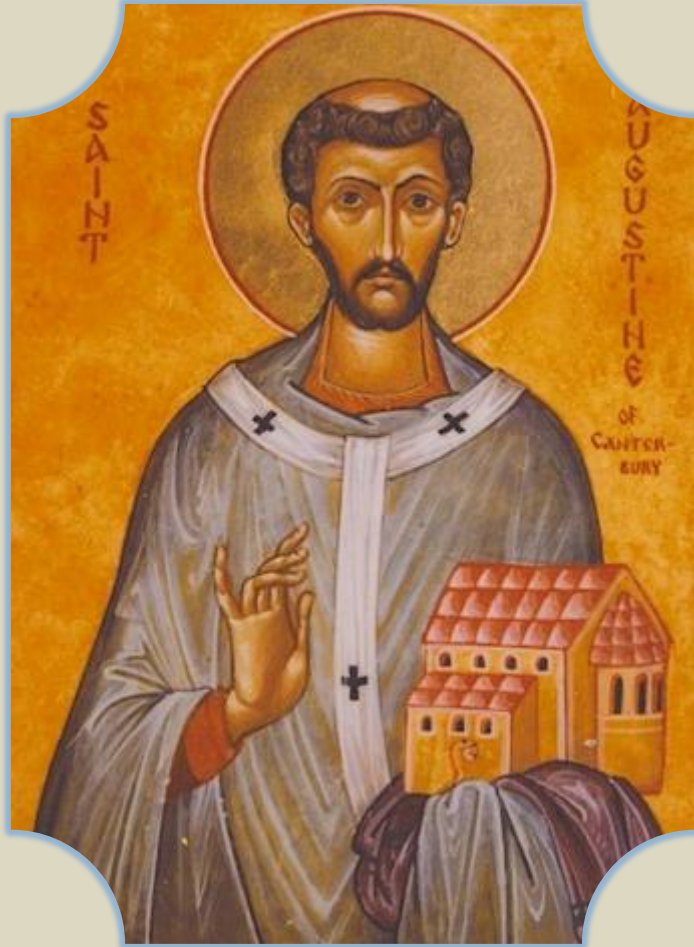
SAINT JEROME AD 347-420

On leaving the Catholic Church

“Heretics bring sentence upon themselves since they by their own choice withdraw from the Church, a withdrawal which, since they are aware of it, constitutes damnation. Between heresy and schism there is this difference: that heresy involves perverse doctrine, while schism separates one from the Church on account of disagreement with the bishop. Nevertheless, there is no schism which does not trump up a heresy to justify its departure from the Church”
(Commentary on Titus 3:10-11)

Separation not remarriage

“Wherever there is fornication and a suspicion of fornication a wife is freely dismissed. Because it is always possible that someone may calumniate the innocent and, for the sake of a second joining in marriage, act in criminal fashion against the first, it is commanded that when the first wife is dismissed a second may not be taken while the first lives” *Commentaries on Matthew 3:19:9*



SAINT AUGUSTINE AD 354-430

Not all sin is equal

“If we resolved to follow the way indicated in the maxim which you mentioned, "All sins are alike," would it not lead us into hopeless exile from that fatherland of truth and blessedness? For could anything more absurd and senseless be said, than that the man who has laughed too rudely, and the man who has furiously set his city on fire, should be judged as having committed equal crimes? This opinion, which is not one of many diverse ways leading to the heavenly dwelling-place, but a perverse way leading inevitably to most fatal error, you have judged it necessary to quote from certain philosophers, not because you concurred in the sentiment, but because it might help your plea for your fellow-citizens -- that we might forgive those whose rage set our church in flames on the same terms as we would forgive those who may have assailed us with some insolent reproach” *Augustine letter 104*

The Catholic Church

“We must hold to the Christian religion and to communication in her Church, which is Catholic and which is called Catholic not only by her own members but even by all her enemies. When heretics or the adherents of schisms talk about her, not among themselves but with strangers, willy-nilly they call her nothing else but Catholic. They will not be understood unless they distinguish her by this name, which the whole world employs in her regard.”(*The True Religion* 7:12, [A.D. 390]).

"The very name of Catholic . . . belongs to this Church alone . . . so much so that, although all heretics want to be called 'catholic,' when a stranger inquires where the Catholic Church meets, none of the heretics would dare to point out his own basilica or house" *Against the Letter of Mani Called 'The Foundation'* 4:5 [397 A.D.].

The Eucharist

“I promised you [new Christians], who have now been baptized, a sermon in which I would explain the sacrament of the Lord's table, which you now look upon and of which you last night were made participants. You ought to know that you have received what you are going to receive, and what you ought to receive daily. That bread which you see on the altar having been sanctified by the word of God is the body of Christ, That chalice, or rather, what is in that chalice, having been sanctified by the word of God, is the blood of Christ “*Sermons* 227

Additional resources:

The Fathers Know Best by Jimmy Akin

Four Witnesses by Rod Bennett

Church Fathers website click [HERE](#)

Next Topic: Is scripture multi-layered? Is there something beyond the literal meaning of scripture? Next we will look at the ancient and apostolic method of reading scripture, Typology.