

Catechism & Theology Course

Session I, Class III

9/26/23

“For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do not have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel.”

- St. Paul, *First Letter to the Corinthians* 4:15

"Let us look at the very tradition, teaching, and faith of the catholic Church from the very beginning, which the Logos gave (*edoken*), the Apostles preached (*ekeryxan*), and the Fathers preserved (*ephylaxan*)."

- Athanasius of Alexandria, *First Letter to Serapion*

“Moreover, in the Catholic (καθολικός (*katholikos*), “according to the whole”; not ‘universal’) Church itself, all possible care must be taken, that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all (*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus*). For that is truly and in the strictest sense Catholic...”

- St. Vincent of Lerins (5th c.)

"...return to the Fathers."

- Among others, attributed to Fr. George Florovsky (1893-1979)

The Church Fathers (& Mothers) / Patrology

Always responding to, and articulating Who Jesus is.

- No specific number; a Living Tradition.
- Early as 2nd century, even from Abraham the patriarch; but continuing to today! 8th century John of Damascus is not the last. Still Photios I of Constantinople 9th c., Symeon the New Theologian 11th c., St. Gregory Palamas 14th c., Nicholas Cabasilas 14th c., etc.

Gospel Period

- Offered by Christ: the *kerygma*, proclamation

Apostolic Tradition

- Apostles
- Early Church Community & councils: Guided by the Holy Spirit
- Biblical interpretation in Truth of the Word of God Vs. Sola Scriptura
- Dogma: Belief/Truth issuing from Christ, & Creeds
- Apologists (Defenders); “written in ink and blood”

c. 30 A.D. – 202

Clement of Rome, Dionysius the Areopagite, Polycarp of Smyrna, Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyon, Hermas, Tatian, Theophilus, Athenagoras, Clement of Alexandria

Third Century

Anthony the Great, Cyprian of Carthage

Patristic Period

4th-5th centuries: Athanasius of Alexandria, Ephraim the Syrian, Basil the Great, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Ambrose of Milan, Cyril of Alexandria, Leo the Great, Hilary of Poitiers, etc.

- Lives, Liturgy, Literature: Illuminate & Articulate, revealed in preaching (big point here), hymnology, iconography, asceticism, worship.
- Period of the Ecumenical Councils

7th Century: John of Damascus, Isaac of Nineveh, Gregory the Great, John Climacus, Maximus the Confessor, etc.

Approaching the Fathers

- Consensus patrum & *Scopos*
- Not read like the Quran or a proof text
- Doctrinal Succession – tradition
- To understand these authors and authorities on the Faith requires following the way of the Fathers.
- Writings have been tested; lives too

The writings of the Church Fathers are not infallible. As a whole, the writings of the Fathers which are built upon the biblical and liturgical foundations of Christian faith and life have great authority within the Orthodox Church and are primary sources for the discovery of the Church's doctrine.

- Ascetical fathers too, asceticism being the exercise and training of the “spiritual athletes”;
- Mystical Fathers, those who concentrated on the way of spiritual communion with God; wrote/lived a life of experiential union with the Divine
- Expressed the phronema (mindset/orientation) of the Church; Mind of the fathers- who explained and defended the true faith
- At different times/places: theological, pastoral, ascetical or mystical