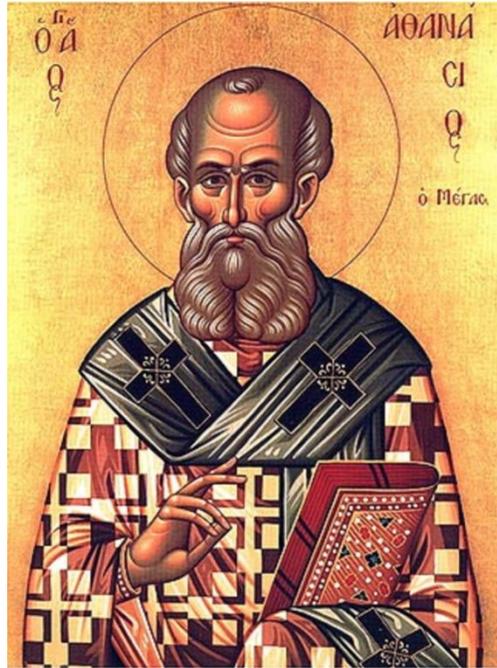


Adult Education – St. Luke’s Church – Sedona, AZ – Class 22
Introduction to the Doctors of the Church – Saint Athanasius
November 24, 2019

Note: for ease of accessing the web sites referenced in this handout, download your own PDF copy here: <http://www.episcopalnet.org/DBS/Sedona/AdultEducation2019.html> and click on the live links in that copy. Questions or comments? Email me at dmc89az@gmail.com. Follow St. Luke’s on Facebook: “St. Luke’s Church Sedona AZ”.



Icon of Saint Athanasius (artist unknown)

(https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/26/Icone_Athanasius_von_Alexandria.jpg)

I. Opening Prayer

Grant, we beseech thee, O Lord, that we remembering with gladness the righteousness of thy Saints, may at all times and in all places feel the effectual succor of their intercession. Through Jesus Christ thy Son our Lord. Who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. **Amen.** (*Secret, Common of a Confessor Bishop, Anglican Missal, p. F23.*)

II. Athanasius of Alexandria – Overview

- Athanasius was born in Alexandria, Egypt sometime in the 290s, probably between 296-298
- Little is known about his parents, but it does seem they were Christians and that Athanasius received a good education
- The story is told that Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, observed several boys playing on the seashore. As he watched, it appeared to them they were acting out some sort of liturgy
- Alexander summoned the boys and inquired of them; they told him that they were being baptized by Athanasius – then about 10 years old

- Astonished and concerned, the Bishop examined Athanasius, and he was so impressed with Athanasius' knowledge that he declared the baptisms to be valid
- It seems certain that Alexander then took Athanasius under his guidance and admitted him to a catechetical school run by Alexander. He was ordained Deacon in 318, during which time he wrote *On the Incarnation*, considered a masterpiece among all branches of Christianity (see Section III)
- As an adult, he is described as being small in stature (his enemies referred to him as a dwarf), with red or auburn hair, dark skin and a hooked nose
- After being consecrated Bishop of Alexandria in 326, Athanasius endured a repeated series of banishments and exiles from 335-363 (see Section V below)
- Despite being attacked ceaselessly by Arius and his followers, Athanasius worked tirelessly for Christian unity, although he wasn't above a little name-calling – referring to his opponents as Ariomaniacs
- After a few years of relative calm and restoration to his See in Alexandria, Athanasius died on May 2, 373
- He was proclaimed a Doctor in 1568 by Pope St. Pius VI, and his Feast Day is May 2.
- He is variously referred to as God's Hammer, the Pillar of the Church, and the Father of Orthodoxy. Accordingly, he is venerated as the patron saint of theologians and the faithful orthodox

III. *On the Incarnation*

- “In this apologetic treatise, St. Athanasius defends the incarnation of Christ against the derision of 4th century non-believers. St Athanasius explains why God chose to approach his fallen people in human form. He states, ‘The death of all was consummated in the Lord's body; yet, because the Word was in it, death and corruption were in the same act utterly abolished.’ St. Athanasius resolves the paradox of the Incarnate by relying heavily on both Scripture and the teachings of the early Church. St. Athanasius also answers several objections to his account, many of which are still raised against Christians today by those outside the Church. *On the Incarnation of the Word* was highly recommended by modern writer and Christian apologist, C.S. Lewis, who suggested that contemporary Christian audiences could benefit from reading more ancient classics. Indeed, though St. Athanasius wrote this text in the 4th century, his style is easy to follow and his concepts are of irreplaceable worth. (<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/athanasius/incarnation>)
- PDF: <http://www.onthewing.org/user/Athanasius%20-%20On%20the%20Incarnation.pdf> (with introduction by C.C. Lewis)
 - Translated by Sister Penelope Lawson, an Anglican nun
 - *From the* Introduction by C.S. Lewis: “For my own part I tend to find the doctrinal books often more helpful in devotion than the devotional books, and I rather suspect that the same experience may await many others. I believe that many who find that ‘nothing happens’ when they sit down, or kneel down, to a book of devotion, would find that the heart sings unbidden while they are working their way through a tough bit of theology with a pipe in their teeth and a pencil in their hand.”
 - Audiobook: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymDMiLuDG-s&t=57s> (2 h 24 min.)

IV. The Council of Nicaea

- In the early 300s, a Libyan presbyter – Arius – had gained a wide following by arguing that Christ was not God; instead, Arius argued, Christ was created by God
- Arius’ reasoning was sophisticated and appealed strongly to the Jewish (and, later, Muslim) concept of a strictly monotheistic God. Arius argued:
 - God alone is eternal
 - God creates all things voluntarily
 - God alone is unbegotten
 - To “beget” means to create (e.g., Christ is the “only-begotten Son” of the father, per John 3:16)
 - God created an independent substance that he used to create all else (i.e., the Logos, the Son of God)
 - The Son is a perfect creature
 - The incarnation involves the unification of the divine Logos with a human body
 - (*See Sources below: Athanasius Contra Mundum (Bruce Gore)*)
- By 325, the “Arian Controversy” had become so heated that Roman Emperor Constantine summoned bishops throughout Christendom – both East and West – to Nicaea to resolve the issue
- Constantine was an unbaptized Christian, but he was no theologian. He simply wanted the controversy to be resolved
- The Council was attended by 318 bishops, and Athanasius attended as assistant to Bishop Alexander of Alexandria
- The story is told that, during the opening of the Council, Constantine bowed his knee to martyrs in attendance and touched their wounds out of veneration for their courage
- Debate – to say the least – was vigorous, and the story is also told that St. Nicholas at one point slapped or punched Arius!
- After two months and eighteen days, the bishops voted 315-3 to approve the Creed of the Council of Nicaea (*see page 6 below*)
- Following the Council, the Arians were purportedly banished, and Arius’ writings were ceremonially burned. But, Arius and his followers continued to preach with great effect and held particular sway with the upper classes
- Arianism seems to have been almost as much of a political force as a theological principle

V. Athanasius *Contra Mundum*

- Meaning: Athanasius Against the World
- Bishop Alexander died not long after the Council of Nicaea, and Athanasius – barely 30 – was consecrated as his successor.
- During the remainder of his life – primarily through the efforts of the Arians – Athanasius was banished or exiled at least five(!) times
 - He was banished to the Rhineland by Constantine from 335-337 after Arius falsely accused Athanasius of threatening to disrupt grain exports from Egypt to Constantinople
 - In 339, Constantine’s son, Constantius II banished Athanasius from 339-346 under a sort of house arrest

- Following a period of reinstatement, he was banished again by Constantius from 356-362. During this time he withdrew to the desert and lived an ascetic lifestyle
 - Julian the Apostate banished him from 362-363
 - Emperor Valens banished Athanasius a fifth time for a short period while Athanasius reportedly stayed just outside of Alexandria until his supporters persuaded Valens to reinstate him
 - During his many exiles, Athanasius kept in touch with his flock in Alexandria through his annual *Festal Letters* which announced the date of Easter each year
 - Athanasius' 39th Festal Letter, written in 367, lists – for the first time – the twenty-seven works which we know as the New Testament
 - While exiled to the desert, Athanasius spent much time with St. Antony, whose influence cannot be underestimated. Athanasius later wrote *The Life of St. Antony*, which did much to spread the ascetic lifestyle throughout Christendom and which greatly influenced St. Ambrose and St. Augustine
 - “Athanasius can serve as a role model for us today...Like Athanasius, we must be ready to stand against that to which the popular heterodoxy or culture is pressuring us to conform. Oftentimes there is a cost for standing up for truth or, in Athanasius's case, standing up for the ‘Truth.’ Over the course of his life, he was exiled on five separate occasions. Toward the end of *The Incarnation*, Athanasius notes, ‘anyone who wishes to understand the mind of the sacred writers must first cleanse his own life, and approach the saints by copying their deeds.’ Let us aspire to copy the deeds of Athanasius and, as Lewis wrote, ‘keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds’ by reading *The Incarnation of the Word of God*.”
- http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/Athanasius_The_Incarnation_of_the_Word_of_God_Full_Article

VI. Closing Prayer

We beseech thee, O Lord, graciously to hear the prayers which we offer unto thee [in remembrance] of thy holy Confessor and Bishop Saint Athanasius: that, like as he was found worthy to do thee faithful service; so by the succor of his merits, we may be delivered from the bonds of the sins which we have committed. Through Jesus Christ thy Son our Lord. Who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. **Amen.** (*Collect for the Feast of St. Athanasius*, Anglican Missal, p. E56.)

Next week: St. Athanasius

VII. Sources

Hardy, E. *St. Athanasius: Egyptian Theologian* (<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Athanasius>)

Catholic Encyclopedia: St. Athanasius (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02035a.htm>)

Rengers, C. *The 35 Doctors of the Church (revised ed.) Kindle Edition*. Charlotte, NC: TAN Books 2014.

Schaff, P. (ed.) *The Complete Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Collection of Early Church Fathers: Cross-Linked to the Bible. Kindle Edition*. Amazon Digital Services 2016.

Saint Athanasius on YouTube

Doctors of the Church: St. Athanasius of Alexandria (Dr. Matthew Bunson)

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Ep3hd_2Epo&list=PLQ9-50qJL_DaOmdq44JD2n1tIIYtIztkn) (28 ½ minutes)

The Lives of the Saints: St. Athanasius of Alexandria (provides a Greek Orthodox perspective)

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqE0fxyHM4s&list=PLQ9-50qJL_DaOmdq44JD2n1tIIYtIztkn&index=8) (23 minutes)

Athanasius Contra Mundum (Bruce Gore)

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oe0V9s5VIIk&list=PLQ9-50qJL_DaOmdq44JD2n1tIIYtIztkn&index=10)

The Creed of the Council of Nicaea – 325 A.D.

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through Whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth, Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down, and became incarnate and became man, and suffered, and rose again on the third day, and ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and dead,

And in the Holy Spirit.

But as for those who say, There was when He was not, and, Before being born He was not, and that He came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is of a different hypostasis or substance, or created, or is subject to alteration or change – these the Catholic and apostolic Church anathematizes.

https://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/creed_of_nicaea_325.htm

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Further reading:

For a comparison of the Nicene Creed of 325 with the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381, see: https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Nicene_Creed#The_original_Nicene_Creed_of_325

The later adoption by the Western church of the filioque clause – “Who proceedeth from the Father **and the Son**” – contributed in large part to the East-West Schism in 1054. For a good article on this controversy, see: https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Filioque_clause

For information on the so-called Athanasian Creed (which was not written by Athanasius), see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athanasian_Creed

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