

11 Peak Moments in Church History

1. Pentecost- The birth of the Church: Before the descent of the Holy Spirit, Pentecost was a Jewish Feast of the harvest. Pentecost is hailed as the beginning of the apostolic mission. When the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples, they were strengthened and inspired to fulfill the Lord's command to: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." [Mt. 28:19-20] When the Holy Spirit came upon them as tongues of fire, the apostles went into the streets proclaiming the Gospel. There were thousands of conversions from the initial proclamation. [Acts chapter 2] The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Blessed Trinity. The Lord refers to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Truth, the *Paraclete* or Advocate, and as the Consoler. The Holy Spirit gives life to the Church & is present in all the sacraments.

2. The Conversion of St Paul: One may wonder why Jesus selected the likes of Paul, as there were certainly devoted followers of Jesus available in those early days of the Church. But Jesus picked and called this Pharisee, known as Saul, saying, "This man is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before Gentiles, kings and Israelites" (Acts 9:15). God selected this man who had a strong hatred of all Jesus stands for, a man who went into the houses of Christians and "dragging out men and women," then "handed them over for imprisonment" (Acts 8:3). This man became God's chosen instrument to spread the message of Jesus across the Middle East and parts of Europe as a missionary, evangelist and mystic. He, who once persecuted the Church, began a pillar of the Church and a martyr in the Imperial City of Rome.

3. The Edict of Milan, The peace of Constantine, 313 AD: The Edict of Milan was the February 313 AD agreement to treat Christians benevolently within the Roman Empire. The Western Roman Emperor Constantine and Licinius, who controlled the Balkans, met in Milan and, among other things, agreed to change policies towards Christians following a rule of toleration. The Edict of Milan gave Christianity a legal status, but did not make Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire, which this took place under Emperor Theodosius I in 380 AD with the Edict of Thessalonica.

4. The Council of Chalcedon, 451 AD: Following heresies regarding the nature of Christ, the council's teaching was an important step in further clarifying the nature of Christ and the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. By affirming that Jesus Christ is one Person who has two natures, the Council of Chalcedon affirmed the truth that Jesus Christ is fully divine and, at the same time, fully human. He is both the Son of God (1 John 5:10) and the Son of Man (Mark 14:21). Jesus, the Word Incarnate, assumed perfect humanity in order to save fallen humanity. Our Savior is both human and divine.

5. The Rule of St. Benedict, 520 AD: The Rule of St. Benedict prescribed a life of liturgical prayer, study, manual labor, and living together in community under a common abbot. The Church has been blessed through Benedictine devotion to the liturgy and through the scholarly studies of many of its members. Benedictine charity always showed concern for the people in the surrounding countryside. Monasteries became centers of learning with libraries and resources. Monks preserved sacred texts by copying manuscripts manually and monks were also active in missionary activity. The Rule of St. Benedict inspired other Orders that live in community.

6. The Founding of the Franciscans, 1200 AD: The Franciscans, as a religious order, were founded in the early 13th century by St. Francis of Assisi. The members of the order strive to cultivate and embody the ideals of St. Francis. The Franciscans actually consist of three orders. The First Order comprises of priests and lay brothers who have sworn to lead a life of prayer, preaching, and penance. The Second Order consists of cloistered nuns who belong to the Order of St. Clare (O.S.C.) and are known as Poor Clares. The Third Order consists of religious and lay men and women who try to emulate Saint Francis' spirit by performing works of teaching, charity, and community service. Congregations of these religious men and women are numerous all

over the Roman Catholic world. The Franciscans are the largest religious order in the Roman Catholic Church. They have contributed six popes to the church.

7. The Reformation begins in Germany, 1517 AD: The Protestant Reformation was a division in Western Christianity initiated by Martin Luther and continued by Huldrych Zwingli, John Calvin and other Protestant Reformers in 16th-century Europe. It is usually considered to have started with the publication of the Ninety-five Theses by Martin Luther in 1517 and eventually led to the division of Western Christianity into different confessions such as: Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Anabaptist, Unitarian, and many others.

8. The Council of Trent, 1545 - 1563 AD, The Counter Reformation: The Council of Trent, the 19th ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church, was held in three parts from 1545 to 1563. Prompted by the Reformation, the Council of Trent was highly important for its sweeping decrees on self-reform and for its dogmatic definitions that clarified virtually every doctrine contested by the Protestants. Despite internal strife and two lengthy interruptions, the council was a key part of the Counter-Reformation and played a vital role in revitalizing the Roman Catholic Church in many parts of Europe. It established norms for seminaries, the catechism and the Mass.

9. The First Vatican Council, 1869 - 1870 AD: First Vatican Council, the 20th ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church (1869–70), convoked by Pope Pius IX to deal with contemporary problems. The pope referred to the rising influence of rationalism, liberalism, and materialism. Life had changed with the industrial revolution. Preparations for the council were directed by a central commission. Of the approximately 1,050 bishops and others who were eligible to participate, about 700 attended the formal opening on Dec. 8, 1869; and a few more eventually participated.

10. The Second Vatican Council, 1962 – 1965: More than 2,100 bishops participated in the Council, which was called by St. Pope John XXIII who died less than one year after the Council was opened. St. Pope Paul VI, who followed him stressed the pastoral nature of the council in his opening address on 29 September 1963 and set out four goals for the council: to define more fully the nature of the Church and the role of the bishop; to renew the Church; to restore unity among all Christians, including seeking pardon for Catholic contributions to separation; and to start a dialogue with the contemporary world.

The Second Vatican Council published a number of important documents including the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, a formal definition of what the Roman Catholic Church is and what its aims are, a document on the Liturgy and on Ecumenism which acknowledged that denominations other than Catholicism (Protestantism, Eastern Orthodoxy, or even non-Christian religions (specifically mentioning Judaism and Islam) have spiritual validity, something that was very controversial amongst traditionalist Catholics at the time.

The Council also emphasized that the Catholic Church's followers should have as great an understanding of Catholic rituals and dogma as possible, chiefly by establishing that the Catholic liturgy should be held in the vernacular (the spoken language in whatever country the Mass is celebrated in) rather than in Latin, and by reaffirming that the Church should continue to provide Bibles in the native tongues of its followers.

11. The Pontificate of St Pope John Paul II, 1978 -2004: Some consider John Paul II a great pope because of his positive influence on the Church and the world. He provided an extraordinarily body of orthodox, articulate, intellectually rigorous teaching in his encyclicals and other documents.

He helped reestablish stability and clarification in the Church after uncertainties arose following Vatican II. He promulgated the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* and the 1990 *Code of Canons for the Eastern Churches*. He promulgated the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in 1992, which was the first catechism of its kind since the *Roman Catechism* in the 1500s. He personally helped bring about the fall of Communism and the collapse of the Iron Curtain. He served as a staunch pro-life, pro-family advocate, and even stood up to the United Nations which promoted some anti-family, anti-child policies on the nations of the world.

His pastoral visits to most areas of the world were inspiring and he spoke of the need for human respect, justice and charity. He was a remarkably holy and a man of deep prayer who set a great example for others.