



## From Deacon Mark Miller's Desk

**It's no secret** that the saints of the church have specific roots and attributes. We have martyrs, religious, virgins, confessors, hermits, and ... doctors. Yes, doctors! Not medical doctors, veterinarians, or scholars with a Ph.D. They are doctors [and saints] who have "made a significant contribution to theology or doctrine through their research, study, or writing" [USCCB]. To be named a 'Doctor of the Church,' the person must have displayed a high degree of sanctity. This is why before being named a doctor, the person must be declared a saint. Only a pope or ecumenical council can proclaim a person a 'Doctor of the Church.' In reality, only popes have made these proclamations.

**The first doctors** were named by Pope Pius V in 1658. The first four doctors in the Western Church were Gregory the Great, Ambrose, Augustine of Hippo, and Jerome. The Eastern church declared four men doctors: John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Athanasius of Alexandria, and Gregory of Nazianzus. There are now 36 'Doctors of the Church'; their number will increase by one when Pope Francis formally declares St. Irenaeus of Lyon as a Doctor of the Church.

**Irenaeus was a** second-century theologian whose work on behalf of the church was instrumental in defending orthodoxy and combating the rise of Gnosticism. He was born between 120 and 140 in the region of Smyrna [modern-day Izmir, Turkey], was educated in the East, and rose to become a bishop in the Greek tradition before making his way to France, where he ministered in the region that took his name [Lyon]. He was well known for guiding and expanding the Christian communities in the south of France.

**While a young man** living in Smyrna, he was privileged to hear the preaching of Polycarp. Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John. Another Doctor of the Church, Jerome, recorded that John ordained Polycarp as the bishop of Smyrna. Because of this connection, Apostle John > Polycarp > Irenaeus, Irenaeus is the last known living connection to the Apostles.

**Writing in his** seminal book *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus established the three pillars of orthodoxy: [1] scripture, [2] tradition handed down from the Apostles, and [3] the teaching of the apostles' successors [the line from the Apostles to the current and future bishops]. He also was the first to assert that there were four – and only four – Gospels. In Irenaeus' time, some Christians accepted only one

Gospel while still others claimed more than four. In addition to insisting on the four canonical Gospels, he was also the first to attribute the Gospel of John to the Apostle John and state that Luke, Paul's companion, wrote the Gospel of Luke. It wouldn't be until 382 [the Council of Rome] when the church affirmed his teaching.

**He possessed an** extensive knowledge of Scripture. He cited the New Testament approximately 1,000 times in his varied writings. About a third of those references were to Paul's letters. The only books he didn't cite were Philemon, 3 John, or Jude. His early education and experience as a priest in the Eastern Rite, coupled with his election as Bishop of Lyon, made him a unique bridge between those two traditions. Pope Francis recognized this unique aspect of his life by announcing Irenaeus' title would be 'Doctor of Unity.' Irenaeus, the Pope explained, "came from the East, exercised his episcopal ministry in the West, and was a great spiritual and theological bridge between Eastern and Western Christians." The Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group's website notes that St. Irenaeus "is revered as a patristic father in both the Eastern and Western churches" and "thus represents an example of the spiritual connection between the churches in East and West."

**Irenaeus maintained that** the bishops in different cities are known as far back as the Apostles. The oral tradition he outlines from the Apostles is a safe guide to the interpretation of Scripture. To support his claim, "he cited the Roman church as an example of the unbroken chain of authority." To him, "The succession of bishops and presbyters was important to establish a chain of custody for orthodoxy." He held that all the Apostolic churches had preserved the same traditions and teachings in many independent streams. It was the unanimous agreement between these many separate streams of transmission that proved the orthodox Faith, current in those churches, to be true."

**He will be joining** 37 Saints from the Western tradition and nine from the East. Among the doctors are 18 bishops, 12 priests, one deacon, three nuns, and once consecrated virgin. Twenty-six of that group were from Europe, seven from Asia, and three from Africa.

The Doctors' works vary greatly in subject and form. Augustine of Hippo was one of the most prolific writers in Christian antiquity and wrote in almost every genre. Some were prominent letter writers and others brilliant homilists. Several doctors produced works of mystical theology; still others wrote biblical commentaries. Three doctors Scholastic philosophers [including Thomas Aquinas].

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