



# Introduction to the Church Fathers

# Challenges

The Church of Christ is facing tremendous challenges in her mission to bring Good News of Salvation to the whole world.

Could you name some of the challenges? Example: Growth is sluggish in many parts of the world.

# Why study the Church Fathers?

St. Augustine: They have been the planters, irrigators, builders, and pastors, feeders of the Church which has been able to grow due to their vigilant and tireless service. In order to grow the Church in our time, it is necessary to know their works and doctrines thoroughly.

# St. John Paul II taught...

“The Church still lives today by the life received from her fathers and on the foundation erected by her first constructors and she is being built today in the joy and sorrow of her journeying and daily toil.”

~Apostolic exhortation Oct 16, 1979 No.2

# Distinguishing Characteristics

- ❖ Pastoral
- ❖ Theological
- ❖ Catechetical
- ❖ Cultural
- ❖ Spiritual and social




# Where do we go from here? Tonight!

Our Lord's command seems hard and heavy, that anyone who wants to follow him must renounce himself. But no command is hard and heavy when it comes from one who helps to carry it out. That other saying of his is true: "My yoke is easy and my burden light." Whatever is hard in his commands is made easy by love.

~St. Augustine's commentary on this Sunday Gospel





What will we  
cover?

# What we will learn:

- ❖ High level overview
- ❖ Provide context to reading Scripture
- ❖ Increase understanding of history and development of doctrine
- ❖ Prepare us for evangelization
- ❖ Jumping off point to individual study



# What we won't cover:

- ❖ All of the readings
- ❖ Everyone
- ❖ All of the heresies and debates

# What is a Father?

"Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul" -Acts 4:32

- ❖ Heirs to the Apostles
- ❖ Protectors of the early family
- ❖ Some are saints – some are not

# The Four 'Marks'

St. Vincent of Lerins (5th cent.)

## 1. Antiquity

- Mid 1st cent – mid 8th cent w/ the death of St. John of Damascus
- Some learned from Apostles
- Formed and shaped the Church and her doctrine

# The Four 'Marks'

## 2. Orthodox Doctrine

- Carried on the Apostolic teaching
- Scripture and oral Tradition
- The understanding of 'orthodox' changed over time

# The Four 'Marks'

3. Holiness of life – Perception and legacy of the time

4. Church Approval

- Church Father vs. “Ecclesiastical Writers”
- Not everything a father wrote is official ‘teaching’

# Who were They?

~ 100 or so

Greek (Eastern) and Latin (Western)

Famous:

~Augustine of Hippo

~Ignatius of Antioch

~Ambrose of Milan

Converted Jews and pagans,  
multi-generational Christians

Not Quite Famous:

~St. Fulgence of Ruspe,

~St. Melito of Sardis,

~Minucius Felix

# What did they write about?

- ❖ Unity and Church Structure
- ❖ Apologetics
- ❖ Apocryphal/Literature
- ❖ Martyrdoms
- ❖ Heresies

- ✓ Canon of the Bible
- ✓ Order of the Mass
- ✓ Creeds and Councils

Some writings are lost and only referenced in extant writings from other authors...

# What did they write about?

1<sup>st</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> - Defense against pagan and Jewish rumors and accusations

4<sup>th</sup> Century - Mystery of the Trinity

5<sup>th</sup> Century+ - Who is Jesus?

❖ Apostolic era (Patristic Era)

❖ Ante-Nicene

❖ Nicene

❖ Post-Nicene





# Next Week....

Life in the Early Church

Patristic Fathers

