

History of the Catholic Church

Chapter 1: The Beginning

Power of Story: Pages 13 - 16

- **Power of Story:** People are captivated by stories. Give a lecture, and people tune out. But tell an engaging story and people are captivated. Our Catholic faith tells a powerful story: where we've been, who we are, and where we are going.
- **Family history:** Studying Church history is learning our story; to know your roots
 - **Attic:** Go up in the attic and look through treasures of grandparents/parents
 - **Key:** By studying Church history, we go up into the attic of great treasures.
- **Nehemiah 8:** Returning from exile, Ezra (priest) reads from Book of Moses from daybreak to midday. The people begin weeping. Ezra gives them back their story.
- **Luke 15:** Prodigal son takes treasures and leaves; he doesn't know identity or future
- **Key:** Not knowing our past, present doesn't make sense and can't shape our future.
 - **Page 16:** "Studying the history of the Church – our own family history – should help us grow in our devotion and love of the Holy Spirit, who guides, guards, and animates the Church." God always guides His Church!

What is History? Pages 16 - 19

- **Greeks:** History repeats itself – never-ending cycle; no beginning, end, or purpose
- **Modern:** Views the past with skepticism or disdain, overemphasis on the present
- **Catholic:** History is linear – has a beginning (Creation) and an end (Return of Christ bringing a new heaven and new earth); Christ is the center of history (Incarnation, death, Resurrection); Jesus is the center, Lord, and Master of history; He is intimately involved in history; History is the story of God interacting with His people
- **Key:** Church history is the study of how God brings about His kingdom (new creation) in the midst of a fallen world. The Church is where God reconciles humanity with himself and with one another (e.g., Noah's ark – God's good order).
- **Salvation History:** The unfolding of God's plan for his people, their sanctification, and their eventual union with him in heaven (17).

Importance of Learning History: Pages 19 - 23

- We study Church history for the four following reasons:
 1. **To make sense of our world:** See modern-day problems more clearly and helps shape our future decisions to benefit the Church and the world
 2. **To know Christ better:** Grow in deeper love for Jesus and His Church
 3. **To defend the Faith and the Church:** Much modern history is taught from an English Protestant perspective; balanced view of truth (good and bad)
 4. **To know who we are:** Sense of a Catholic identity – understand how the Catholic Church has helped shape and influence Western civilization (19)
- **Key:** Our study of Church history gives an opportunity to learn together, reflect together, and discuss the blessings and challenges of building up Christ's Church.

The Beginning: AD 33 - 99

- **Mustard Seed:** The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants. It becomes a large bush, and the 'birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches (Matt 13:31-32). The Church begins very small – band of 12 disciples.
- **Acts of the Apostles:** Tells the story of the beginnings of the Church
- **Pentecost:** With the Tower of Babel, God scatters and confuses language, but with Pentecost, He brings people together with a shared language of the Gospel (3,000).
- **Martyrdom of Stephen:** Early deacon presents salvation history (tells them their story), prays for his persecutors, and is stoned to death (Acts 7).
- **Martyrdom of James:** Herod Agrippa (AD 41 – 44) beheads James, imprisons Peter
- **Key:** In every age, the Church has been persecuted; sometimes it will suffer internally from worldliness and sometimes it will be persecuted from the outside
- **Spread of Gospel:** The Apostles spread the gospel throughout Asia Minor, Greece, Ukraine, Arabia, Armenia, and India.
- **Key:** They endured hardships and even death out of their love for Christ. They spread not an idea or a philosophy, but the Person of Jesus Christ.

The Greatest Missionary: St. Paul

- **St. Paul:** One of the greatest missionaries in the history of the Church
- Paul's missionary activity produced three vital effects in the early Church:
 1. His tireless journeying spread the Faith through the known Roman empire in centers of political and economic importance; the Faith spreads easily along the Roman roads and waterways of commerce and business;
 2. Mentored new converts and leaders to build up Christian communities – brought a structure to the Faith he spread (hierarchical foundation);
 3. Kept in contact with nascent communities through writing letters; he wrote letters – 13 epistles make up bulk of the New Testament (30 – 32).
- **Key:** "We cannot overstate the importance of Paul to the history of the Church. The Apostle to the Gentiles was the greatest of converts, the greatest of disciples, greatest of missionaries [and] the follower in whom more than any other is mirrored in the Master" (32).

Council of Jerusalem: Acts 15 (AD 49)

- **Gentile Converts:** The early Church wrestled with the important question of whether Gentiles converts had to be circumcised and follow dietary laws.
- **St. Paul:** We enter God's family not by circumcision, but by faith in Jesus Christ.
- **Debate:** After much debate, Peter settles the matter by referring to Cornelius and Gentiles who received the Holy Spirit without circumcision (Acts 10). Gentiles do not need to be circumcised but enter God's family through faith (baptism).
- **Key:** The Council of Jerusalem set the procedure for how disagreements would be settled by the Church's leadership: collegiality with Petrine leadership (33).
- **Next Time:** The small family of God will come into contact with the Roman Empire.