

QUOTE: Peter Claver understood that concrete service like the distributing of medicine, food or brandy to his brothers and sisters could be as effective a communication of the word of God as *verbal* preaching. As Peter Claver often said, “We must speak to them with our hands before we try to speak to them with our lips.”

SEPTEMBER 12 ⊕ OPTIONAL

Most Holy Name of the Blessed Virgin Mary

This feast is a counterpart to the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus (January 3); both have the possibility of uniting people easily divided on other matters.

The feast of the Most Holy Name of Mary began in Spain in 1513 and in 1671 was extended to all of Spain and the Kingdom of Naples. In 1683, John Sobieski, king of Poland, brought an army to the outskirts of Vienna to stop the advance of Muslim armies loyal to Mohammed IV in Constantinople. After Sobieski entrusted himself to the Blessed Virgin Mary, he and his soldiers thoroughly defeated the Muslims. Pope Innocent XI extended this feast to the entire church.

COMMENT: Mary always points us to God, reminding us of God’s infinite goodness. She helps us to open our hearts to God’s ways, wherever those may lead us. Honored under the title “Queen of Peace,” Mary encourages us to cooperate with Jesus in building a peace based on justice, a peace that respects the fundamental human rights (including religious rights) of all peoples.

QUOTE: “Lord our God, when your Son was dying on the altar of the cross, he gave us as our mother the one he had chosen to be his own mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary; grant that we who call upon the

holy name of Mary, our mother, with confidence in her protection may receive strength and comfort in all our needs” (Marian Sacramentary, Mass for the Holy Name of the Blessed Virgin Mary).

SEPTEMBER 13 ⊕ MEMORIAL

John Chrysostom

Bishop and Doctor (d. 407)

The ambiguity and intrigue surrounding John, the great preacher (his name means “golden-mouthed”) from Antioch, are characteristic of the life of any great man in a capital city. Brought to Constantinople after a dozen years of priestly service in Syria, John found himself the reluctant victim of an imperial ruse to make him bishop in the greatest city of the empire. Ascetic, unimposing but dignified, and troubled by stomach ailments from his desert days as a monk, John began his episcopate under the cloud of imperial politics.

If his body was weak, his tongue was powerful. The content of his sermons and his exegesis of Scripture were never without a point. Sometimes the point stung the high and mighty. Some sermons lasted up to two hours.

His lifestyle at the imperial court was not appreciated by some courtiers. He offered a modest table to episcopal sycophants hanging around for imperial and ecclesiastical favors. John deplored the court protocol that accorded him precedence before the highest state officials. He would not be a kept man.

His zeal led him to decisive action. Bishops who bribed their way into their office were deposed. Many of his sermons called for concrete steps to share wealth with the poor. The rich did not appreciate hearing from John that private property existed because of Adam’s fall from grace—any more than married men liked to hear that they were bound to marital fidelity just as much as their wives. When it came to justice and charity, John acknowledged no double standards.

Aloof, energetic, outspoken, especially when he became excited in the pulpit, John was a sure target for criticism and personal trouble. He was accused of gorging himself secretly on rich wines and fine foods. His faithfulness as spiritual director to the rich widow, Olympia, provoked much gossip attempting to prove him a hypocrite where wealth and chastity were concerned. His action taken against unworthy bishops in Asia Minor was viewed by other ecclesiastics as a greedy, uncanonical extension of his authority.

Two prominent personages who personally undertook to discredit John were Theophilus, archbishop of Alexandria, and Empress Eudoxia. Theophilus feared the growth in importance of the bishop of Constantinople and took occasion to charge John with fostering heresy. Theophilus and other angered bishops were supported by Eudoxia. The empress resented John's sermons contrasting gospel values with the excesses of imperial court life. Whether intended or not, sermons mentioning the lurid Jezebel and impious Herodias were associated with the empress, who finally did manage to have John exiled. He died in exile in 407.

COMMENT: John Chrysostom's preaching, by word and example, exemplifies the role of the prophet to comfort the disturbed and to disturb the comfortable. For his honesty and courage he paid the price of a turbulent ministry as bishop, personal vilification and exile.

QUOTE: Bishops "should set forth the ways by which are to be solved very grave questions concerning the ownership, increase, and just distribution of material goods, peace and war, and brotherly relations among all people" (*Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops*, 12).

Triumph of the Cross

Early in the fourth century, Saint Helena, mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine, went to Jerusalem in search of the holy places of Christ's life. She razed the Temple of Aphrodite, which tradition held was built over the Savior's tomb, and her son built the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher over it. During the excavation, workers found three crosses. Legend has it that the one on which Jesus died was identified when its touch healed a dying woman.

The cross immediately became an object of veneration. At a Good Friday celebration in Jerusalem toward the end of the fourth century, according to an eyewitness, the wood was taken out of its silver container and placed on a table together with the inscription Pilate ordered placed above Jesus' head. Then "all the people pass through one by one; all of them bow down, touching the cross and the inscription, first with their foreheads, then with their eyes; and, after kissing the cross, they move on."

To this day the Eastern Churches, Catholic and Orthodox alike, celebrate the Exaltation of the Holy Cross on the September anniversary of the basilica's dedication. The feast entered the Western calendar in the seventh century after Emperor Heraclius recovered it from the Persians, who had carried it off in 614, fifteen years earlier. According to the story, the emperor intended to carry the cross back into Jerusalem himself, but was unable to move forward until he put off his imperial garb and became a barefoot pilgrim.

COMMENT: The cross is today the universal image of Christian belief. Countless generations of artists have turned it into a thing of beauty to be carried in procession or worn as jewelry. To the eyes of the first Christians, it had no beauty. It stood outside too many city walls, decorated only with decaying corpses, as a threat to anyone who defied Rome's authority—including the heretic sect which refused sacrifice to Roman gods. Although believers spoke of the

cross as the instrument of salvation, it seldom appeared in Christian art unless disguised as an anchor or the chi-rho until after Constantine's Edict of Toleration.

QUOTE: "How splendid the cross of Christ! It brings life, not death; light, not darkness; Paradise, not its loss. It is the wood on which the Lord, like a great warrior, was wounded in hands and feet and side, but healed thereby our wounds. A tree has destroyed us, a tree now brought us life" (Theodore of Studios).

SEPTEMBER 15 ☉ MEMORIAL

Our Lady of Sorrows

For a while there were two feasts in honor of the Sorrowful Mother: one going back to the fifteenth century, the other to the seventeenth century. For a while both were celebrated by the universal church: one on the Friday before Palm Sunday, the other in September.

The principal biblical references to Mary's sorrows are in Luke 2:35 and John 19:26–27. The Lucan passage is Simeon's prediction about a sword piercing Mary's soul; the Johannine passage relates Jesus' words to Mary and to the beloved disciple.

Many early church writers interpret the sword as Mary's sorrows, especially as she saw Jesus die on the cross. Thus, the two passages are brought together as prediction and fulfillment.

Saint Ambrose in particular sees Mary as a sorrowful yet powerful figure at the cross. Mary stood fearlessly beneath the cross while others fled. Mary looked on her Son's wounds with pity, but saw in them the salvation of the world. As Jesus hung on the cross, Mary did not fear to be killed but offered herself to her persecutors.

COMMENT: John's account of Jesus' death is highly symbolic. When Jesus gives the beloved disciple to Mary, we are invited to appreciate Mary's role in the church: She symbolizes the church; the

beloved disciple represents all believers. As Mary mothered Jesus, she is now mother to all his followers. Furthermore, as Jesus died, he handed over his Spirit. Mary and the Spirit cooperate in begetting new children of God—almost an echo of Luke’s account of Jesus’ conception. Christians can trust that they will continue to experience the caring presence of Mary and Jesus’ Spirit throughout their lives and throughout history.

QUOTE “At the cross her station keeping,
 Stood the mournful mother weeping,
 Close to Jesus to the last.
 Through her heart, his sorrow sharing,
 All his bitter anguish bearing,
 Now at length the sword has passed”
 (*Stabat Mater*).

SEPTEMBER 16 ⊕ MEMORIAL

Cornelius and Cyprian

Pope and Martyr; Bishop and Martyr

Cornelius (d. 253). There was no pope for fourteen months after the martyrdom of Saint Fabian because of the intensity of the persecution of the church. During the interval, the church was governed by a college of priests. Saint Cyprian, a friend of Cornelius, writes that Cornelius was elected pope “by the judgment of God and of Christ, by the testimony of most of the clergy, by the vote of the people, with the consent of aged priests and of good men.”

The greatest problem of Cornelius’s two-year term as pope involved the Sacrament of Penance and centered on the readmission of Christians who had apostatized during the time of persecution. Two extremes were finally both condemned. Cyprian, primate of Africa, appealed to the pope to confirm his stand that the relapsed could be reconciled only by the decision of the bishop (against the very indulgent practice of Novatus).

In Rome, however, Cornelius met with the opposite view. After his election, a priest named Novatian (one of those who had governed the church) had himself consecrated a rival bishop of Rome—the first antipope. He denied that the church had any power to reconcile not only the apostates, but also those guilty of murder, adultery, fornication or second marriage! Cornelius had the support of most of the church (especially of Cyprian of Africa) in condemning Novatianism, though the sect persisted for several centuries. Cornelius held a synod at Rome in 251 and ordered the “relapsed” to be restored to the church with the usual “medicines of repentance.”

The friendship of Cornelius and Cyprian was strained for a time when one of Cyprian’s rivals made accusations about him. But the problem was cleared up.

A document from Cornelius shows the extent of organization in the Church of Rome in the mid-third century: forty-six priests, seven deacons, seven subdeacons. It is estimated that the number of Christians totaled about fifty thousand.

Cornelius died as a result of the hardships of his exile in what is now Civitavecchia (near Rome).

COMMENT: It seems fairly true to say that almost every possible false doctrine has been proposed at some time or other in the history of the church. The third century saw the resolution of a problem we scarcely consider—the penance to be done before reconciliation with the church after mortal sin. Men like Cornelius and Cyprian were God’s instruments in helping the church find a prudent path between extremes of rigorism and laxity. They are part of the church’s ever-living stream of tradition, ensuring the continuance of what was begun by Christ, and evaluating new experiences through the wisdom and experience of those who have gone before (Rolinier).

QUOTE: “There is one God and one Christ and but one episcopal chair, originally founded on Peter, by the Lord’s authority. There cannot, therefore, be set up another altar or another priesthood.

Whatever any man in his rage or rashness shall appoint, in defiance of the divine institution, must be a spurious, profane and sacrilegious ordinance” (Saint Cyprian, *The Unity of the Catholic Church*).

Cyprian (d. 258). Cyprian is important in the development of Christian thought and practice in the third century, especially in northern Africa.

Highly educated, a famous orator, he was converted to Christianity as an adult. He distributed his goods to the poor, and amazed his fellow citizens by making a vow of chastity before his Baptism. Within two years he had been ordained priest and was chosen, against his will, as bishop of Carthage (near modern Tunis).

Cyprian complained that the peace which the church enjoyed had weakened the spirit of many Christians and had opened the door to converts who did not have the true spirit of faith. When the Decian persecution began, many Christians easily abandoned the church. It was their reinstatement that caused the great controversies of the third century, and helped the church progress in its understanding of the Sacrament of Penance. Novatus, a priest who had opposed Cyprian’s election, set himself up in Cyprian’s absence (he had fled to a hiding place from which to direct the church bringing criticism on himself) and received back all apostates, without imposing any canonical penance. Ultimately he was condemned. Cyprian held a middle course, holding that those who had actually sacrificed to idols could receive Holy Communion only at death, whereas those who had only bought certificates saying they had sacrificed could be admitted after a more or less lengthy period of penance. Even this was relaxed during a new persecution.

During a plague in Carthage, Cyprian urged Christians to help everyone, including their enemies and persecutors.

A friend of Pope Cornelius, he opposed the following pope, Stephen. He and the other African bishops would not recognize the validity of Baptism conferred by heretics and schismatics. This was not the universal view of the church, but Cyprian was not intimidated even by Stephen’s threat of excommunication.

He was exiled by the emperor and then recalled for trial. He refused to leave the city, insisting that his people should have the witness of his martyrdom.

Cyprian was a mixture of kindness and courage, vigor and steadiness. He was cheerful and serious, so that people did not know whether to love or respect him more. He waxed warm during the baptismal controversy; his feelings must have concerned him, for it was at this time that he wrote his treatise on patience. Saint Augustine remarks that Cyprian atoned for his anger by his glorious martyrdom.

COMMENT: The controversies about Baptism and Penance in the third century remind us that the early church had no ready-made solutions from the Holy Spirit. The leaders and members of the church of that day had to move painfully through the best series of judgments they could make, in an attempt to follow the entire teaching of Christ and not be diverted by exaggerations to right or left.

QUOTE: “You cannot have God for your Father if you do not have the Church for your mother.... God is one and Christ is one, and his Church is one; one is the faith, and one is the people cemented together by harmony into the strong unity of a body...if we are the heirs of Christ, let us abide in the peace of Christ; if we are the sons of God, let us be lovers of peace” (Saint Cyprian, *The Unity of the Catholic Church*).

SEPTEMBER 17 ⊕ OPTIONAL

Robert Bellarmine

Bishop and Doctor (1542–1621)

When Robert Bellarmine was ordained in 1570, the study of church history and the Fathers of the Church was in a sad state of neglect. A promising scholar from his youth in Tuscany, he devoted his energy to these two subjects, as well as to Scripture in order to systematize church doctrine against the attacks of the Reformers. He was the first Jesuit to become a professor at Louvain (Belgium).

His most famous work is his three-volume *Disputations on the Controversies of the Christian Faith*. Particularly noteworthy are the sections on the temporal power of the pope and the role of the laity. He incurred the anger of both England and France by showing the divine-right-of-kings theory untenable. He developed the theory of the indirect power of the pope in temporal affairs. Although he was defending the pope against the Scottish philosopher Barclay, he also incurred the ire of Pope Sixtus V.

Bellarmino was made a cardinal by Pope Clement VIII on the grounds that “he had not his equal for learning.” While he occupied apartments in the Vatican, Bellarmine relaxed none of his former austerities. He limited his household expenses to what was barely essential, eating only the food available to the poor. He was known to have ransomed a soldier who had deserted from the army and Bellarmine used the hangings of his rooms to clothe poor people, remarking, “The walls won’t catch cold.”

Among many activities, he became theologian to Pope Clement VIII, preparing two catechisms which have had great influence in the church.

The last major controversy of Bellarmine’s life came in 1616 when he had to admonish his friend Galileo, whom he admired. Bellarmine delivered the admonition on behalf of the Holy Office, which had decided that the heliocentric theory of Copernicus was contrary to Scripture. The admonition amounted to a caution against putting forward—other than as a hypothesis—theories not yet fully proved. It was an example of the fact that saints are not infallible.

Bellarmino died on September 17, 1621. The process for his canonization was begun in 1627 but was delayed until 1930 for political reasons, stemming from his writings. In 1931, Pius XI declared him a doctor of the church.

COMMENT: The renewal in the church sought by Vatican II was difficult for many Catholics. In the course of change, many felt a lack of firm guidance from those in authority. They yearned for the stone columns of orthodoxy and an iron command with clearly defined lines of authority.