



Anglican Catholic Church



Diocese of the United Kingdom

Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

August 2021

My dear friends and colleagues,

This month sees the annual commemoration of the life and ministry of the simple parish priest who was to become the patron saint of *all* parish priests. I am referring to Saint John Vianney.

He was the son of a poor French farmer, receiving no education at all until he was 20. He encountered numerous difficulties before training as a priest, being turned down countless times for seminary and twice failing his exams. He was finally ordained at 30, but was considered utterly incompetent! And so he was sent to work under the direction of the Abbé Balley in Écully, France. In 1818, shortly after the death of Fr Balley, Vianney was appointed parish priest of the parish of Ars, a tiny French village with reputedly more cattle than people. Presumably the church authorities thought they would shunt him off into obscurity.



From the Archdeacon's desk

Well John Vianney may have been a hopeless academic. But his love of God was indeed passionate and he led a truly prayerful life. It wasn't long before his holiness and sincerity became apparent to others. He had what countless better-educated priests did not – a sincere holiness of life. And so God richly blessed his ministry with many gifts, including the gift of healing and an ability to understand the hearts of those who came for confession.

People sought his wisdom from far and near, and large crowds flocked for guidance from all over France. He often spent 13 hours at a time inside his tiny confessional, never turning anyone away. He died on 4th August 1859, aged 73. In 1925 the man who had struggled to become a priest, and was considered useless at seminary, was Canonised and named patron saint of all parish priests.

Here then is the example of how the quiet little life offered to God is used. God raises the lowly and makes them strong. The point being that what the church is most in need of is not worldly business plans, managers and secular muscle. What it needs is ordinary little lives offered to God from the heart. And yes, each of ours is one of them.

For just as a seed doesn't have the ability to develop until it is planted in the ground, so we cannot change our lives until we are planted in God's kingdom by grace and faith. That is what the life of Saint John Vianney witnessed to.

The Lord of the Universe is ever ready to transform our little lives and to use them to his glory – but are we ready to let Him do that? Do we believe in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit? And if we do then are we willing to offer our hearts to God for that transformation to happen?

With every blessing

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Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church

In the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 15:1-29), we read how “the Apostles and elders came together” to consider a question of faith. The question was: must Gentile Christians be circumcised and follow other aspects of Jewish law? This “Council of Jerusalem” was the first meeting of the Church to consider a question of faith.

After the death of the Apostles, the bishops of the Church would occasionally meet to consider major questions. These councils were “ecumenical” in that bishops from all of Christendom were invited to attend.

There were seven such Ecumenical Councils during the thousand years the Church was united. Each council was convened by the Roman or Byzantine Emperor at the time.

For the findings of an Ecumenical Council to be binding on all Christians, the bishops in attendance had to agree to them – and the agreement had to be unanimous. There was unanimous agreement in all seven of the Ecumenical Councils.

Most of these councils addressed questions of Jesus’ divine and human natures. Other councils addressed the Trinity, Mary, and the use of religious imagery in worship. During these councils, the participants also discussed and agreed upon non-dogmatic subjects, such as church administration, discipline, and ordination practices.

It was during these Ecumenical Councils that the Nicene Creed was defined. The Nicene Creed is the statement of faith of all Catholic and many Protestant churches. It is to the Gospels, these seven Ecumenical Councils, and the Apostles’ Council of Jerusalem, that the Universal Church looks for the essentials of the Christian faith.

What follows below is a very brief summary of each Council which may be a handy reference.

First Ecumenical Council

First Council of Nicea, A.D. 325

This council was called by the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great. It was in response to the heresy of Arianism, which said that Jesus was not divine, but merely human.

The Nicean Council declared that Jesus was both human and divine and it denounced Arianism as heresy. The Council also defined the first part of what would later be called the Nicene Creed. 318 bishops attended this Council.

Second Ecumenical Council

First Council of Constantinople, A.D. 381

This council was called by Roman Emperor Theodosius I. It was in response to the heresy of Macedonianism, which said the Holy Spirit was merely one of God’s powers and not a person like God the Father and God the Son.

The Council defined the doctrine of the Holy Trinity: that God is three persons – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. This doctrine along with other articles was added to the Nicene Creed. 150 bishops attended.

Third Ecumenical Council

Council of Ephesus, A.D. 431

This council was called by Byzantine Emperor Theodosius II, grandson of Theodosius I. It was in response to the heresy of Nestorianism, which said Jesus was merely a man in whom the Word of God dwelled (as in a temple). Nestorianism also taught that Mary, Jesus’ mother, was merely the mother of Christ, not to be called Mother of God.

The Council declared that Jesus Christ is completely God and completely man (although without sin) and that Mary is rightly called the Mother of God. Furthermore, the Council declared that the Nicene Creed, defined during the first two Councils, was complete and never to be changed. 200 bishops attended.

Fourth Ecumenical Council

Council of Chalcedon, A.D. 451

This council was called by Byzantine Emperor Marcian. It was in response to the Monophysitism, which said Jesus' human nature was transformed by his divine nature, making him divine and not human.

The Council declared, as it did in previous councils, that Jesus was both fully human (though without sin) and divine. 630 bishops attended.

Fifth Ecumenical Council

Second Council of Constantinople, A.D. 553

This council was called by Byzantine Emperor Justinian the Great. It was called due to the persistence of the Nestorian and Monophysite heresies.

The Council confirmed, again, the dual nature of Jesus Christ as both God and man. 165 bishops attended.

Sixth Ecumenical Council

Third Council of Constantinople, A.D. 680-681

This council was called by Byzantine Emperor Constantine IV. Like the previous Council, it was called to deal with the persistence of the heresies about the human and divine nature of Jesus Christ.

The Council declared that Jesus was fully man and fully divine and that the two natures exist with "no confusion, no change, no separation, no division". 170 bishops attended.

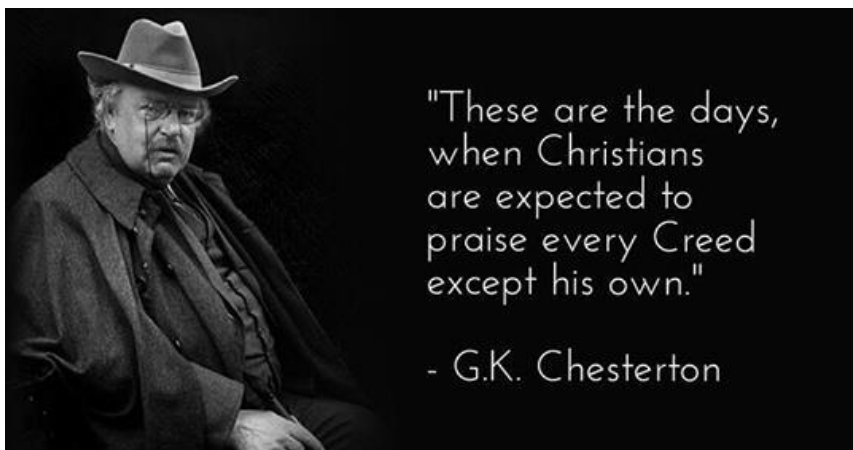
Seventh Ecumenical Council

Second Council of Nicea, A.D. 787

Called by the Byzantine Empress Irene, this Council considered the question of icons: art which depicted Jesus, the Father, the Holy Ghost, Mary, and the saints. This included crucifixes. Many Christians, particularly in the East, venerated icons. Others considered this to be idolatry and sought to destroy icons. These opponents are the source of today's word "iconoclasts" (Greek for "image destroyer").

The Council declared that religious icons are not idols, but only representations. Therefore icons could be used to venerate Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Mary, and the saints, and had to be respected. However, icons were not to be worshipped for themselves. 367 bishops attended.

These are the statements of faith defined by the united Church. Together with the Gospels and the Apostles' Council of Jerusalem, they form the essential, shared faith of all Catholic Christians.



(My "desk picture" shows an Isle of Sheppey scene viewed from my desk, from the garden, or within a few minutes of it.)