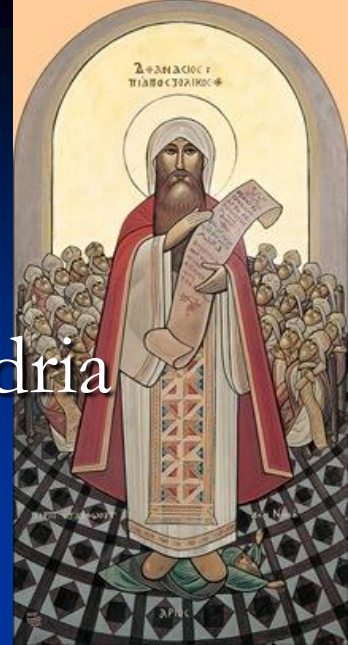


Saint  
Athanasius  
*contra*  
*mundum*



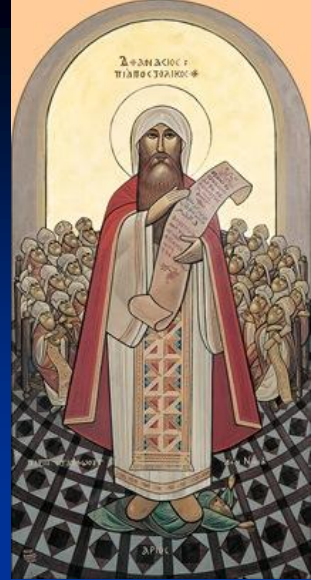
# Introduction

- St Athanasius was the 19<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria
- He was ordained pope at 31yrs of age
- He fought arianism for his whole life
- He is known as
  - Athanasius Contra Mundum
  - Athanasius the Great
  - Athanasius the apostolic
- One of the most influential popes.



# Early Years

- Born in Alexandria in 298AD
- From a very young age he received Christian education at the school of Alexandria, and was taught all the church rituals
- From age 5-13 he witnessed persecution of many people he knew by Diocletian and other emperors.
- When he was a teenager, Pope Alexander (pope at that time) saw him and his friends playing at the beach and noticed they were practicing the rite of baptism
- Called for them, Athanasius described the ritual of baptism with all its complex details (14 yrs old)
- Asked Athanasius' parents that he live in the papal residence and soon became the papal secretary and an archdeacon



# Early Influences

## Saint Anthony:

- Became a monk in approx 285AD
- During persecutions, many Christians took refuge in the desert
- In “The Life of St Anthony” by Athanasius he wrote that he “was his attendant for a long time” and “I saw the saint often and poured water on his hands”
- The most likely time of this companionship was in his boyhood
- There was between them a close friendship for the remainder of their lives



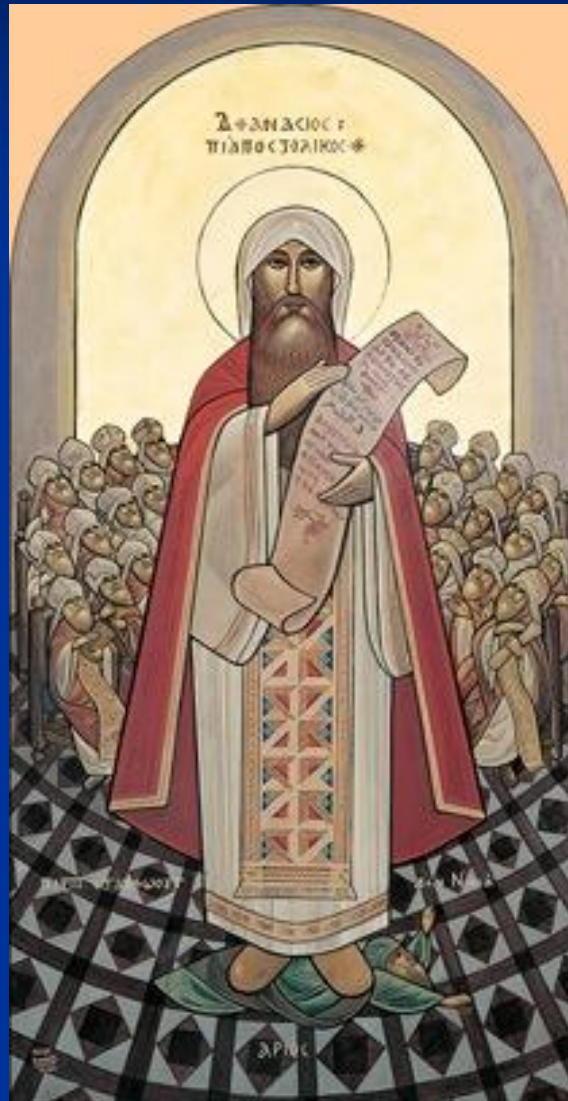
# Early Writings

- In 318AD as the papal secretary, Athanasius wrote “On the Incarnation”
  - The central mystery of Christianity is that the Word of God took flesh and became a real man, and that this was necessary to trample death and accomplish salvation.
- He was only 19 when he wrote this book, one of the treasures of the church
- C.S. Lewis describes it as a “masterpiece” of christian writing
  - Have u written any books yet??

# On the Incarnation

- Starts with the fall of Adam, sin entering the world, and death gaining a hold over humanity.
- Christ came to renew the image of man by destroying death and making Himself known as the true image of Man and God.
- At the same time as He was a child, a carpenter, and a crucified criminal, He was God, immortal, full of Divine energy, and He was still:
  - “present in all things by His own power, giving order to all things, and over all and in all revealing His own providence, and giving life to each thing and all things, quickening the whole universe”
- At the same time He was truly man:
  - “having a body in truth and not in seeming in order that He might die and accomplish the death of all things in His own body. For there was need of death, and death must be suffered on behalf of all, that the debt owing from all might be paid”

# Battle Against Arianism



# Start of Arianism

- Arius was an Egyptian priest who started the arian heresy.
- He incorrectly taught that
  - the Son was not one and equal with God the Father
  - Jesus was created and acting only as an intermediary between God the Father and the world
  - Jesus was not truly God by nature.
- Arians began claiming:
  - “There was a time when the Son was not”

*What's wrong with this heresy?*

*Is it such a big deal?*



# Start of Arianism

- Pope Alexander and Athanasius immediately saw the depth of heresy:
  - If there was a time when the Son was not, such that He was created, then He is infinitely lower than the Father
  - He is then less than God, and His death cannot have been enough to loose the bonds of death
- Pope Alexander and Athanasius saw that the heresy could split the church and called for Arius to explain why his teachings were wrong:
  - They asked Arius to reject the heresy but he refused
  - Arius and his followers were excommunicated

# Arius Deposed

- Arius withdrew to Nicomedia where he had a strong following of Bishop Eusebius and many people
- His heresy spread like fire across the empire, with bishops rising against bishops, and the church in danger of splitting:
  - “In former times the church was attacked by enemies and strangers from without. Today those who are native of the same country, who dwell under one roof and sit down at table together, fight with their tongues as if with spears”
- There was danger of civil war and Emperor Constantine called the first general ecumenical council in Nicea in 325 AD

*How many bishops attended the council of Nicea?*

# Council of Nicaea



# Council of Nicea

- 318 bishops from the whole empire (mostly the east)
- Pope Alexander attended with Athanasius as his secretary
- Athanasius called to respond on behalf of Pope Alexander (age 27 yrs)
- The Council lasted from May through August
- Although he was younger than all the bishop, his energy and enthusiasm led the great majority of bishops to reject Arius
- St Athanasius called his friend St Antony who made a rare appearance in Alexandria, to dispel the rumor that the desert monks were on the Arian side. He denounced Arianism “as the worst of heresies”



# Council of Nicea

- This was the conclusion:
  - We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible, and invisible.
  - And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father the only-begotten, that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God, and Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made in heaven and on earth; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence he cometh to judge the quick and the dead.

*Is this familiar?*

# Pope Athanasius

- 3 years after the Council of Nicea, in 328 AD Pope Alexander died.
- Athanasius (at age 31) was elected to preside over the Church of Alexandria. When he discovered this, he fled to the wilderness to St Anthony and hid, considering himself unworthy.
- He was eventually found and ordained Pope.
- He presided over the Church 46 years (of which he spent 17 years in exile by orders of various emperors, and because he was a very strong opponent to the Arian heresy).
- He was very loved, and served his congregation from all his heart. Even during his exile, he served his congregation with many paschal letters.

# First Exile

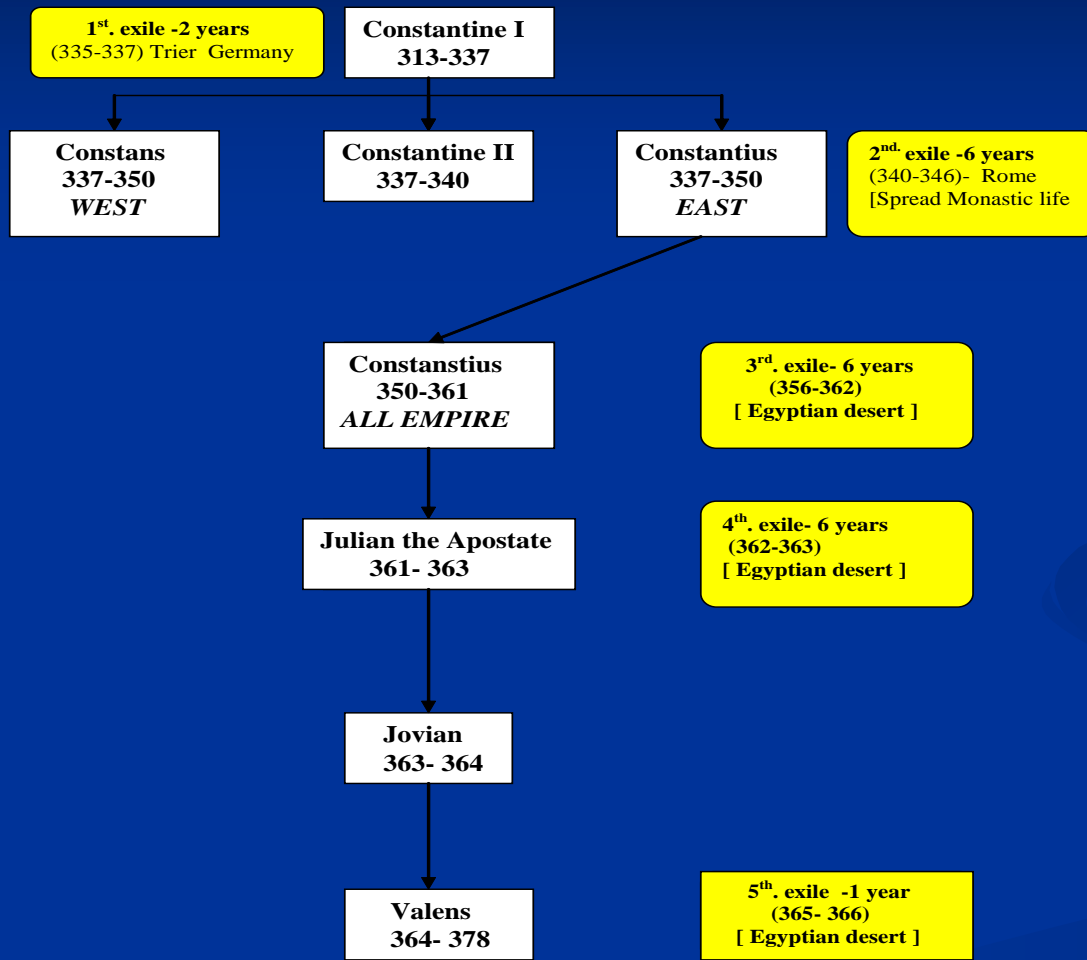
- Unfortunately, Arian gathered a large group of followers and continued lobbying the emperor for Athanasius' exile.
- Rumours and accusations were made by Arians against Athanasius: black magic, murder, violence, but they couldn't prove any of them.
- Finally his enemies resorted to intrigue. They bribed Arsenius, a Bishop in Hypsele, to disappear so that the rumor could be started that Athanasius had arranged his murder and cut off one of his hands for magic. Constantine was told and asked for a trial to be held in Tyre. Meanwhile one of Athanasius' trusted deacons had tracked Arsenius to a monastery in hiding and taken him captive and brought him secretly to Tyre.

# First Exile

- At the trial the accusers produced a human hand to confirm the indictment. But Athanasius was ready. “Did you know Arsenius personally?” he asked. “Yes” is the eager reply from many sides. So Arsenius is ushered in alive, wrapped up in a cloak. They were surprised but demanded an explanation of how he had lost his hand. Athanasius turned up his cloak and showed that one hand at least was there. There was a moment of suspense, artfully managed by Athanasius. Then the other hand was exposed, and the accusers were requested to point out whence the third had been cut off.
- However, Constantine was worried for the peace of his empire, so he exiled Athanasius to France to avoid Arius’ followers from causing a split in the land



# He was exiled another 4 times



- He spent his exiles either with the other patriarchs, or in the desert with the monks whom he loved.
- He spent his time writing books and in deep prayer
- Each time he returned, the joy of his return led to a spiritual revival in Egypt

# Arius Dies...

It was then Saturday, and Arius was expecting to assemble with the church on the day following: *but divine retribution overtook his daring criminalities*. For going out of the imperial palace, attended by a crowd of Eusebian partisans like guards, he paraded proudly through the midst of the city, attracting the notice of all the people. As he approached the place called Constantine's Forum, *a terror arising from the remorse of conscience seized Arius*, and with the terror a violent relaxation of the bowels: he therefore enquired whether there was a convenient place near, and being directed to the back of Constantine's Forum, he hastened thither. Soon after a faintness came over him, and together with the evacuations his bowels protruded, followed by a copious hemorrhage, and the descent of the smaller intestines: moreover portions of his spleen and liver were brought off in the effusion of blood, so that he almost immediately died. The scene of this catastrophe still is shown at Constantinople, as I have said, behind the shambles in the colonnade: *and by persons going by pointing the finger at the place, there is a perpetual remembrance preserved of this extraordinary kind of death.*

— *Socrates Scholasticus*

# Athanasius' Return

- A few months later, emperor Constantine also died
- His sons' called for Athanasius' return
- Thousands of people, bishops and monks went to meet his returning ship with great celebrations

Gregory of Nazianzus (330-389) tells us about his return from exile:

...amid such delight of the people of the city and of almost all Egypt, that they ran together from every side, from the furthest limits of the country, simply to hear the voice of Athanasius, or feast their eyes upon the sight of him.

# Writings

1. Life of St Anthony
2. Against the Heathens
3. On the Incarnation
4. Apology to Constantius
5. Apology for my flight
6. History of the Arians
7. Letters – Paschal letters, letters to Bishops
8. Biblical exegesis – mostly OT
9. Discourse on Virginity
10. On Sickness and Health





# Conclusion

- Athanasius saw the great proportion of things. There are doctrines in the Bible that are worth dying for and living for. They are the ground of our life. They are the heart of our worship. The divine and human nature of Christ in one person is one of those doctrines.
- From meditating on every book of the Bible and such as none else has applied even to one of them, he grew rich in contemplation, rich in splendor of life.

# Conclusion

Gregory remembered him like this:

- Let one praise him in his fastings and prayers . . . , another his unweariedness and zeal for vigils and psalmody, another his patronage of the needy, another his dauntlessness towards the powerful, or his condescension to the lowly. . . . [He was to] the unfortunate their consolation, the hoary-headed their staff, youths their instructor, the poor their resource, the wealthy their steward. Even the widows will . . . praise their protector, even the orphans their father, even the poor their benefactor, strangers their entertainer, brethren the man of brotherly love, the sick their physician.

# Conclusion

- St Athanasius was able to serve God in every situation: while in Alexandria, he served his congregation through his love, sermons, and charity, and while in exile, through his letters and books that would revolutionize the church.
- Athanasius' biography of Antony was read to St. Augustine. Augustine says, he was “violently overcome by a fearful sense of shame.” This led to Augustine's final struggles in the garden in Milan and his eventual conversion.
- Even while he was writing the biography, it influenced all of Rome, that many roman villas were converted to monasteries.

# Lessons

- Seek the Lord from an early age
- Build a personal relationship with the Lord
- Show your faith wherever you are
- Develop a deeper understanding of your faith
- Be prepared to stand against the world for Christ... Contra Mundum!
- Read the Fathers
- Have friends like St Antony and Pope Alexander...friends who encourage your spiritual growth.

