



A History of the Catholic Church for Kids and Their Parents and Teachers

Mary Lea Hill, FSP

The Church Rocks!



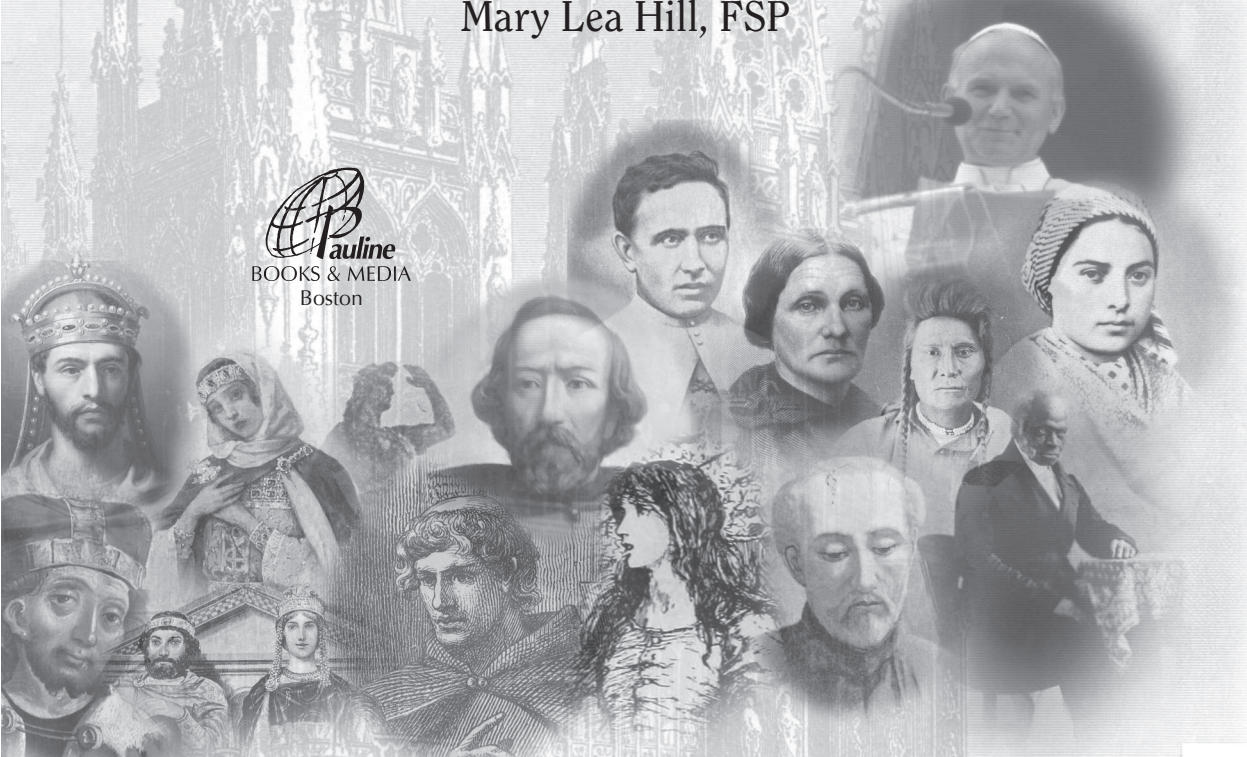
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Contents

Introduction	1	Chapter 2: Lots of Trouble	
Prologue: The Church Is Born	2	(2nd century)	20
Pentecost	5	Crime to Believe	23
Church of Believers	6	Councils	24
Chapter 1: Giants of Faith: Peter		Heresies	24
and Paul (1st century)	10	Early Church Fathers	26
Saint Stephen, the First Martyr	14	Saint Polycarp of Smyrna	26
Saul Becomes Paul	15	Saint Justin Martyr	27
Peter's Vision	16	Saint Irenaeus	27
Council of Jerusalem	17	Tertullian	28
Martyrdom of Peter and Paul	18		

Chapter 3: Martyrs and Missionaries

(3rd century)	30
Persecution in the Roman Empire	32
Roman Martyrs	33
Rich Martyrs	34
Military Martyrs	35
Martyrs in the Papal Court	36
Mistaken Teachers	38

Chapter 4: Rule of Constantine

(4th century)	40
Saint Sebastian	42
Changes in the Roman Empire	44
Emperor Constantine	45
The Edict of Milan	46
Important Saints of the 4th Century	47
The Council of Nicea	48
The First Council of Constantinople	49
A Christian Empire	50

Chapter 5: Days of Danger

(5th century)	52
Invaders	54
Attila the Hun	55
The Fall of Rome	56
Conversion of the Franks	56
The Arian Heresy Again	57
Nestorius and the Mother of God	58
Heresy and Schism	60

Chapter 6: Organizing the Church

(6th century)	62
The Second Council of Constantinople	64
Pope Saint Gregory the Great and His Missionaries	66
Saint Benedict of Nursia	68

Chapter 7: Trouble from Without and Within (7th century)

Christianity Spreads in England	73
The Easter Controversy	74
Third Council of Constantinople	75
Saint Bathilde	76
Saint Benedict Biscop	78

Chapter 8: Darkness and Light

(8th century)	80
Saint Bede	83
Saint John Damascene	84
Saint Boniface	85
The Battle of Tours	86
Charlemagne	88

Chapter 9: Conversions

(9th century)	90
Divided Kingdoms	93
The Feudal System	94
The Feudal System and the Church	95
<i>Veni, Creator Spiritus</i>	96



Saints Cyril and Methodius	97
Saint Ansgar	97
Saint Edmund and the Vikings . .	98
No Council to Decide	100

**Chapter 10: Age of Kings
(10th century) 102**

Changes in Western Europe . . .	104
Social Changes	
around the World	105
The Holy Roman Empire	107
Daily Life in the 10th Century . .	108
Christianity in Russia	110

**Chapter 11: East and West
(11th century) 112**

The Great Schism	115
Pope Gregory and King Henry	
Disagree	116
Saint Margaret of Scotland	118
Saint Anselm	119
Saint Bruno	120
The First Crusade	121

**Chapter 12: Crusades
(12th century) 124**

Working for Peace	
in the Holy Land	126
The Second Crusade	127
The First Lateran Council	128
The Second Lateran Council	129

The Third Lateran Council	129
Saint Thomas à Becket	130
Richard the Lionhearted	132

**Chapter 13: Friars on the Front
Lines (13th century) 134**

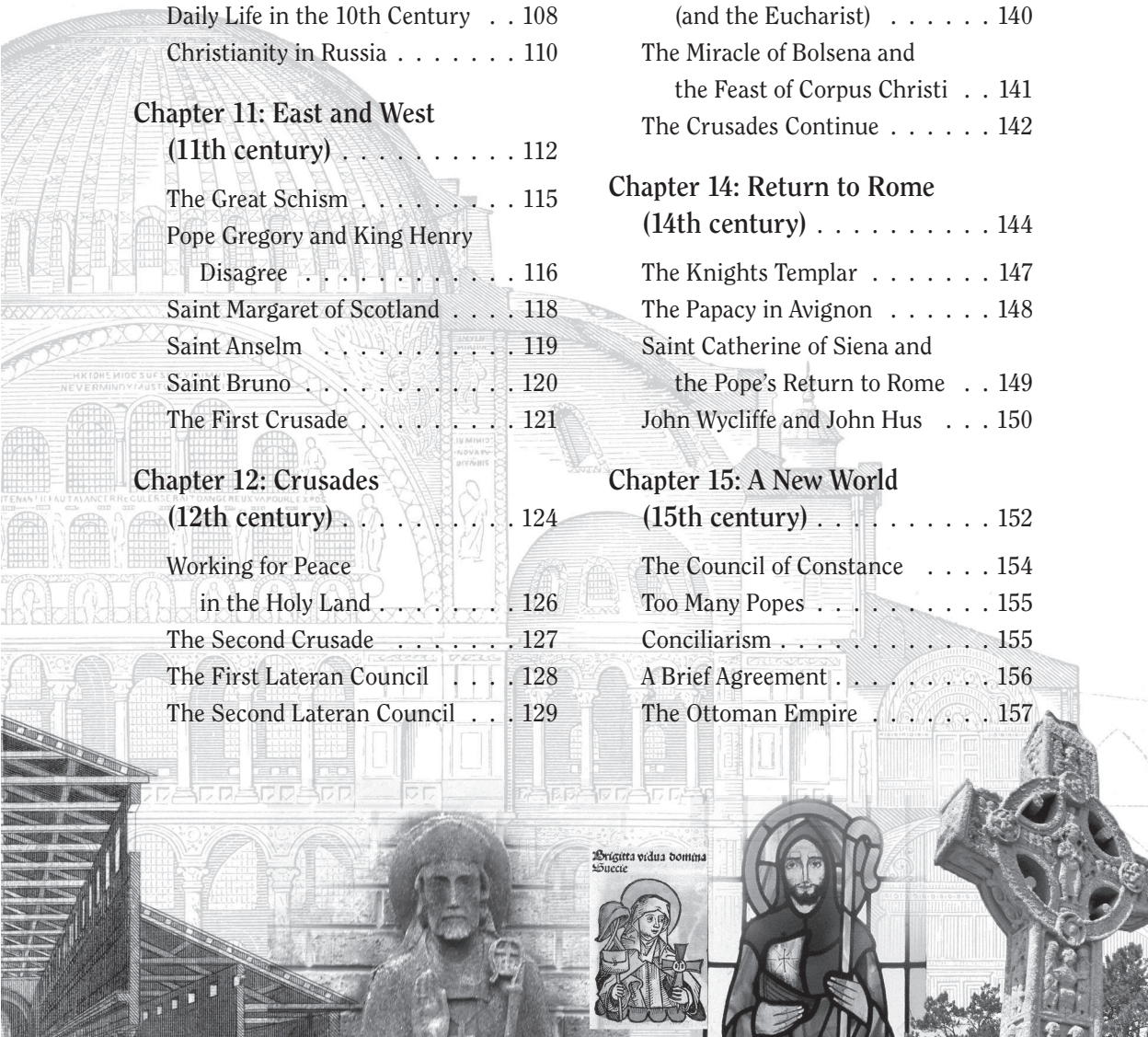
Effects of the Crusades	137
Saint Francis of Assisi and His	
Followers	138
Saint Dominic and His Followers	139
The Fourth Lateran Council	
(and the Eucharist)	140
The Miracle of Bolsena and	
the Feast of Corpus Christi . .	141
The Crusades Continue	142

**Chapter 14: Return to Rome
(14th century) 144**

The Knights Templar	147
The Papacy in Avignon	148
Saint Catherine of Siena and	
the Pope's Return to Rome . .	149
John Wycliffe and John Hus	150

**Chapter 15: A New World
(15th century) 152**

The Council of Constance	154
Too Many Popes	155
Conciliarism	155
A Brief Agreement	156
The Ottoman Empire	157



The Renaissance	157
Art in the Church	158
Music in the Church	159
Some Saints of the 15th Century	160
Saint Joan of Arc	160
A United Spain	161
The Spanish Inquisition	161
Global Exploration	162

**Chapter 16: Brothers Separate
(16th century)** 164

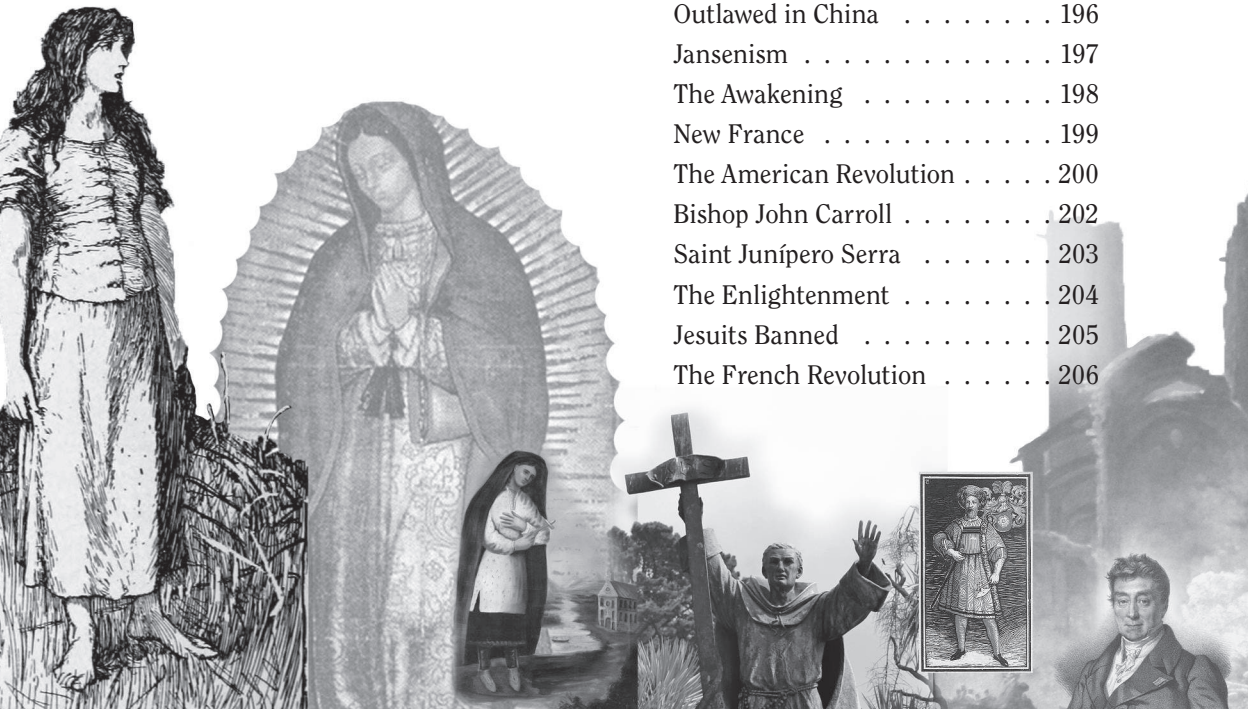
Martin Luther	166
Reformers Inside and Out	168
Politics and the Reformation	169
Henry VIII and Saint Thomas More	170
The Council of Trent	172
Saint Ignatius of Loyola	172
The Swiss Guard	174
The Battle of Lepanto	175
Explorers, Soldier, Missionaries	177

**Chapter 17: Game Changers
(17th century)** 180

English Colonization of the Americas	182
Spanish Colonization of the Americas	184
Dutch and French Colonization of the Americas	185
Missionaries to the Americas	186
Saint Kateri Tekakwitha	187
Catholicism in the American Colonies	188
Catholicism in England	188
The Church in Japan	190
Queen Christina of Sweden	191
Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque	191
The Defeat of the Ottoman Empire	192

**Chapter 18: Foundations and
Revolutions (18th century)** 194

Outlawed in China	196
Jansenism	197
The Awakening	198
New France	199
The American Revolution	200
Bishop John Carroll	202
Saint Junípero Serra	203
The Enlightenment	204
Jesuits Banned	205
The French Revolution	206



Chapter 19: A Time of Progress

(19th century) 208

Medical Advances 210

Napoleon Bonaparte 212

Nations and Empires 212

Political Sources of Restoration

for the Church 213

The First Vatican Council 214

The Industrial Revolution 215

Changing Borders 216

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton 216

Migration and the American

Civil War 217

Saint Damien of Molokai 219

Saints of the 19th Century 219

The Immaculate Conception 220

Chapter 20: War and Peace

(20th century) 222

Pope Saint Pius X 225

The World at War 225

Our Lady of Fatima 226

A Fragile Peace 227

The Great Depression and the Catholic

Worker Movement 227

The Holocaust or *Shoah* 228

Saint Maximilian Kolbe 229

Saint Edith Stein 229

Resistance 230

Examples of Holiness 230

The Assumption 231

Communism 232

The Second Vatican Council

and the Catechism 233

Protecting Human Life 234

Threat to the Pope 236

Chapter 21: Time of New

Evangelization (21st century) 238

Pope Saint John Paul II 240

Pope Benedict XVI 242

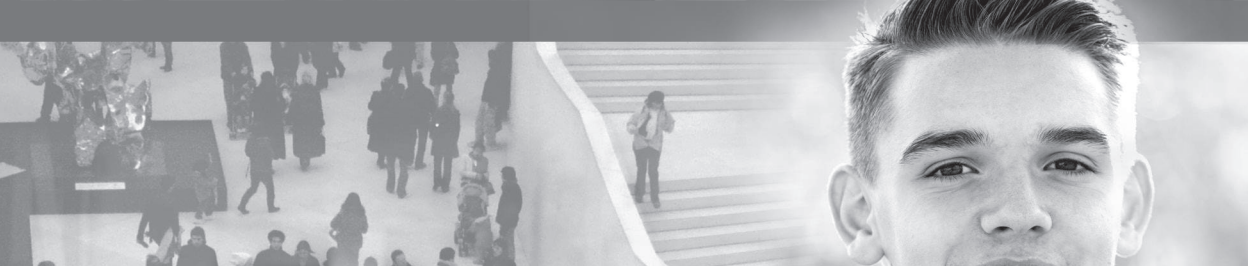
Pope Francis 245

Index 248

Credits 254

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to download the appendices: Table
of Popes, of Church Councils, and of
Heresies








Introduction


You are living history. Everything that happens becomes part of history. Have you read about something or seen a story in the news that you think will become part of our study of history in the future? Just think: when you are grown up you can tell your children, “I was in school when that happened; when that was discovered; when that was invented.”



History is the story of people—both individuals and groups of them. Because the Church is the People of God, it also has a story. It is the fascinating journey of Jesus Christ’s disciples over a little more than two thousand years. Church history is the true story of our family of faith that leads all the way up to today.

In these pages we will trace the Church’s adventure from Pentecost until our own century. As we read, we thank God for the gift of the Church and for all those who make up the Church’s story. Along the way we’ll discover that it’s *our* story—yours and mine—too.

Prologue

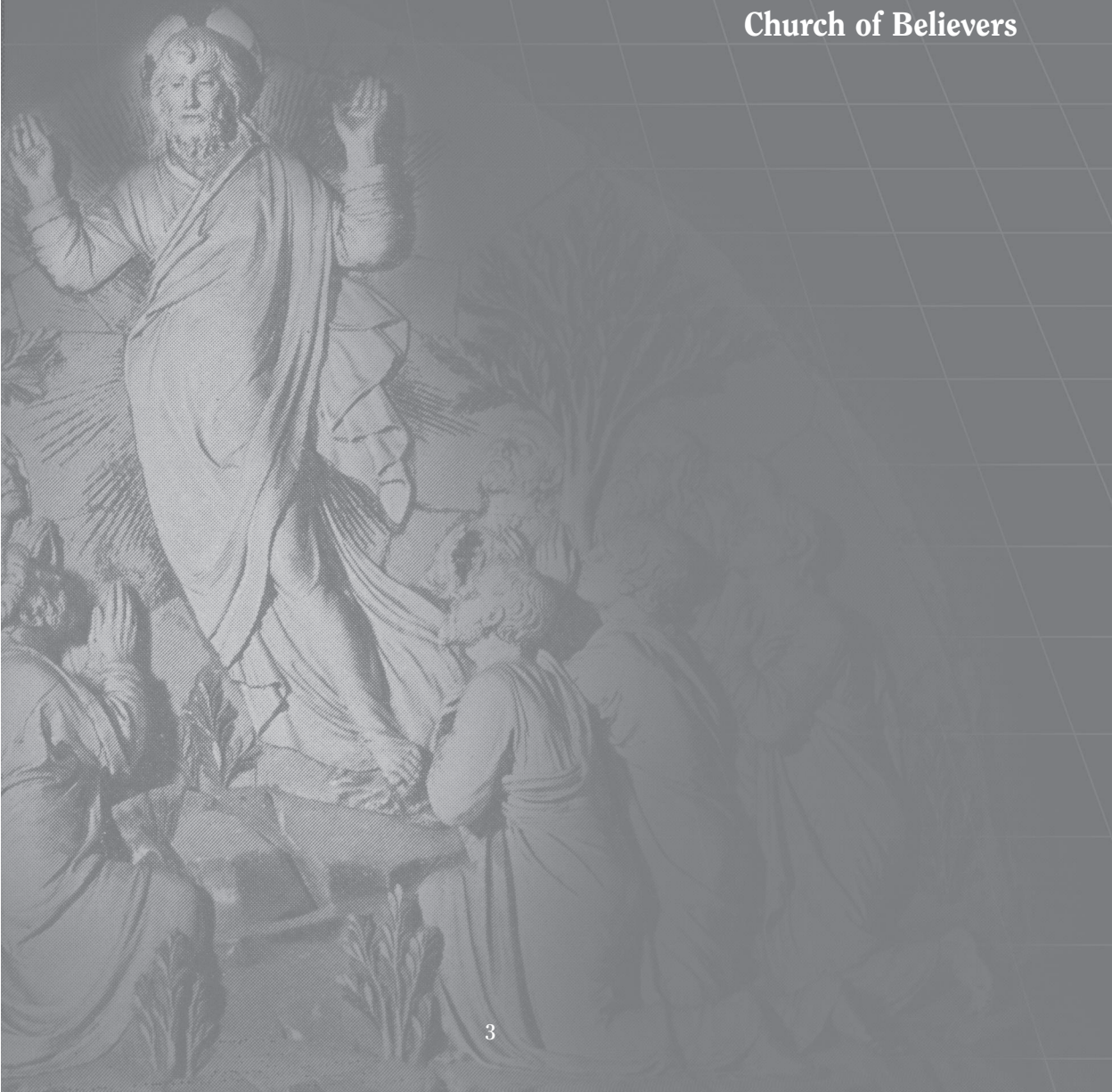



10 BC	
1 BC	3 BC or AD 1—Jesus is born. Basket makers (also known as the <i>Anasazi</i>) begin farming settlements in the North American southwest.
AD 1	AD 1—Judea becomes a Roman province.
AD 15	AD 14—Emperor Augustus dies after choosing Tiberius as the next emperor.
AD 25	AD 25—The Eastern Han Dynasty begins in China.
AD 35	AD 30 or 33—The Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus take place. AD 30 or 33—Pentecost.

The Church Is Born

Pentecost

Church of Believers





Jesus ascended into heaven forty days after he rose from the dead. His friends were sad and afraid. They missed being with their Risen Lord. Jesus had appeared to them and spoken with them as naturally as he had always done. Now that Jesus was gone, his disciples hid in the Upper Room. They gathered in the place where he had celebrated his Last Supper with them. Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James, Simon, and Jude Thaddeus were there. Matthias also joined them. He had been chosen to take the place of Judas Iscariot, the one who had betrayed Jesus. These apostles were joined by many other disciples of the Lord. Among them were a number of devoted women and Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

Jesus had appeared in that very room after his resurrection, to assure his friends that he was alive again. He had told his followers to preach the Good News of salvation to everyone in the whole world. They were to go out and baptize new believers. The Holy Spirit, Jesus had promised, would be their guide: “He will remind you of all I have said.” That promise caused the disciples to wait and pray in the Upper Room. It gave them hope.



“My name is Esther. I listened to Jesus teach many times. He liked having us kids around him. One day his disciples tried to shoo away a bunch of us who ran up to him. Jesus told them to leave us alone. ‘Let them come to me,’ he said. He told us that his Father’s kingdom belongs to those who have trusting hearts, like children do. Jesus loves kids. I like that about Jesus.” (See Mt 19:4; Lk 18:16.)

Pentecost

One morning as they were praying together, the whole house began to shake. A strong wind blew through the large room. Suddenly flames appeared above each person's head, like little tongues. The disciples looked at one another in wonder. They no longer felt afraid. Each person was certain about what Jesus had taught. Each one felt eager to share everything he or she had heard from Jesus. They were so energized they immediately went out together and began to tell everyone about Jesus and what he had done for the world.

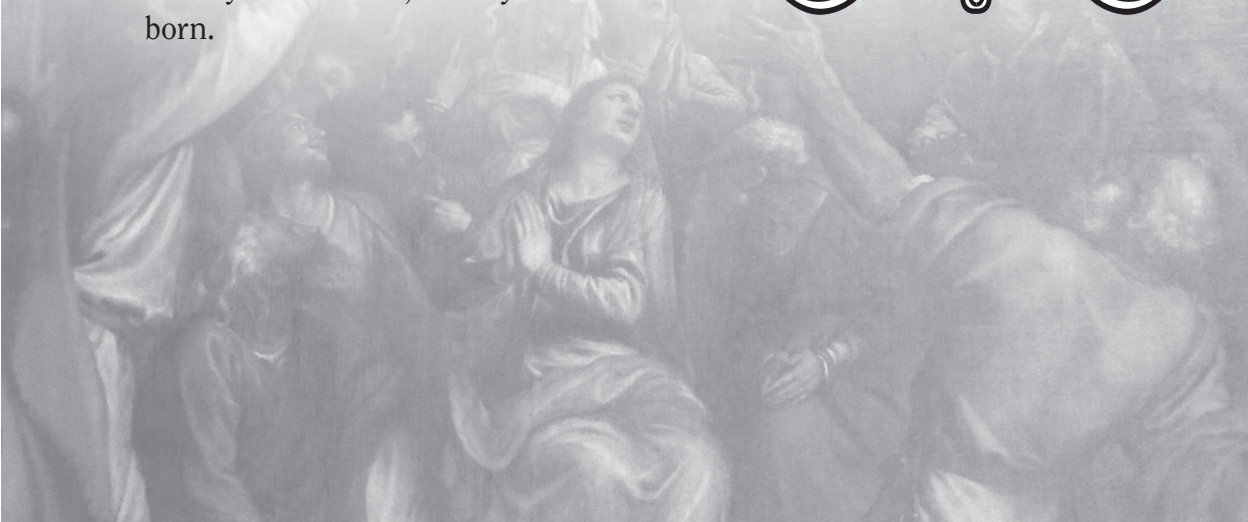
The people who listened were excited but also confused. They asked one another: "How is it that we each hear these men in our own native language?" (See Acts 2:7–11.) They were amazed! Here they came from different countries with different languages, yet it seemed the disciples spoke all of these languages at once. It was the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the followers of Jesus. Three thousand people were baptized and joined as believers of the Good News that day. It was the day of Pentecost, the day the Church was born.

ONCE UPON A WORD

The word *Pentecost* (PEN-ti-kost) comes from the Greek word for *fifty*. It is a Jewish holiday celebrated fifty days after Passover. In Hebrew it is called *Shavuot*. At Passover Jews remember how God rescued them from slavery in Egypt. They also celebrate the first harvest. On Pentecost, they thank God for giving his Law to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Pentecost is also the name we use for the birthday of the Church.

That is because the Holy Spirit came during this Jewish feast. We celebrate Pentecost every year in the Church, fifty days after Easter.



Church of Believers

We see in this story what *church* means. Like the stones or bricks used to build a church, we are members of the Church individually. But the Church is also a community. Stones and bricks *together* form a church building. So, too, all believers together with Jesus form the Church. Church is the calling together of all believers. Jesus himself promised: “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). He continues to be with us in the Holy Eucharist. He also promised to send the Holy Spirit. God’s Holy Spirit continues to be with the Church to guide her and make her holy. Across the centuries the Church has grown—from the first small group of believers at Pentecost to a large family of faithful women and men all over the world.



SNAPSHOT

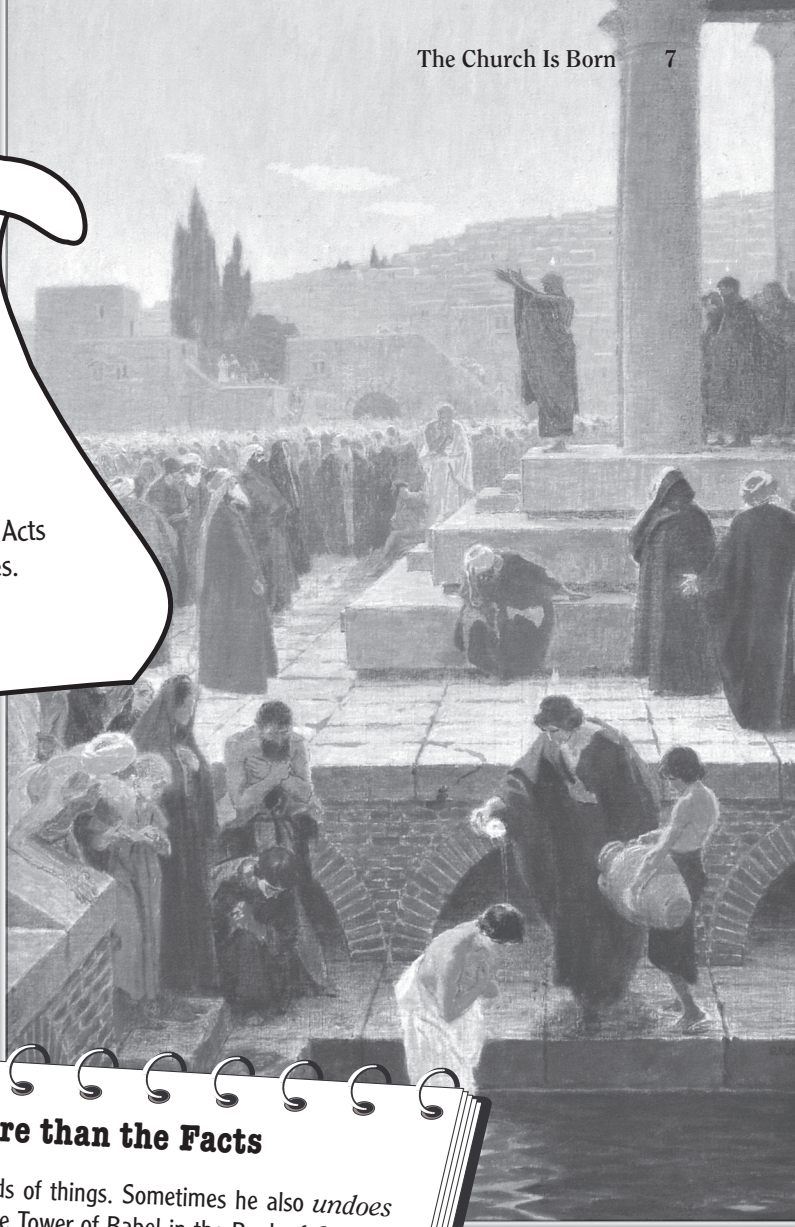
Mary, the Mother of Jesus

The Bible tells us that Mary was in the Upper Room on Pentecost. She had been praying with the apostles and disciples after Jesus ascended into heaven. She must have kept their spirits up while they waited for the Holy Spirit. Mary was Jesus’ first disciple. She followed him longer than anyone else. And when it came to the Holy Spirit, Mary had lots of experience. The Holy Spirit had made her Jesus’ Mother. The Holy Spirit had also revealed to her cousin, Elizabeth, that Mary’s child was the Son of God.



On the Record

Read the exciting account of the first Christian feast of Pentecost. It can be found in the Bible, in the first two chapters of the Acts of the Apostles.



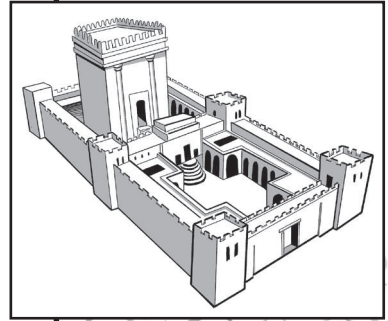
More than the Facts

God does all kinds of things. Sometimes he also *undoes* things. Read about the Tower of Babel in the Book of Genesis (11:1–9). The people in that story thought that if they built their tower high enough, they could rule the world. Because of their pride, God confused their speech. Everyone began speaking different languages. No one could understand what anyone else was saying.

The opposite happened at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit brought the gift of understanding. The people were from different countries and spoke various languages. But they all understood Peter and the other apostles who spoke about Jesus.

LATEST & GREATEST

One of the most beautiful buildings that existed in the time of Jesus was the Temple. It was in the center of the city because it was the heart of Jewish worship. Today we can go to Jerusalem and visit what's left of that great house of God. Jews and other people gather at the ancient Western Wall. It is also called the Wailing Wall. They stand and pray there to honor God. Many people write their special prayers on slips of paper and place them in the cracks between the stones.



Mystery of History

What is time and how do we keep it, measure it, and record it? What do your yearly school photos tell you about the idea of “time”? Look up some different ways of tracking time: BC/AD, BCE/CE, Roman time, Jewish lunar months and years, Chinese years, the Mayan calendar, and the Ethiopian calendar.



ACTIVITY

- Choose a person from one of these New Testament stories:
- Easter, the Ascension, or Pentecost.
- Draw a portrait or write a paragraph to give a “snapshot” of this person.

Prayer

Mary, you are called the Queen of the Apostles because you stayed with Jesus’ friends in the Upper Room. You prayed with them, consoled them, and encouraged them. As you gave birth to Jesus the Savior, so you witnessed the birth of the Church. Remain with the Church today and always, as our Mother, Teacher, and Queen. Amen.

The Bigger Picture

With the coming of the Holy Spirit, the first followers of Jesus begin to realize what they are being called to do. They are to preach the Good News of salvation to everyone. They are to be brave when future misunderstandings and sufferings come. As we will see, these Jewish believers in Christ will be seen as troublemakers. They will be thrown out of synagogues. They will be separated from family, friends, and the way of life they knew. They will become a new people—the Church.

Chapter 1

AD 30

AD 40

AD 50

AD 60

AD 70

AD 80

AD 90

AD 64—Fire destroys part of Rome.

AD 70—Romans destroy the Temple of Jerusalem.

AD 70—Construction begins on the Coliseum (Colosseum) in Rome.

AD 79—Mount Vesuvius erupts, burying Pompeii and Herculaneum.

Giants of Faith: Peter and Paul



Saint Stephen,
the First Martyr

Saul Becomes Paul

Peter's Vision

Council of Jerusalem

Martyrdom of
Peter and Paul

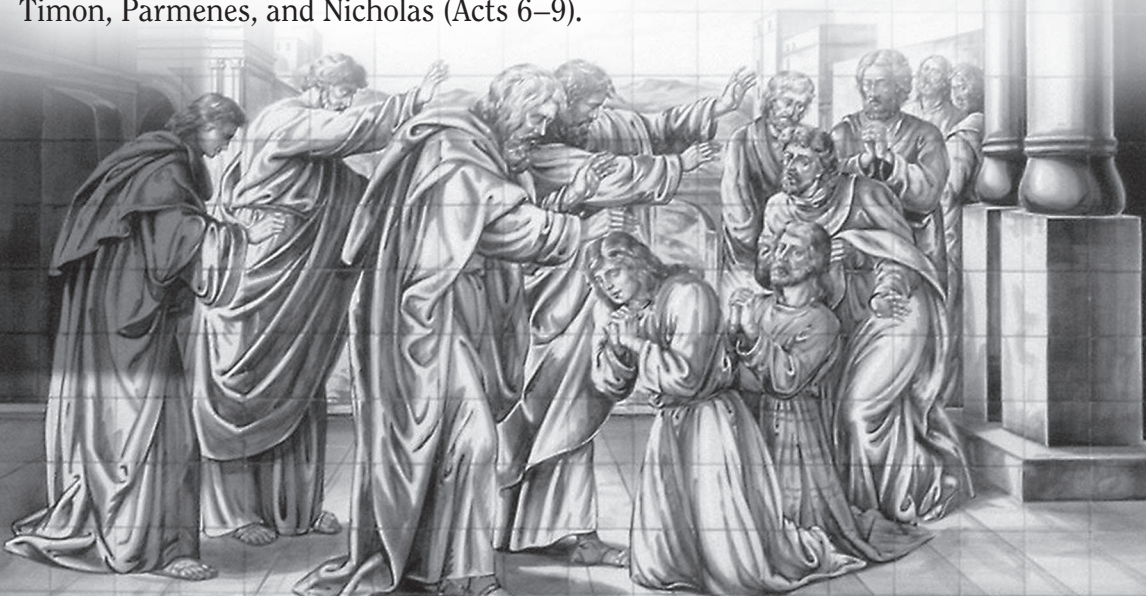
The first few years after Pentecost were peaceful. Many new people were drawn by Jesus' teachings and by his resurrection. They were also impressed by the kindness of his followers. The young Church began to grow. Those who followed the way of Jesus were mostly faithful Jews who worshiped in the Temple. They also met together to share the words of Jesus and the Eucharist.

Jews who lived in Jerusalem at the time were from different backgrounds. Those who came from the Greek-speaking world were called Hellenists. Those like Jesus, whose native language was Aramaic, were called Nazarenes. Disciples of Jesus came from both of these groups.

Soon conflict arose. The Hellenists claimed that their widows and orphans were being treated like second-class members. According to them, the widows of the Nazarenes were being favored. To restore peace, the apostles appointed seven deacons to care for all the people's needs. Their names were Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenes, and Nicholas (Acts 6–9).



1st ce





SNAPSHOT

Philip the Evangelist

Philip was one of the first seven deacons appointed by the apostles. He left Jerusalem after the death of Stephen. One day God's angel told Philip to go to Gaza. On the way he met an official of the Ethiopian queen. This man was sitting in his chariot, reading from a scroll. Philip saw that the man was puzzled by the writings of the Prophet Isaiah. "Do you understand the prophet's words?" Philip asked. And the man invited Philip into his chariot. Philip then explained that Isaiah was writing about the Savior whom God had promised to send. He told the official how he could find salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. As they came to some water, the official asked Philip to baptize him. After the man was baptized, the Holy Spirit miraculously whisked Philip away to Azotus. There he continued to preach the Good News. (Read the story in Acts 8:26–40.)

Century

On the Record

The first Church history book is part of the Bible. *The Acts of the Apostles* was written by Saint Luke around 64 AD. A Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus (37–100 AD), also wrote about Jesus and the Church in his book, *Antiquities of the Jews*. These books were actually written on scrolls. Josephus said,

"At this time lived a wise man called Jesus. He did amazing deeds and taught truth pleasant to hear. Many Jews followed him and many Greeks as well. And when our important men suggested to Pilate that Jesus be condemned to the cross, he was not abandoned by those who loved him. And those named Christians in his honor are still among us today."

Antiquities of the Jews, book 18, chapter 3, 3

Saint Stephen, the First Martyr

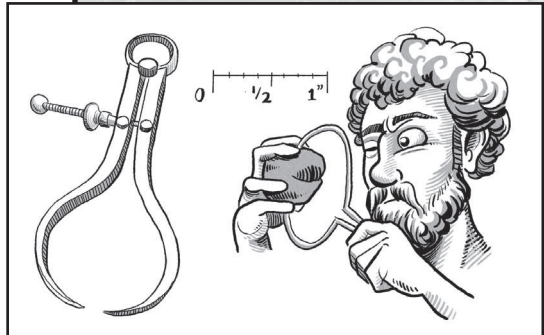
Stephen was a man of great faith and enthusiasm. While he took care of people who needed help, he also spoke publicly about Jesus. Soon Jewish leaders decided he had become too much of a problem. Stephen was arrested. He was accused of insulting God and threatening the Temple. The punishment was death.

Crowds gathered quickly. They piled their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul, then threw rocks at Stephen to kill him. As he lay on the ground, Stephen saw the heavens open and Jesus seated beside God the Father. “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” he cried. Moments later he again prayed, “Lord, don’t hold this sin against them!” Then he died (Acts 7:1–60). Stephen became the first martyr, the first person to die for his faith in Jesus Christ.

Stephen

LATEST & GREATEST

Calipers are similar to the protractors we use to measure angles. They were first used around this time. With such instruments, stonemasons and carvers were able to create grand buildings and monuments.



Saul Becomes Paul

The young man who had guarded the coats of those who killed Stephen was Saul of Tarsus. He had permission from the Jewish leaders to arrest Christians who were stirring up trouble. The Jewish leaders wanted to rid Jerusalem of their ideas. Suddenly, everyone seemed to be against the followers of Jesus. Most of the disciples fled Jerusalem, but they did not stop their mission. They continued to teach and baptize people wherever they went. The Church continued to grow.

Saul was determined to put an end to faith in Jesus. One day he set out with other men to round up Christ's disciples in Damascus. On the way there, Saul was suddenly surrounded by a great light. He fell to the ground as a voice called out his name. "Saul, why are you persecuting me?" the voice questioned. Confused, Saul asked, "Who are you?" The voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city. There you will find out what to do." The light was so bright that it blinded Saul. Completely unable to see, he had to be led into the city by his companions.

Inside Damascus, God had prepared a man named Ananias to heal Saul of his blindness and to baptize him. "I have chosen him to carry my name to nations and kings," Jesus had told Ananias in a vision. (See Acts 9 for all the details.) Saul's experience on the road to Damascus was so powerful that he immediately came to believe in Jesus.

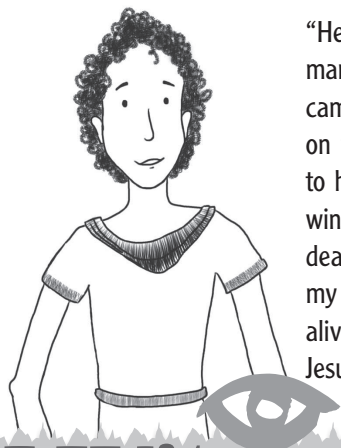
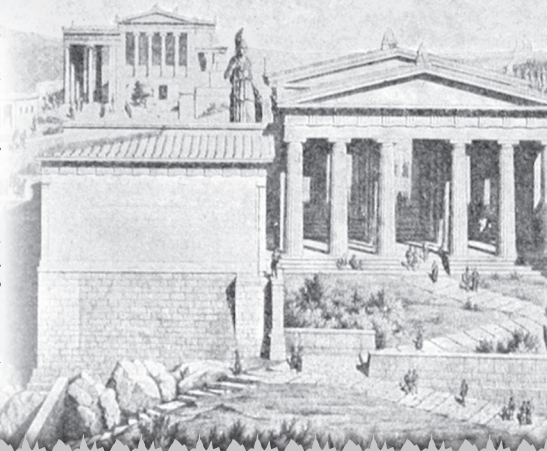
From then on, Saul was known as Paul. He became the greatest missionary the

ONCE UPON A WORD

A *relic* (REL-ik) is a holy object preserved in a special container called a reliquary (REL-i-kwair-y). Relics can be the bone fragments of a martyr or saint. Strands of hair, pieces of clothing, or other things a saint used can also be relics. People honor relics to be closer to the saints. Sometimes God grants miracles through these relics. Examples of this are the handkerchiefs and aprons of Saint Paul. Sick people who touched these relics were cured (see Acts 19:11–12). Today we preserve relics in the altars of our churches. Ask about the relics in your church.



Church has ever known. Paul traveled to large cities in Europe and Asia Minor, all the way to Macedonia, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Athens. Sometimes he went alone. Other times he traveled with disciples like Barnabas, Mark, Luke, Titus, or Timothy. Paul had much success in spreading the Gospel, along with a few failures. His missionary journeys were exciting real-life adventures, which even included being shipwrecked!



“Hello! I’m Eutychus and I live in the Greek city of Troas. One evening many people crowded into a big room on the third floor of our house. They came to hear Paul preach about Jesus, called the Christ. I was perched on the windowsill to get a little air. All of my friends and I were there to hear about this new Way of Jesus. I guess I dozed off and fell out the window. Paul, my parents, and others ran down to the street, but I was dead. People tell me that Paul lifted me up and prayed to Christ to restore my life. I only remember opening my eyes to see my mother crying. ‘He’s alive! He’s alive!’ she shouted. Now I want to learn everything I can about Jesus Christ.” (See Acts 20:7–12.)

I Witness

Peter’s Vision

Meanwhile, Peter was also beginning to think of the many people who were not Jews. One day, he saw in a vision a large sheet coming down from heaven. It was filled with all the foods that Jewish people were not allowed to eat. Then he heard a voice telling him to eat some of them. Peter protested that it would be wrong. The voice spoke again, “What God has called clean and good is both clean and good.” Around the same time Peter had another vision. This time it was of a man



Mystery of History

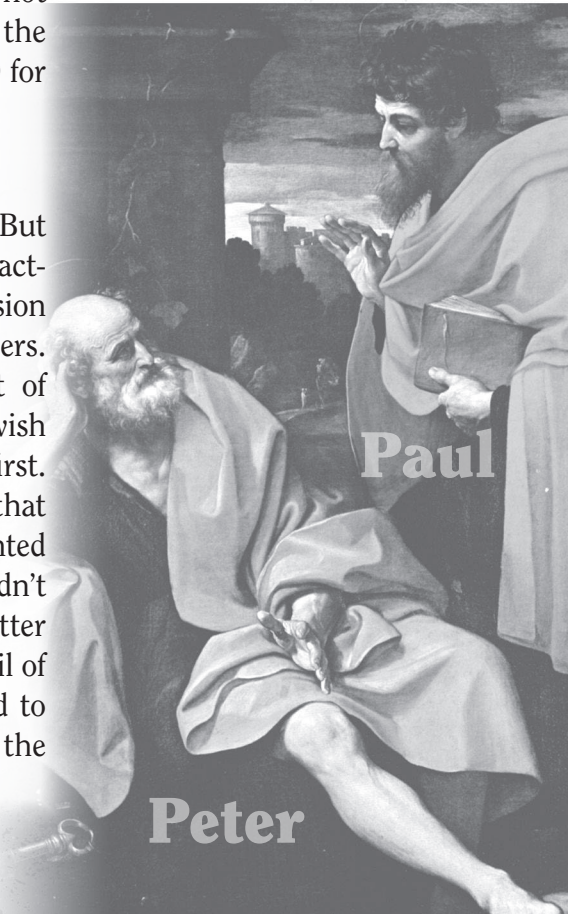
In the year 64, a huge fire destroyed a large section of the city of Rome. Was the great fire just an accident? Perhaps. The Emperor Nero, though, blamed it on the Christians. He used this accusation as a reason to put them to death. This was the first organized persecution of Christians in history. Many historians believe that Nero himself may have set the fire. Soon after it, he built a luxurious residence in the neighborhood that had burned down.



asking him to come to his city and bring the message of Jesus to people who were not Jews. Peter realized that Jesus wanted the Church to include everyone. (See Acts 10 for the whole story.)

Council of Jerusalem

The very first Christians were Jewish. But soon more and more non-Jews were attracted to faith in Jesus. This caused confusion and disagreement among church leaders. Some were determined to remain part of the Jewish faith. They wanted all non-Jewish believers in Christ to become Jewish first. Others, like Peter and Paul, recognized that Jesus had died to save everyone. They wanted the Church to be open to people who didn't know or keep the laws of Moses. The matter was finally settled in AD 49 by the Council of Jerusalem. Anyone who sincerely desired to follow Jesus could become a member of the Church.



Martyrdom of Peter and Paul

Peter and Paul both longed to bring the Good News to Rome. Rome was the center of the civilized world. People from every country came there. The apostles knew that if they preached the Gospel in Rome, visitors of that city would take the message of Jesus back to their own countries. In fact, the Roman Empire had more than 50,000 miles of good roads and many busy ports. That made Rome the perfect starting point for spreading faith in Jesus Christ to the whole world.

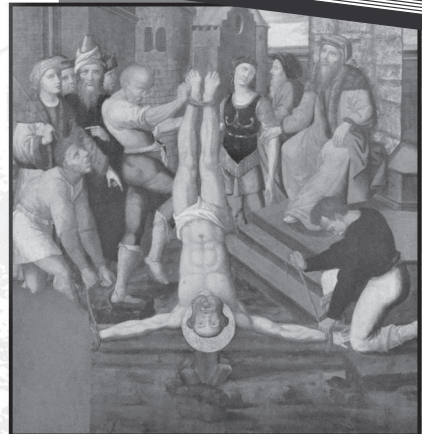
Peter secretly made his way to Rome. Paul, however, was brought as a prisoner. The Jewish leaders had been angry with him for teaching about Jesus. They would have killed him earlier, if they had been able. They couldn't because Paul was a Roman citizen. He had the right to appeal to Caesar for judgment. That is exactly what he did.

Around the year AD 64 or 67, the Emperor Nero was persecuting Christians in Rome. Peter and Paul were among the many Christians who died as martyrs. Paul was beheaded, which is how Roman citizens were executed at the time. Peter, on the other hand, was crucified. It is said that Peter did not consider himself worthy to die the way Jesus had. So he asked to be hung on the cross upside down. The relics of Peter and Paul have always been venerated by Christians in Rome. These two apostles are considered the pillars that have supported the Church throughout its history.



More than the Facts

Saint John the Evangelist was the only apostle at the cross when Jesus died. Jesus entrusted his Mother Mary to John, and the apostle cared for her as a son would do. John was also the only one of the twelve apostles to die of natural causes. The rest were martyred. John survived several attempts on his life. He was later exiled to the Greek island of Patmos. Finally he returned home and died a very old man. He wrote the Gospel of John, the three letters of John, and the Book of Revelation.



ACTIVITY

The Bible is holy. It is even more worthy of veneration than the relics of the saints. The Bible is God's word and his message of salvation. Talk to your family, teachers, or classmates about preparing a special place to display the Bible. How will you decorate this place? When we spend time reflecting on the Scriptures, our minds and hearts become "reliquaries" for God's word! Read a short piece of the Bible every day. Be sure to think about what it says—and then live by it.

The Bigger Picture

The very first Christians heard Jesus preach and saw him work miracles. Jesus himself taught them how to live. As time went on, however, these eyewitnesses began to die. It became clear that to continue passing on faith in Christ, his followers would need instruction. They would need a written account of what Jesus said and did.

As time passed, some of the apostles began to write letters about Jesus. The letters were read aloud in Christian communities. Early disciples also wrote books of history (the Acts of the Apostles) and prophecy (the Book of Revelation). Their words gave Christians hope and helped them grow in holiness. Jesus' life and teachings were written down in the Gospels by four "evangelists"—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Much, but not all, of what was written about Christian faith was collected. It became known as the New Testament.

The first century witnessed a great geographical spread of the Christian faith. Since at that time a message could only be spread by word of mouth or by letter, the apostles began to make missionary adventures. Saint Paul made several amazing journeys to start churches. He followed up his visits by writing letters to the Christians of those churches. In addition to Paul, Saint Thomas made his way east to India, where he preached the Gospel. A vibrant Catholic Christian Church exists there to this day. Saint James the Greater was another great missionary apostle. He brought the faith west to Spain. In just a few years, the Church spread from Jerusalem and Rome to the ends of the known world.

Prayer

Lord, this first century of the Church was a time of giants. The first Christians were so enthusiastic about your life and teachings. These men and women lived faith-filled lives and shared the Good News with everyone. Give the joy and excitement of discipleship to me as well.
Amen.