

“THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES”: LATERAN IV AND CHURCH ORDER

Please trust me– I do not suffer from delusions of grandeur. Even if I did, I doubt I’d choose the name of “Innocent” as my papal name! Wouldn’t go there! J That said, the reign of **Pope Innocent III** (1198-1216) was **decisive** for the Church in the high Middle Ages. He was determined to free the Church from **subservience** to the emperor and focus exclusively on **spiritual matters**. It would have been fascinating to live in this era. In the early years of his reign, he called the Fourth Crusade, which was a **disaster** for East-West relations, leading to the fall of the Byzantine Empire. But that’s another story! Meanwhile on June 15, 1215, English King John signed the **Magna Carta**, including this key provision: “by this present charter have confirmed for us and our heirs in perpetuity, that the English Church shall be free, and shall have its rights undiminished, and its liberties unimpaired.” History teaches it’s never quite that simple!

As related in Fr. Norman Tanner’s excellent “Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils,” present in the Lateran Basilica (the Cathedral Church of Rome) were “**404 bishops** from throughout the western church, and from the Latin eastern church a large number of abbots, canons and representatives of the secular power. No Greeks were present, even those invited, except the patriarch of the Maronites and a legate of the patriarch of Alexandria.” So yes, the East was minimally represented; still, the pope moved ahead with **resolve**. In his letter summoning the Council, he articulated his vision to “to uproot vices and implant virtues, to correct abuses and reform morals, to **eliminate heresies** and **strengthen** faith, to allay differences and establish peace, to check persecutions and cherish liberty, to persuade Christian princes and peoples to grant succor and support for the Holy Land from both clergy and laymen.”

The Council documents begin with a clear and concise **Confession of Faith**, though with one exception. The third paragraph stated: “There is indeed one universal church of the faithful, outside of which nobody at all is saved, in which Jesus Christ is both priest and sacrifice.” Here is a great example of how **doctrine develops** and can be clarified in succeeding generations. Q: Do Catholics believe that Church membership is necessary for salvation? A: Yes, **but**...it depends upon your operative definition of membership. If you mean a “card carrying” **visible member** of the Church, the answer is no. But if you mean that all who are saved by God are saved **by means** of Christ and His **Church**, then the **answer is yes**. (The Church clarified this doctrine in 1949 when Boston’s Fr. Leonard Feeney’s teaching caused a stir.) It’s complicated!

Lateran IV included a **clear condemnation** of heresy, which honestly is quite refreshing. The Church did not tolerate heresy– nor should we today either. That said, the **manner of enforcement** applied in the Middle Ages is almost completely untenable today, apart from **condemning the teaching** itself, declaring a teaching to be anathema. The Council insisted that those condemned of heresy be allowed to **defend their views**. No more condemnations *in absentia* as before. The Council’s canons **dealt extensively** with the church’s discipline (6-13), the reform of clerical morals (14-22), episcopal elections and the administration of benefices (23-32), exaction of taxes (33-34), canonical suits (35-49), matrimony (50-52), tithes (53-61), simony (63-66), and relations with the Jewish people (67-70). The last item is surely a dark stain on the Church, though must be understood **contextually**– perhaps the subject of a separate column.

Clearly, these 70 canons were seen as **universally applied** and regulated many areas of Church life at a time when church authority was strong. But the breakdown of East-West relations was most unfortunate. Overly zealous Crusaders sacked Constantinople in 1204, leading to “bad blood”

with the **Greeks**, who were too facilely **blamed** for the **schism**. There were plenty of creative and helpful teachings, including the minimum requirement of **annual confession** and Holy Communion (#21). The next Canon (#22) forbade “any physician, under pain of anathema, to prescribe anything for the bodily health of a sick person that may endanger his soul.” This likely referred to astrology, charms, magical potions, etc. Medicine, medieval style! Canon 23 decreed that dioceses were “not to remain **without a prelate** for more than three months.” That seems to have fallen on deaf ears in 2021, at least in **Gaylord, MI** (vacant since 25 March 2020) and **New Ulm, MN** (vacant since 6 August 2020) respectively!

Canon 51 prohibited “clandestine” marriages by requiring wedding to be announced publicly. Nine centuries later, the Church **still requires** this, usually in the form of banns published in the bulletin three times before the wedding date. While **extremely rare**, it has happened that someone objects after seeing the banns, relaying either grave concerns or even tipping off the Church that someone is civilly married. After all, a Catholic wedding is a sacrament with civil effects and as such is public, not private. Overall, the Council addressed significant issues forthrightly and with resolve. It also demonstrated the pride of place the Church held in the lives of so many Catholics at the time. (To be continued).

- If you haven’t followed the horrific **quadruple** murder that ended with a ditched van in a Wisconsin farm field, know of the incredible detective work that resulted in apprehending two suspects. In real time, **detectives** reviewed surveillance video and traced pinging phones, piecing together a complicated flurry of activity. Pray for our **St. Paul Police**, who work under the most stressful of circumstances. May their patron, St. Michael the Archangel, protect them!
- California continues to **tarnish** the memory of **St. Junipero Serra**, vowing to replace his statue at the CA State Capitol with those honoring Indigenous populations. Assembly Bill 338 takes a complicated period of history, claiming “Enslavement of both adults and children, mutilation, genocide, and assault on women were all part of the mission period initiated and overseen by Father Serra.” In fact, the “war of extermination,” began 60 years after he died! Serious historians have **never** made such **sweeping** claims. Facts no longer matter.
- We are making progress with our re-start of **coffee and donuts** after the Sunday 10:00 a.m. Mass. Through a generous gift from the Men’s Association, a new 21st century **coffee maker**, will arrive in a few weeks! While we wait, we need to develop a **volunteer** crew to assist us. Please call the parish office if you are willing to be part of a team even once per month.
- Haven’t visited an art museum lately? I recommend the **Minneapolis Institute of Arts**. It was the venue for a birthday party for my sister-in-law, who volunteers as a docent. She was surprised with an **original painting** commissioned for the Mia! The museum houses 90,000 art works over a 5000-year period.
- The **TC Marathon** returns next Sunday. Consider attending **evening** Mass **Saturday** (5:15) or **Sunday**, (5:00), when open roads provide easy access to our lot. Your support is vital.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector