

## Lesson 5

# DEFENDERS OF TRUE FAITH



St. Paul instructs the faithful at Galatia thus “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - note that there is an other gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed! As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaimed to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed!”(Gal. 1:6-9)

The sources of true faith are the sacred scriptures and traditions. The right and the authority to teach and interpret them is with the Church. We must study the Word of God, sitting in the lap of the mother Church. From the beginning of the Church, there have been people who gave wrong teachings. The Church has been ever alert to save the faithful from such teachings and to give correct teachings.

## Schisms and Heresies

Schism is standing opposed to the Church, without getting united to her. The doctrines against Christian faith is known as heresy. Heresies are formed in connection with the mysteris of faith. Heresy is rejecting the true teachings of the Church and teaching against it. Main heresies are developed with regard to the Holy Trinity, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit. In the history of the Church, there have been many heresies like monarchianism, Aryanism, Appollonarism, Nestorianism, Abiyonitism, adoptionism, Manicheism, argument on single nature etc. It is those heresies that provided occasions to define true faith at proper times.

Monarchianism is the false doctrine that since God is one, there are no three persons like Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. The chief proponent of this is Sabellius who lived in Asiaminor in the 3rd century. The council of Nicaea teaches that this heresy about the Holy Trinity is unacceptable. Aryanism is a heresy that disturbed the Church in the 4th century. The one who spread this heresy most is the priest Arius who lived in Alexandria. Arius taught that the Son of God - the Word-is not God truly but a creature like others who were created from nothingness. In 325, the council of Nicaea condemned Aryanism.

**Activity-1.** Discuss with the teacher the false teachings around us that are against the true teachings of the Church.

Appollonarism has a different teaching. It says that, divine nature and human nature cannot dwell in a person in their fulness. The Son received a human body without the soul. The word of God acted as the soul in this body. Appollonaris, the bishop of Lavodokia, introduced this false teaching. The local synod of bishops who assembled at Alexandria in 362 rejected this teaching as heresy. The final decision was taken by the 1st council of Constantinople.

While explaining the divine and human nature of Jesus Christ, Nestorianism teaches that there are two persons in Jesus Christ based on the two natures in him. This teaching is known in connection with Nestorius, a patriarch of constantinople. In 431, the council of Ephesus rejected it.

## False Teachings of the Modern Era

Following the protestant reformation under the leadership of Martin Luther, there have been several false teachings against the doctrines of faith of the Catholic Church. We see such wrong teachings in the different sects of the protestants and pentacostal communities. Witnesses of Yahweh denies the divine nature of Jesus. They are variants of the early heresies like Aryanism and Monarchism.

Heresies that arose at different times persuaded the Church to give authentic teachings on the doctrines of faith. The chief purpose of early councils was to give such teachings against heresies. Holy doctors of the Church came forward to curse heresies and to preserve true faith. We must be alert not to be influenced by such false teachings and to live in true Catholic faith.

## Apostolic Fathers

Christian writers who lived in the first century had direct acquaintance with either the apostles or their followers. They were able to keep the teaching of the apostles untarnished. Hence they are called apostolic fathers. Half of their writings are letters and articles. The rest is doctrinal teachings. St. Clement of Rome, St. Barnabas, St. Ignatius, St. Polycarp, and Papias of Hyropolis belong to this category.

## Apologists

Persons who wrote and acted against the threats and accusations raised against Christianity in the 2nd century and who tried to defend the true faith of the Church through such writings are known as apologists. They confessed their true faith even to the political rulers who persecuted Christians. They preserved many in Christian faith. Their writings are known as 'apology'. It means books or decrees written to defend true faith explaining the truths of faith.



**Activity-2.** What are the abstacles that you experience to live your faith ? Discuss in the class how they can be overcome and prepare a report of it.

## Fathers of the Church

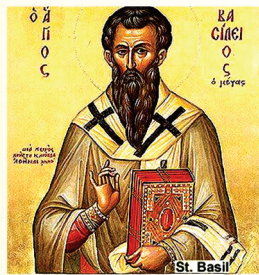
Fathers of the Church are saints who lived during the first seven centuries, recognised by the Church and who gave authentic teachings to the Church.

Their role in defending faith is very significant. Important among the fathers of the Church are St. Athanasius, St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine, St. Ephrem, etc.



### St. Athanasius (295-373)

He was born in Alexandria in A D 295 and became the bishop of that place in 328. He is a great theologian and father of the Church. He fought against Aryan heresy and declared and taught the Nicaea creed. He has written interpretations of the Word of God and other doctrinal books defending faith. He died in 373.



### St. Basil (329-379)

He was born at Caesarea in Asia-minor in 329 A D and became the bishop of Caesarea. He tried hard to spread the doctrines of the Council of Nicaea and to fight against Aryanism and Sebellianism. He is known as the father of Eastern Religious Orders.

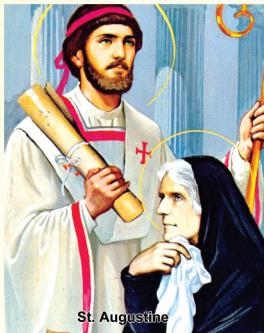
### St. John Chrysostom (349-407)

Born in 349 in a noble family in Antioch, he became a priest in 386. He was an eloquent orator and his main field of missionary activity was preaching. He became the bishop of



Constantinople in 397. He was an expert in explaining the truth of faith in a very simple way. He has contributed a lot of books to the Church. He died in Pontus in 407.

### **St. Augustine (354-430)**

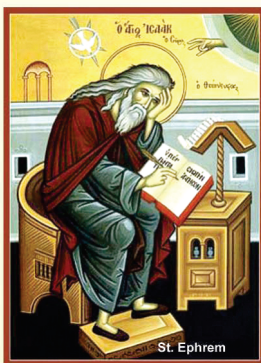


He was born at Thagasthe in Africa in 354. His father Patritius was a non-Christian and his mother Monica was a Christian. Though he was a prey to many youthful temptations, he was converted due to the incessant prayer of his mother. The rest of his life was a pure search for God. He became a priest and a bishop and has written many spiritual books. Among them, the important ones are his autobiography 'Confessions' and 'The City of God'.

### **Fathers of the Church of the Eastern Syrian Rite**

The arena of activity of the Fathers of the Church of Eastern Syrian rite were those areas that witnessed the teachings and activities of Jesus. The language that they used was Syriac, a language formed from Aramaic. They tried to uphold the greatness of the Syrian Church, explaining the divine and moral truths in accordance with the traditions, when false teachings were gaining ground. They were interested in enriching the liturgy and giving hope and enthusiasm to religious life in the Syrian rite. Among them Thasian, Afrathas, St. Ephrem, St. Jacob of Sarug, Narsai of Sisibus, St. Ephrem occupies an important place.

### **St. Ephrem (306-373)**



The most famous among the Fathers of the Church of the Eastern rite is St. Ephrem. Born at Nisibus in Syria in 306, Ephrem spent his last days in Edessa. He was interested in learning the Bible, teaching the Bible and in writing books. He was a doctor who presented deep divine truths in a simple way through beautiful poems and hymns. Most of his writings are in poetic form. He composed simple and beautiful poems, so as

to make the most important truths of faith be understood by ordinary people and he is called 'Harp (Veena) of the Holy Spirit'.

He developed two centres of knowledge in Edessa and Nisibus. They were able to contribute much to the Eastern churches, especially the Syrian church. This scholar and saint and the lover of the Church died on 7th June, 373.

The fidelity which the Fathers of the Church had for true faith and the concern and interest they had to impart the truths of faith to posterity are worthy of imitation by us, the children of the Church. Imitating them, let us be loyal to the true faith and live accordingly.

### **Let us Read the Word of God and Meditate**

1 Jn. 2:18-27

### **A Word of God to Remember**

"But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a Gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed."

(Gal. 1:8)

### **Let us Pray**

Lord Jesus, help us not to deviate from true faith influenced by wrong teachings.

### **My Decision**

I will not read any publications against faith and morals.

### **Let us think with the Church**

The Church, the spouse of the incarnate word of God, instructed by the Holy Spirit is ever interested in trying to gain more deep wisdom about the sacred scriptures. She desires to constantly nourish her children with the divine word. It is because of this that the Church encourages all to study the books of the Eastern and Western Fathers of the Church and the Sacred liturgy (DV 24)

### **Let us find out the answers**

1. What is the difference between schism and heresy ?
2. Write a note on Apostolic Fathers.
3. Who are the Fathers of the Church ? What is their role in defending faith ?
4. Write a short note on St. Ephrem.
5. Prepare a brief description of St. Augustine.