



Early Church Fathers

Instructor: Deacon Jason Stewart

Overview:

People of faith have sometimes referred to history as “His Story”. Catholics believe that every nook and cranny of the history of the world has been governed by our good and all-powerful God. Nothing happens without the influence of his sovereign will. This is especially true of the history of the Catholic Church. All the twists and turns, triumphs and tragedies of the Church Jesus established have unfolded according to an eternal plan known only to God before time began. It is a history that has already spanned two millennia, and if God wills it, many more.

Our baptisms make us witnesses to this history, but God wants us to go a step further and become students of it. There is much to learn. Thankfully we can conveniently divide church history into its early, middle, and more modern periods.

The era of the Church Fathers comprises the earliest period of Church history. The great figures and events populating this time literally shaped the structures and foundational dogmas of the Catholic Church for ages to come. This course will focus attention on the major Fathers of the Church and how the events of their lives influenced the trajectory of Catholic theology. A special emphasis will be given to how reading these ancient Fathers can enhance our own understanding of the faith and serve as a tool in reaching Christians from Protestant traditions who have yet to embrace the apostolic faith of the Catholic Church.

Helpful Readings in Preparation for the Class:

[Fathers of the Church \(The Catholic Encyclopedia\)](#)

[Online listing to most of the major works of the Fathers of the Church](#) (you may want to dip in and sample some of their writings to gain a little familiarity with the better known Fathers) - Major Apostolic Fathers are St. Clement of Rome, St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Justin Martyr, and St. Irenaeus of Lyons. Important later Fathers would be men like St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Athanasius, St. John Chrysostom, etc.