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CHURCH HISTORY MONTHLY

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Timeline of Topics

- Quote
- St Patrick (d. 460)
- Early Medieval Christianity
- Life of St Patrick
- World Christianity
- Why are there 24 different Catholic Churches?

New Trinitas class starting this week:
New Testament Canonization (How we got the NT) and
New Testament Apocrypha
(Books not included in the NT):
6 weeks

Patrick's clear sense of purpose comes through in this writing. As he stated in section 44: "I do not believe in my own powers, as long as I shall continue in this mortal flesh, because he (the flesh) is strong, who daily strives to turn me away from the faith and from the purity of religion that is without any pretense right up to my very last breath in Christ my Lord. Yet my enemy the flesh continually drags me down to death, I mean indulgence in illicit pleasures. And I well know in part why I have not led a perfect life, just like other believers, but still I confess my Lord and I do not blush for shame in his sight. Neither do I lie, for I have known him from my youth, and the love of God and the fear of him have grown in me, and up till now, by God's goodwill, I have kept the faith."



Statue of Patrick holding a shamrock (three-leaved clover).

St Patrick's Day: March 17

Who was St. Patrick?

St Patrick's Day is known as a day to wear green. But who was the man behind the celebration? Patrick (390?-460?) is known as the "Apostle of the Irish," although he was not Irish and was originally a slave.

Knowledge of Patrick's life is scant, yet this much is widely accepted: He was born in Britain in a Christian family. At 16, he was kidnapped by pirates and taken to Ireland as a slave. After six years, he believed God told him to escape. He traveled 200 miles to the southeastern coast of Ireland (closest to England) where he found passage on a ship and landed back in Britain. Eventually he made it home, a much different man than when he had left almost seven years earlier.

His change came in the form of a desire to become a priest. He underwent the necessary training and was sent as a "Bishop of Ireland" back to the land where he had lived as a slave. He spent the rest of his life in Ireland, evangelizing the people, and setting up a strong Christian presence among the Irish. His influence was so strong that today 80% of Irish are Catholic.

Only one of Patrick's writings is known to exist. This book, known as "The Confession of Saint Patrick," was written toward the end of his life. (In that time, the title "Confession" meant "autobiography.") It is only about fifty pages in a small paperback.

But still, why is March 17 called St Patrick's Day? Because that is the accepted date of his death. This celebration was brought over by Irish immigrants to the colonies, with the first recorded celebration of St Patrick's Day being in Boston in 1737. In addition, the St Patrick's Day Parade in New York City has been held since 1762. And the shamrocks? The story goes that Patrick explained the Trinity of God, Three in One, by using a three-leaved clover: three leaves but part of the same plant.

“I arise today through God’s strength
to pilot me;
God’s might to uphold me,
God’s wisdom to guide me,
God’s ear to hear me,
God’s word to speak for me,
God’s hand to guard me,
God’s way to lie before me,
God’s shield to protect me afar and
anear, alone or in a multitude.”
Prayer ascribed to St. Patrick
(d. late 400s)(Part of a longer poem)

1. Coptic Catholic Church
2. Eritrean Catholic Church
3. Ethiopian Catholic Church
4. Maronite Church
5. Syrian Catholic Church
6. Syro-Malankara Catholic Church
7. Armenian Catholic Church
8. Chaldean Catholic Church
9. Syro-Malabar Church
10. Albanian Catholic Church
11. Belarusian Catholic Church
12. Bulgarian Catholic Church
13. Croatian Byzantine Catholic Church or
Croatian Greek Catholic Church
14. Greek Catholic Church
15. Hungarian Catholic Church
16. Italo-Albanian Catholic Church
17. Macedonian Catholic Church
18. Melkite Greek Catholic Church
19. Romanian Church United with Rome
20. Russian Catholic Church
21. Ruthenian Catholic Church
22. Slovak Catholic Church
23. Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church

Questions, comments, or want to join
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The Catholic Church: It is not what you think it is: There are 24 of them

-When most people hear of the Catholic Church, they think of the church headquartered in Rome and led by the pope. For most conversations you will have, that assumption is correct. But there are 24 different Catholic Churches: The one you think of and 23 other Catholic Churches.

-Part of the misunderstanding comes from an assumption of almost all Protestants (and probably most Roman Catholics) that the Catholic Church is one institution. Almost all Protestants and Catholics think that same thing about Orthodox churches. But the opposite is true: Catholics (and Orthodox, but that is for a later article) are similar to Protestants in that they encompass different groups with similar theological understandings.

-The Catholic Church that most people think of when they hear the phrase “Catholic Church” is technically the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). The 23 other Catholic Churches are listed to the left.

-But what are the differences and similarities between these 23 Churches and the RCC? To boil down a complex issue into a short column, we will focus on this: much of the differences come from national and/or cultural differences and loyalties.

-To make a rough comparison, think about the USA. There is one federal government and 50 smaller state governments. So, all 50 states have their own rules, often reflecting their unique cultural and social understandings. But, over all of that, the federal government keeps them connected through a focus on larger issues, like national security. Therefore, you have states’ rights and federal regulations.

-Something roughly similar happens with the 24 Catholic Churches. Each of the churches exercises its own particular worship style reflecting the culture of its region. For example, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church will have different liturgies (forms of carrying out worship) that are different than the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church that is located in India. Each religious region will have a separate history that is reflected in their churches along with different styles of singing and even how to interact between people and clergy.

-But this is the interesting part: they all look to the Roman pope as a source of authority over doctrine (but not practice). Each has its own form of leadership, which can range from having leaders known as a patriarch, an archbishop, a metropolitan, etc. They are attached to the RCC and fall (we would say loosely) under his authority, but they have their own leadership structures that are not part of the Roman Catholic Church. This is known as being “sui iuris,” which is Latin for “of one’s own right.”

-And how many people are in the 23 smaller Catholic Churches? A combined membership of around 18 million.