

St. John's Newsletter



Doctors of the Church

Of the thousands of saints in 2,000 years, only 37 have been identified as Doctors of the Church. What does this mean? Why were they chosen? How are they identified and why should we care?

Jesus is the first teacher, the center of our understanding of our God and our faith. He chose the apostles who led the early Church; and established a teaching authority to speak for him. He built His Church on the Apostles and sent the Holy Spirit to guide. The fullness of the gifts of guidance and authority He reserves for the Successors of the Apostles.

The word **Doctor** itself comes from the Latin *docere*, meaning "to teach." It is in this literal sense that the title "Doctor of the Church" is

bestowed on certain individuals whose teaching has greatly benefited the life of the Church. There are three requisites for this highly distinguished title: **holiness of life, importance and orthodoxy of writings and official recognition by the Church.**

As **Pope St John Paul II** explains:

Indeed, when the Magisterium proclaims someone a Doctor of the Church, it intends to point out to all the faithful, particularly to those who perform in the Church the fundamental service of preaching or who undertake the delicate task of theological teaching and research, that the doctrine professed and proclaimed by a certain person can be a reference point, not only because it conforms to revealed truth, but also because it sheds new light on the mysteries of the faith, a deeper understanding of Christ's mystery."

Through the centuries, great teachers and writers have helped to make clear when there was controversy of belief. By preaching, teaching and writing, they took part in the ongoing quest for a deeper understanding of the truth about Jesus Christ.

The first Church doctors were declared by Pope Boniface VIII in the 13th century: Sts. Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Pope Gregory the Great. The first women to be named as church doctors were Sts. Teresa of Ávila and Catherine of Siena in 1970 by Pope Paul VI.

In January 2022, Pope Francis bestowed the title doctor of the church on **St. Irenaeus of Lyons**, a Christian bishop who died about A.D. 200. In declaring him a Doctor of the Church, Pope Francis has assigned him the title *doctor unitatis* or "doctor of unity." Christians in both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches have venerated him as a saint. To read more about St. Irenaeus, go to <https://www.osvnews.com/2022/02/11/a-look-at-the-newest-doctor-of-the-church-st-irenaeus/>

Online Sources: <https://catholic-link.org/doctors-of-the-church-part-1/>
<https://www.simplycatholic.com/exploring-the-doctors-of-the-church/>
<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2022/01/21/220121b.html>

