

Faith Tidbits..
a little food for thought
and some knowledge
about your
Catholic faith

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This monthly series will answer questions you always wondered about or questions you never even thought to ask... all about our Catholic Faith.

If you have a question you want answered, call Diane Hardick at 633-3672.

What are some of the key Councils of the church and what did they do?

You can read about the first Council in the Book of Acts, the **Council of Jerusalem**. (Councils were named by the city or location where they took place.) The first Council was called because of the number of Gentile converts S. Paul was bringing into the Christian faith. Because the earliest Christians were Jewish, the issue was whether the Gentile converts were to be circumcised, which was the sign of being a Jew. The Council decided that they did not .

Another key Council is the **Council of Nicea** in 325, called to give a definitive answer to the heresy of Arianism, which denied the divinity of Jesus. Out of this Council we have the Nicene Creed which clearly states that Jesus Christ is “the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, *begotten, not made*, one in being with the Father.” The Council of Nicea didn’t just describe the nature of the Son, it defined it.

Another key Council was the **Council of Trent** (1545-63). This Council, among other things, set the number of sacraments at 7; fixed the Canon (list of books) in the Old and New Testament; set up a seminary system for the training of priests; and ruled against Martin Luther’s doctrine of justification by faith. For Catholics, God desires the salvation of all and that God wills us to cooperate freely with divine grace in the working out of our salvation. For Luther, we can do nothing on our own. For Protestants the emphasis is on the radical unworthiness of the person, even after Jesus’ redemptive death on the Cross. The Catholic tradition, on the other hand, insists that God not only declares our worthiness for salvation, but actually transforms us and makes us new creatures in Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Another key Council is the **First Vatican Council** (1869-1870) which, along with other issues of faith, promulgate the teaching of *papal infallibility* (which literally means “immunity from error”). The Pope is empowered with the charism of infallibility only when he is in the act of defining a dogma of faith. As we know the Pope has only spoken *infallibly* two times: on the teaching of the Immaculate Conception of Mary and of the Assumption of Mary. No other time since Vatican I has the Pope used this charism.

Prior to the **Second Vatican Council** there were only 20 Church Councils in the 2,000 year history of the Church. Vatican II was the 21st Council, called by Pope John XXIII in 1959, running through 1965. Vatican II was the largest in numbers. Vatican I (1869-1870) had only 737 bishops and other officials in attendance. There were 2600 bishops in attendance at Vatican II. Over 2,908 bishops were eligible to come, but some bishops could not attend because they were not permitted to leave their Communist countries. If you include theologians and other experts, there were nearly 3,000 in attendance at Vatican II. Vatican II was also the most representative in terms of nations and culture, and almost every major Christian Church was also represented at the Council. Vatican II was also the first Council of the Church to have electric lights, telephones and typewriters – no computers were yet in use. It was also the first Council to be covered by television and radio, newspapers and magazines from all over the world. Vatican II began the movement toward a genuine world Church. Pope John XXIII said he felt called by God to announce this Council because he said the Church needed to “read the signs of the times” to better accomplish the Mission of Jesus Christ in the modern world. Vatican II brought dramatic changes in the Mass; a deeper understanding of who we are as Church; the role of the laity; religious freedom; and historic advances in Ecumenism.