

Athanasius of Alexandria

298-373 Bishop & Theologian Feast Day: May 2

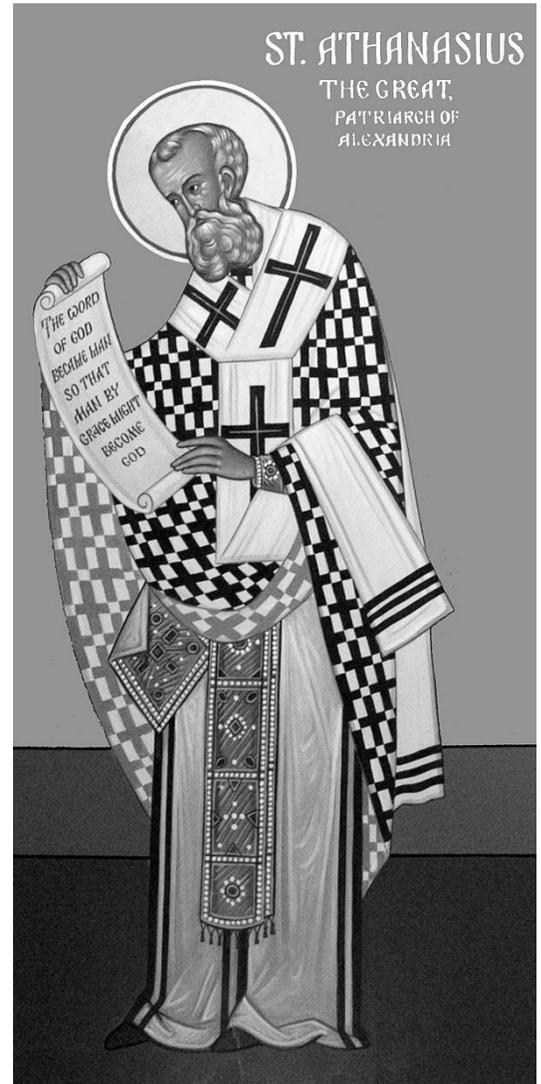
Uphold your Church, O God of truth, as you upheld your servant Athanasius, to maintain and proclaim boldly the catholic faith against all opposition, trusting solely in the grace of your eternal Word, who took upon himself our humanity that we might share his divinity; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Rarely in the history of the Church has the course of its development been more significantly determined by one person than it was by Athanasius in the fourth century. Gregory of Nazianzus called him "the pillar of the Church," and Basil the Great said he was "the God-given physician of her wounds."

Athanasius was born about 295 in Alexandria, and was ordained deacon in 319. He quickly attracted attention by his opposition to the presbyter Arius, whose denial of the full divinity of the Second Person of the Trinity was gaining widespread acceptance. Alexander, the Bishop of Alexandria, took Athanasius as his secretary and adviser to the first Ecumenical Council, at Nicaea in 325, which dealt with the Arian conflict. Athanasius was successful in winning approval for the phrase in the Nicene Creed which has ever since been recognized as expressing unequivocally the full godhead of the Son: "of one Being with the Father" (homoousios).

When Alexander died in 328, Athanasius became bishop. He fearlessly defended the Nicene Christology against emperors, magistrates, bishops, and theologians. Five times he was sent into exile. He often seemed to stand alone for the orthodox faith. "Athanasius contra mundum (against the world)" became a by-word. Yet, by the time of his last exile, his popularity among the citizens of Alexandria was so great that the Emperor had to recall him to avoid insurrection in the city.

Athanasius wrote voluminously: biblical interpretation, theological exposition, sermons, and letters. His treatise, *On the Incarnation of the Word of God*, is a still widely read classic. In it, he writes, "The Savior of us all, the Word of God, in his great love took to himself a body and moved as Man among men, meeting their senses, so to speak, half way. He became himself an object for the senses, so that those who were seeking God in sensible things might apprehend the Father through the works which he, the Word of God, did in the body. Human and human-minded as men were, therefore, to whichever side they looked in the sensible world, they found themselves taught the truth."



1 John 5:1-5

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Psalm 71:1-8

- 1 In you, O Lord,
have I taken refuge;
let me never
be ashamed.
- 2 In your righteousness,
deliver me
and set me free;
incline your ear to
me and save me.
- 3 Be my strong rock,
a castle
to keep me safe;
you are my crag
and my stronghold.

- 4 Deliver me, my God,
from the hand
of the wicked,
from the clutches
of the evildoer
and the oppressor.
- 5 For you are my hope,
O Lord God,
my confidence
since I was young.
- 6 I have been sustained
by you ever since
I was born;
from my mother's
womb you have been
my strength;
my praise shall be
always of you.
- 7 I have become a
portent to many;
but you are my
refuge and my
strength.
- 8 Let my mouth be full
of your praise
and your glory
all the day long.

Matthew 10:22-32

And you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven.