



St. Athanasius
May 2

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c. 296–373 • Egypt

When Athanasius was a young man, the bishop of Alexandria in Egypt recognized in Athanasius someone who would serve the Church. He ordained Athanasius a deacon and made him his personal secretary.

In those times, a man named Arius was spreading a false teaching about Jesus. Arius claimed that Jesus was not equal to the Father and not fully God. Many people began to believe this false teaching (called Arianism because Arius taught it). The Church was troubled and divided. In 325, the Emperor Constantine called together a council of bishops so that they could bring peace back to the Church and explain the truth about Jesus. The bishop of Alexandria went to the council, and he brought with him his secretary Athanasius.

At the council, Athanasius bravely defended the truth that Jesus is fully God. Athanasius shined in the debates—his words were clear and full of energy. All that watched him knew that he would become a strong leader in the Church.

His words convinced the bishops at the council that Arius's teachings were false. And so, the council of bishops declared that Jesus is fully God and equal to the Father. This important council was called the Council of Nicaea, and from it we receive the Nicene Creed that we pray today at Sunday Mass.

Soon after the council ended, the bishop of Alexandria lay on his deathbed. He called Athanasius to him to say goodbye. The rest of the bishops gathered to elect someone to replace the dying bishop. The people surrounded the church in which they were gathered and cried out, "Give us Athanasius!" The bishops knew that Athanasius would defend the Faith, so they agreed to make him the next bishop of Alexandria. Athanasius was only thirty years old.

At first, Athanasius did not want to be bishop. He knew that his life would be full of struggles. Even though the Church had declared that Arianism was wrong, many powerful people still believed it. These people spread lies about Athanasius, and the Emperor Constantine believed those lies and banished Athanasius from Alexandria. When the emperor died, Athanasius returned; but he was exiled from his city five more times because he defended the truth about Jesus. But Athanasius never stopped teaching the truth to the Christians under his care, and he died a holy death.

St. Athanasius, help me never to be afraid to stand up for the truth!