



Get to know the Church Fathers: A reading list to deepen your faith

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Outside of the New Testament, there may be no Christian writings that put us more in touch with the faith than the Fathers of the Church. Some of the earlier Fathers actually knew the Apostles. Christians seeking to grow in their faith would do well to “tolle, lege” — take up and read — the Fathers of the Church, to quote one of the better-known Church Fathers, St. Augustine of Hippo.

The New Advent website has a comprehensive list of Church Fathers, linking to some of their major writings. But the list is quite long. After all, it represents writers who lived from roughly A.D. 100 to A.D. 800. So, aside from scrolling down the list to see what titles sound appealing, how can we discern which of them is best to read?

Marcellino D’Ambrosio points out that there is a convenient, ready-made “reading list” in a book that is used by priests, religious and many laypeople already. It’s called the Office of Readings, part of the Liturgy of the Hours, the formal prayer used in the Church outside of Mass.

“In the revision of the Divine Office mandated by the Second Vatican Council, the late night hour of ‘vigils’ was transformed into the ‘Office of Readings,’ which can be done at any hour of the day,” Marcellino writes at Catholic Answers. “It includes one of the longer psalms (broken up into three parts), a page-long reading from the Bible, and a non-biblical page-long commentary—usually from one of the Church Fathers — on the biblical reading, the liturgical season, or the saint of the day. Thus the Office of Readings is a kind of ‘Fathers’ greatest hits,’ an introduction to the most accessible, inspirational, and instructive nuggets from the patristic goldmine.”

The Office of Readings is available both in print and online and, says Marcellino, is “the most accessible entry into the world of the Fathers.” In the meantime, here is a sample of readings, with excerpts and links to where you can find them online:

St. Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Ephesians:

The last times have come upon us. Let us therefore be of a reverent spirit, and fear the long-suffering of God, that it tend not to our condemnation. For let us either stand in awe of the wrath to come, or show regard for the grace which is at present displayed — one of two things. Only [in one way or another] let us be found in Christ Jesus unto the true life. Apart from Him, let nothing attract you

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies:

Error, indeed, is never set forth in its naked deformity, lest, being thus exposed, it should at once be detected. But it is craftily decked out in an attractive dress, so as, by its outward form, to make it appear to the inexperienced (ridiculous as the expression may seem) more true than the truth itself.

St. Athanasius, De Incarnatione Verbum:

For it were not worthy of God's goodness that the things He had made should waste away, because of the deceit practiced on men by the devil. Especially it was unseemly to the last degree that God's handicraft among men should be done away, either because of their own carelessness, or because of the deceitfulness of evil spirits.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 1:

It is the Day of the Resurrection, and my Beginning has good auspices. Let us then keep the Festival with splendor, and let us embrace one another. Let us say Brethren, even to those who hate us.

St. John Chrysostom, Homily 1 on Matthew:

Was not one evangelist sufficient to tell all? One indeed was sufficient; but if there be four that write, not at the same times, nor in the same places, neither after having met together, and conversed one with another, and then they speak all things as it were out of one mouth, this becomes a very great demonstration of the truth.

Taken and adapted from aleteia.org written by John Burger