



Invest time each week to expand your vocabulary and deepen your faith.

28 April 2024

WORD OF THE WEEK

Doctor of the Church

\ˈdäk-tər ˈəv ˈthə ˌtʃɜrch\

Doctor, from the Latin *docere*, meaning “to teach”; an eminent teacher of the faith, canonized and recognized as such by the pope or church council. Originally eight in number, four were chosen from the Eastern Church and four from the West. To date there are 37 **church doctors**, including four women.

Pronunciation: <https://tinyurl.com/Take5-Doctor-of-the-Church>

CONTEXT

The **doctors of the church** were apostles of the pen. —*Homiletics & Pastoral Review*

Doctor of the church ... is an honorific reserved for those recognized as superlative sources of great wisdom and holiness. —*James Keene in America*

In theological discussion, particular respect is paid to the writings and opinions of those designated **doctors of the church**, because they are deemed to represent the Tradition in a noteworthy degree. —*Monika K. Hellwig*

WHY IT MATTERS

Sometimes in the moral life you need an umpire who has the authority to call it fair or foul. **Doctors of the church** have proven that their careful perspective on matters of faith can be trusted, particularly by their witness of holiness and dedication to learning.

From the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ website: “To be declared a **Doctor of the Church** does not imply that all their writings are free from error but rather that the whole body of their work, taken together serves to advance the cause of Christ and his Church.”

RELATED WORDS

Holiness | Church fathers | Saints | Magisterium

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Who are the doctors of the church?

Doctors of the church are always canonized saints, defined by three criteria: eminent learning, a high degree of sanctity, and proclamation by a pope or council. Their naming isn’t an infallible decision and doesn’t presume their writings are free from error. A doctor’s primary significance is as Confessor of the faith. That is why martyrs, such as Ignatius and Cyprian, were originally excluded. Irenaeus of Lyon was added in 2022, however, so doctor-martyrs are now a possibility.

Currently, there are 37 **doctors of the church**, with 17 being from religious orders: Five Benedictines; three each of Carmelites, Dominicans, and Franciscans; two Jesuits; and one Redemptorist. Each doctor reveals an avenue of grace through unique achievements in such areas as apologetics, homiletics, history, education, science, art, music, poetry, catechesis, mysticism, morality, and spirituality.

—*Alice Camille, from Questions Catholics Ask <http://tinyurl.com/QCA-Doctor-of-the-Church>*

REFLECTION OF THE WEEK

MEMORIAL OF CATHERINE OF SIENA, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH (APRIL 29)

Follow the doctor’s advice

Catherine of Siena transcended the narrow roles to which Medieval laypeople—and women in particular—were subject. She gave wise counsel to popes, negotiated settlements, kept a continuous correspondence with her followers throughout Italy, and composed *The Dialogue*, an account of her conversation with God, which is widely considered a masterpiece of spiritual literature and contributed to her being named a **doctor of the church**. Amazingly she accomplished all this despite being almost completely illiterate! How? She dictated everything.

READINGS: Acts 14:5-18; John 14:21-26 (285 <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/042924.cfm>). “*The Advocate, the Holy Spirit . . . will teach you everything.*”

FAITH IN ACTION

Each one of us has shortcomings. Today, before you feel defeated by a limitation, heed Catherine’s advice: “Don’t look at your weaknesses. Realize instead that in Christ crucified you can do everything.”