

Tridentine Community News

November 16, 2025 – Twenty-third Sunday After Pentecost

The 21 Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church

This week's column has been guest written by James Murphy.

Throughout her history, the Catholic Church has convened 21 Ecumenical Councils, each guided by the Holy Ghost to safeguard, define, and defend the deposit of faith. According to Catholic teaching, a council is considered ecumenical when it is lawfully convoked by the Roman Pontiff, attended (at least representatively) by bishops from the universal Church, and confirmed by the Pope, whose approval gives its decrees binding authority over all the faithful. These councils have not only defined dogma and clarified doctrine, but have also condemned heresies and schisms, and imposed anathemas upon those who obstinately opposed revealed truth. A council cannot disregard or modify the teachings of a previous council. From the early councils that proclaimed the divinity of Christ to the later ones that addressed reform and renewal within the Church, each has played a decisive role in preserving unity, defending orthodoxy, and shaping the life and teaching of the Catholic Church. The following is a list of these twenty-one Ecumenical Councils in their historical order:

First Council of Nicaea (325)

Condemned Arianism; defined Christ's divinity; produced the Nicene Creed.

First Council of Constantinople (381)

Reaffirmed Nicaea; condemned Macedonianism; completed the Nicene Creed.

Council of Ephesus (431)

Condemned Nestorianism; defined Mary as Theotokos (Mother of God).

Council of Chalcedon (451)

Condemned Monophysitism; defined Christ as one Person in two natures.

Second Council of Constantinople (553)

Condemned the 'Three Chapters'; reaffirmed Chalcedon.

Third Council of Constantinople (680–681)

Condemned Monothelitism; defined Christ's two wills and operations.

Second Council of Nicaea (787)

Restored veneration of images; distinguished veneration from worship.

Fourth Council of Constantinople (869–870)

Addressed the Photian Schism; reaffirmed papal authority.

First Lateran Council (1123)

Reform council; confirmed clerical celibacy; settled investiture issues.

Second Lateran Council (1139)

Continued reform against simony and clerical marriage.

Third Lateran Council (1179)

Regulated papal elections; condemned Albigensian heresy

Fourth Lateran Council (1215)

Defined Transubstantiation; required annual confession; reaffirmed Church necessity for salvation.

First Council of Lyons (1245)

Deposed Emperor Frederick II; addressed Church reform and crusades.

Second Council of Lyons (1274)

Temporary reunion with Greeks; defined Purgatory; reaffirmed papal primacy.

Council of Vienne (1311–1312)

Suppressed Knights Templar; discussed reform and a new crusade.

Council of Constance (1414–1418)

Ended Western Schism; condemned Wycliffe and Hus; elected Martin V.

Council of Florence (1431–1445)

Sought reunion with East; defined Filioque; clarified sacramental theology.

Fifth Lateran Council (1512–1517)

Called for reform; addressed clerical discipline before Reformation.

Council of Trent (1545–1563)

Defined doctrine against Protestantism; reformed liturgy and seminaries.

First Vatican Council (1869–1870)

Defined Papal Infallibility; reaffirmed harmony of faith and reason.

Second Vatican Council (1962–1965)

Addressed Church in modern world; emphasized laity, holiness, and renewal.



Tridentine Masses This Coming Week

Tue. 11/18 7:00 PM: Low Mass at *St. Benedict/Holy Name of Mary, Windsor* (Dedication of the Basilicas of Ss. Peter & Paul)