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January 2

**John II**

*January 2, 533 – May 8, 535*

John was the first pope to change his name, as he felt that the name given him at birth, Mercurius, sounded too heathen. During the unusually long papal vacancy of two and a half months that preceded his election, conspiracy and corruption were widespread. The papal candidates were engaging in canvassing and simony, even using sacred objects and charitable contributions to the end of being elected pope. As a result of this, Athalaric, king of the Ostrogoths, renewed a decree issued by the Senate in 530, which declared simony in papal elections a punishable crime. A copy of the decree was engraved in marble and placed in St. Peter's.

John enjoyed good relations with both the king of the Ostrogoths and with East Roman Emperor Justinian I, the latter of whom rewarded him with valuable gifts. Justinian wished to win support from the pope for his religious policies, the goal of which was to come to a compromise with the opposition Monophysites. In an abrupt change to the course set by a predecessor, Pope Saint Hormisdas, John II accepted as dogma a decree issued by the emperor. Hormisdas had rejected as incorrect the formula, "One of the Trinity was crucified." John accepted the formula as orthodox.

The hope of coming to an agreement with the Monophysites failed, however. There was passionate opposition to Justinian's decree, especially in the cloisters. Though monks were steadfast allies of Rome, the pope nevertheless excommunicated them, in order to stay in the Court's good graces. This action on the part of John II can be viewed as an extreme example of how popes contradicted their predecessors in questions of faith.

February 25

**Stephen VI**

*896 – 897*

Following the death of Pope Formosus, the various parties, allegiances and factions in Rome set about bashing each others' heads in. After Arnulf was crowned German emperor in Rome, Stephen, the son a priest, at first tried his luck with the anti-Formosians. But once Arnulf retreated from Italy due to illness, Stephen reconsidered his own situation and joined the National Italian Party. From his position of power he soon was involved with forces that opposed the Emperor and were enemies of Formosus.

Formosus was succeeded by Pope Boniface VI, the corrupt tool of an obscure alliance of Notables. Two weeks later, his death closed the book on his office. The powerful captains of the National Party and of the Spoletan and Tuscan parties now chose Stephen as their figurehead – perhaps impressed by his plans for revenge against the followers of Formosus. According to the renowned Catholic historian, Cardinal Baronius, Stephen attained "the Holy See in violent fashion."

Driven by the fanaticism of the anti-imperial party, the pope staged one of the most barbaric spectacles in history. In February 897, Stephen convened a synod to sit in judgement upon Formosus, who had died of poisoning months earlier. Cardinals and Church dignitaries gathered for the occasion under the protection of Rome's ruler, Lambert von Spoleto. The body of Formosus was exhumed and the badly decomposed corpse dressed in vestments and set upon a throne. After placing a lawyer at his side to defend him, the pope addressed the dead man, asking, "Why did you allow ambition to lead you to usurp the Apostolic See? Weren't you Cardinal-Bishop of Porto? You left your first bride for another, and so are damned as a perjurer who abandoned his Church." Rulings from other synods were cited, which forbade bishops for exchanging one seat for another. But there also were rulings by former synods that lifted this prohibition in certain emergency situations. All in all, this was a matter of obscure Church law. The advocate's reply, if he overcame his horror long enough to speak, is not recorded. But Stephen, with the approval of all of the bishops and cardinals present, declared the defendant guilty of having attained his office through illegal means. All of those present signed the decree of deposition and sentence of damnation. The corpse then was stripped of his papal vestments, and the three fingers Formosus used in consecrations were amputated, after which the body was beheaded. The torso was dragged through the streets to fanatical cries of triumph and thrown into the Tiber to the raucous applause of the mob.

It was the time of the shocking collapse of the decrepit Lateran Basilica, a sacrilege that made the pope many new enemies. The emperor's party gained from this new enmity and in August of the same year staged an uprising. Stephen was overthrown, put in chains and dragged off to a cell, where he was strangled to death.

Baronius observes that Pope Stephen well deserved his miserable fate. He adds: Just as the sun sometimes is overshadowed by clouds, which cannot diminish its brilliance, so the radiance of the Church cannot be violated by such scandals.

February 28

**Johanna**

855

For centuries, Pope Leo IV's successor was believed to be a woman, Joan. According to this version of history Joan, who arrived in Rome following her studies in Athens, held the office of Pope for two and a half years under the name Johannes Anglicus or John of Mainz. Only when she gave birth during a procession to the Lateran Basilica (other renditions record this as having occurred as she was mounting a horse) was her true sex revealed.

The legend of "Popess Johanna" was spread from the 13th Century forward and was considered credible by both popes and members of the Curate. From the 15th Century until the mid-17th Century it was made use of in the reformist polemic against the papacy, until debunked by the reformed Church historian, David Blondel.

March 20

**Clement VI**

*May 7, 1342 – December 6, 1352*

At the same time that construction on the huge papal palace in Avignon was being completed during Clement VI's papacy, Europe was experiencing the most horrifying epidemic in recorded history, the plague known as the Black Death. Roughly one-third of Europe's population was lost. In Avignon, 400 people died every day and 7,000 houses were boarded up, all the inhabitants having died. Paris lost half of its population, Venice two-thirds, Florence four-fifths. Simple folk believed the plague to be a sign of God's displeasure, and joined huge processions of repentance that traversed the countries of Europe. Clement at first approved the processions, then banned them when they turned into plundering raids, especially against members of the clergy and Jews, in addition to accelerating the spread of the plague. When persecution of the Jews continued, he issued a Bull declaring that assertions that the Jews were the cause of the Black Plague were the work of the devil. "Due to the unfathomable will of God" the plague was affecting all people, including the Jews. As it also raged in regions in which no Jews lived, it was "not feasible" to blame the Jews. The clergy was assigned the responsibility of protecting persecuted Jews. Few Bulls of this era saw such little response.

In October 1348, the University of Paris issued a rationalization for the plague that was accepted by the educated populace: on March 20, 1345, Saturn, Jupiter and Mars came together to form a three-way constellation, set at a 40-degree angle to Aquarius. To this were added occurrences "the causes of which remain obscure to even the finest minds."

This judgement, disseminated throughout the civilized world as the official explanation of the plague, was translated into many languages and even recognized by Arabic scholars.

The pope had his own effective means of protecting himself. His physician ordered that even during the summer Clement was to seat himself between two huge fires of scented logs perpetually kept burning in his rooms. Because this measure more than likely warded off fleas – which spread the plague – the pope in fact remained healthy. see also: May 7; July 23

April 15

**John X**

*March/April 914 – May/June 92*

At the instigation of the influential senator Theodora the Elder of Rome, John assumed the Throne of Peter in March 914. John and Theodora were lovers, according to a report by Bishop Luitprand of Cremona. The powerful senator had come to appreciate him during his early visits to the city as deacon. This "truly shameless harlot was enflamed by the ardour of Venus," fell in love with the goodly man, and "not only wanted to whore with him once, but forced herself on him again and again."

Over time, the bishops of Bologna passed away, then the Archbishop of Ravenna, and finally Popes Anastasius III and Lando. Due to these deaths John succeeded from Bishop of Bologna to Archbishop of Ravenna and finally, due to the support of Theodora and her husband Theophylactus, to the papacy.

Politically, John was a good choice – he quickly succeeded in forming a powerful league to combat the Saracens, who were threatening Italy with invasion. An army assembled of Romans and Greeks and from soldiers from Naples, Capua, Salerno, Spoleto, Benevento and Gaeta surrounded the Saracens in their camp at Garigliano. After a three-month siege it came to open battle. The pope himself joined the fighting and twice led the attack, as he proudly reported to the Archbishop of Cologne. An appearance by Apostles Peter and Paul strengthened the courage of the Christian armies, which led to a crushing defeat of the Saracens. With this, Central Italy once and for all was freed from threat by the Arabs.

John was less involved, however, in Church policy. It is true that he endorsed the strict monastic laws of the Cluny monks and is considered by many Church historians to have belonged to the clerical reform movement. On the other hand, he had no problem naming a five-year-old as archbishop of Reims, thus creating a precedent for the next few centuries that countless generations of aristocrats exploited to their own ends.

In 915, John crowned Berengarius of Friuli emperor of Italy. But Berengarius lost influence through a number of decisive defeats by the invading Hungarians, and in the end was murdered by a devious vassal. The Hungarians used this advantageous moment to conduct raids that took them up to the gates of Rome.

John then set his hopes on Hugh of Burgundy, and together with the archbishop of Milan supported his coronation as king of Italy. But Theodora's daughter, Marozia, proved more powerful. The widow of Alberic, Count of Spoleto, she then had married Guido, Margrave of Tuscany. John brought every bit of influence he could muster against her, but Guido's men attacked him during a high mass in the Lateran and imprisoned him in the Castel Sant' Angelo. He was killed in mid-929, reputedly smothered with a pillow.

April 16

**Benedict XVI**

*April 19, 2005*

Benedict XVI is said to have earned his nickname, *Goldmund*, or Golden Mouth, in his seminary days, due to his rhetorical gift. The moniker was based not on Hermann Hesse's novel, *Narcissus and Goldmund* -- Joseph Alois Ratzinger more resembled Narcissus as a type -- but referred instead to the great preacher of the Byzantine Church, St. John Chrysostom ("golden-mouth" in Greek). But while Chrysostom's attacks on opulence and extravagance and passion for finery made him an unpopular figure at the imperial court, Ratzinger distinguishes himself through his stylish appearance, fashionable elegance and, in particular, through his exquisite footwear.

The son of a chief of constables and a cook, Joseph Alois Ratzinger was born on April 16, 1927, in the Upper Bavarian village of Marktl, which has become a tourist attraction following his election as pope though the boy spent only his first two years there. By the age of 16, as a high school student and flak helper in Munich, Joseph knew that he wanted to become a priest. At 31, Joseph Ratzinger was professor of dogma and fundamental theology in the archdiocese of Munich-Freising, later in Munster and then in 1966, at the recommendation of Hans Küng, in Tübingen. Following run-ins with leftist students there, he fled to the University of Regensburg, where things proved more orderly. As he himself admits, his clashes with the generation of '68 turned the liberal advisor to Cologne's Cardinal Josef Frings at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) into the strictly conservative cardinal and later prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which he was named on November 25, 1981.

The Catholic Church is responsible for "defending the faith of simple believers from the power of the intellectuals," as the cardinal and archbishop of Munich and Freising postulated in 1979. As sovereign protector of the faith, Ratzinger went up against Latin American intellectual liberation theologians Leonardo Boff and Gustavo Gutiérrez, and is opposed to priests marrying, the ordination of women, same-sex partnerships and artificial insemination. He is author of the encyclical, "Dominus Jesus," issued by John Paul II in 2000. In it he stated that the Evangelical Churches were not "churches in the true sense." Prior to this the protector of the faith instructed the international Conferences of Bishops, in reference to the connection with the Protestant Church, to "avoid using terms such as *our two churches*."

This set tongues wagging among the German bishops, who joked of him that his evening prayer is, "Dear Lord, I'll make you pious yet, when I to heaven get. Joseph Ratzinger's brother Georg, three years older than he and also a priest, describes his brother's leisure time thus: "He's level-headed. He sees to it that he exercises. Every day he takes a walk with his two secretaries and they say the rosary as they walk. And he stops work relatively early in the evening. At 7 o'clock, once his Audiences are completed, he prays the Breviary; at 7:30 he eats dinner; at 8 o'clock they watch the Italian news and then take one more walk. He then prays the rest of the Breviary and goes to bed."

For all the criticism the protector of the faith receives in Germany, since his election as Pope Benedict XVI on April 19, 2005, Ratzinger enjoys the affection of his fellow Catholics -- those in Bavaria in particular -- for the Bavarian who occupies the Chair of Peter.

April 30

**Pious V**

*January 7, 1556 – May 1, 1572*

The discovery of America contributed to the spread of cocoa, a beverage unknown until then. Spaniards detested this indigenous drink, which to their taste was bitter and too rich, until the nuns of Guanoco, Venezuela, came up with the idea of skimming off the fat and adding vanilla and sugar. And, as opposed to Native American tradition, they served it hot rather than cold. Hot chocolate quickly became the most popular

libation of fasting in the cloisters and parishes of the New World. Not long thereafter, the cloister cooks of Guatemala figured out how to preserve the drink in the form of chocolate bars. Word of this treat rapidly passed among the lay population and soon there were angry protests from the religious community of Mexico that the ladies of high society were having cups of hot chocolate served to them in church. The bishop of Chiapas attempted to ban chocolate as a fasting choice and was poisoned for his efforts.

In 1569, a delegation of Mexican bishops arrived in Rome to ask Pope Pius V to arbitrate the matter. Though he was faced with more serious matters, such as a potential recurrence of war in Turkey, the pope declared himself personally prepared to test the drink in order to judge whether or not it was appropriate during fasting. A cup was prepared for him; he tasted it and spit it out in disgust. “You can drink this awful stuff daily as repentance,” he told the delegation.

Unfortunately it is not recorded which hot chocolate recipe was used for this test. Was it made with or without sugar, cold or hot, with cream or skimmed? Thus, with the pope’s permission, began chocolate’s centuries-long triumphal march through the Catholic world.

Feast Day: April 30

See also: May 1

May 30

### **Benedict XIV**

*August 17, 1740 – May 3, 1758*

Pope Benedict XIV, born Prospero Lambertini in Bologna on March 31, 1675, was the most erudite of the popes and also the one with the best sense of humor. As curial *Promotor fidei*, or Promoter of the Faith, also known popularly as *Advocatus diaboli* or the devil’s advocate, he came to be known for his knowledge of canonical law and history during the canonization proceedings that took place between 1708 and 1727. At the same time, this position allowed him to gain profound insight into folk traditions and beliefs. His four-volume study on the conditions for canonization, which remains a standard work to this day, was one result of this insight, another was his election as cardinal in 1728. His life-long tolerance for enlightened scepticism in the face of unrestrained zealotry also may well date from this period. He deplored, for instance, the visions of Bavarian nun Crescentia Höss of Kaufbeuren, who claimed that the Holy Spirit had appeared to her in the form of a beautiful youth.

As pope he promoted classical studies, and protected Italy’s greatest archivist and bibliographer, Ludovico Muratori, from the Inquisition. He revoked the ban against Copernicus, serving the advancement of the science of astronomy in Rome, and even corresponded with Protestants, a remarkable act for that time. His liberal compassion was also evident in the Bull “*Magnae nobis admirationis*” of June 29, 1748, which sanctioned mixed marriages between Catholics and Protestants under certain conditions.

His predilection for literature and science was so well-known in Europe that even François Voltaire sought to profit from it. In 1742, Voltaire’s play *Mahomet*, a

tendentious piece opposing religious fanaticism, was branded as an attack on the Church disguised as anti-Muslimism. Following three very successful performances it was removed from the repertoire under pressure from the censors. Voltaire, with the help of the connections of his friend the Marquise du Châtelet, contacted Pope Benedict. When the pope proved disposed to Voltaire's work, the latter wrote to him the following letter:

“Holy Father, Your Holiness will forgive the liberty taken by one of the most humble but greatest admirers of the holy nobility, in dedicating to the head of the one true religion a work penned against the founder of a false and barbaric form of religion. To whom could I better dedicate this satire on the cruelty and erroneousness of a false prophet than to the representative and successor of a God of peace and truth? I dare to beseech your support for this work, your blessing for its author. With profound reverence, I kiss the feet of your Holiness.”

Benedict expressed his thanks for the “admirable tragedy,” which he read with great joy, he noted, and accepted the dedication. *Mahomet* went on to become a successful theatre piece, later adapted by Goethe and performed in Weimar.

Voltaire, the majority of whose works were placed on the index of banned books despite the goodwill of the pope – even *Mahomet* eventually was banned by Rome – turned again to Benedict in 1757, with a request for relics for his castle church in Fernay. The Bishop of Annecy, namely, wanted to deny the infamous castle owner the right to have Mass read in his church. Once again Benedict proved understanding and sent Voltaire a hair shirt of his “patron saint,” Saint Francis of Assisi. This put a damper on the querulous bishop's efforts and masses indeed were held in the private church of the famous satirist, who died on May 30, 1778, in Paris.

See also: August 24, November 3

September 10

### **Julius III**

*February 7, 1550 – March 23, 1555*

As cardinal, Giovanni Maria del Monte, who was born in Rome in 1487 and began his career as papal chamberlain under Pope Julius II, was considered a devil-may-care priest. One day he picked up on the street a handsome youth, whom he called Simia and made keeper of his monkeys. At his Villa Julia, together with Simia and his niece Ersilia, he enjoyed the coarser pleasures of life. With the support of the French faction he was elected pope, and his first act as such was to appoint the 17-year-old Simia, who could neither read nor write, as cardinal. When there was grumbling about this in the consistory, Julius admonished, “*Potta di dio!* What was it then that caused you to name me as pope?” He continued to bestow lucrative benefices on Simia, in the end going so far as to appoint him secretary of state.

Julius avoided the nonessential labors of the office, devoting himself to the more pleasant side of life of a Renaissance pope. He took such pleasure in the joys of the table that he disregarded with pontifical authority his physician's warnings concerning his diet. He was forbidden to eat pork because of his gout, but when overcome by

desire for it he would command, “*Del porco, al dispetto di Dio!*” (Bring me pork, God notwithstanding!) He was feared for his anger. On one occasion, when served a dish of breast of peacock in almond pastry that had grown cold, he became so angry with his servants it was as if they were his army who had deserted him on the brink of battle. Asked by an honored guest whether he regretted his outburst, the pope responded, “Didn’t God get so angry over an apple that he took paradise away from us?”

Julius was a great supporter of men of letters, especially if they were young and attractive. But he also championed Aretino, whose erotic writings came close to gaining him the office of cardinal. Cardinal della Casa dedicated to Julius – and not without good reason – his famous “Paeon to Sodomy.”

October 28

### **Blessed John XXIII**

*October 28, 1958 – June 3, 1963*

When he was elected on October 28, 1958, it seemed that Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, the 77-year-old patriarch of Venice, would be a transitional pope. The first impression the world gained of him was the way in which his style differed from that of his ascetic, aristocratic predecessor, Eugenio Maria Giuseppe Giovanni Pacelli, Pope Pius XII. John XXIII, as he called himself, was short, rotund and good-natured, with a big nose and ears. “If God had already decided that I should become pope, he could have given a little more thought to my appearance,” he once joked. He loved mingling with people and paid visits on foot to Rome’s hospitals, prisons, schools and kindergartens. The Curia, rooted in the formal ceremony of Pius XII’s reign, was horrified by this country parson who dispensed with pomp, arrogant sermonizing and grand gestures.

But this friendly patriarch also demonstrated incredible energy. In his first 27 months as pope he named 42 new cardinals to office, the majority of them non-Italians, therewith raising the College of Cardinals to 85 members. In this he surpassed by far the limit of 70 cardinals set by Sixtus V.

Ninety days after his election the pope, to the surprise of the public and even the Curia, announced that he wished to convoke an Ecumenical Council. He invited Protestants, Anglicans, Orthodox and other Christian denominations. “We’re not interested in a historical proceeding, in proving who was right or wrong. We merely are saying, “Let us come together, let us put an end to what divides us.”

On the evening of his announcement the cardinals make known to him their shock. It was three years until the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican convened on October 11, 1962. In his welcome address the pope announced that he wished to end the practice of excommunication and the sanction of anathema. He also warned of the “prophets of misfortune,” who “see in modernity only injustice and ruin; they are always saying that our age, in comparison to the one that preceded it, has only changed for the worse, and they behave as if they have learned nothing from history, which after all is the teacher of life.” A third point he raised was the necessity for the Catholic Church to respect non-Christian religions.

But John didn't live to see the Council conclude. Nor did his successor comply with the spontaneous request of the Council to canonize him.

On September 3, 2000, John XXIII was beatified by Pope John Paul II.

Feast Day June 3

see also: May 10

November 1

**Pius XII**

*March 2, 1939 – October 9, 1958*

With the papal Bull "Munificentissimus Deus" of November 1, 1950, diplomat, politician, lawyer and Ecumenical Promotor Eugenio Pacelli proclaimed the dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. "Since our Redeemer is the Son of Mary, he could not do otherwise, as the perfect observer of God's law, than to honor not only his eternal Father, but also his most beloved Mother. And since it was within his power to grant her the great honor of preserving her from the corruption of the grave, we must believe that he in fact did so." The secular world shook its head, but intellectual circles, surprisingly, were in agreement Catholic theologians proposed, given the identifying of matter and energy, that the Virgin Mary's death be described as a transition to an energy field that then was dispersed throughout the universe.

A female Protestant theologian, who later became quite well-known, considered the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin to be Christianity's greatest redress for the oppression of women, an oppression that even the Reformers, in particular Luther and Calvin, participated in. For this reason she converted to Catholicism and later became one of the faith's most respected unconventional thinkers. But it was C. G. Jung, founder of the theory of archetypes, who stole the show by calling Pius XII's dogma the greatest human achievement since the discovery of America. This was not, however, enough to persuade this son of a Swiss clergyman to convert.

Pius's exaltation of the Virgin Mary led to a revival of the Rosenkranz movement. The most successful of these initiatives was the "Atonement Crusade of the Rosary" in Austria. In 1946, a Franciscan priest from Vienna by the name of Petrus Pavlicek had returned from war captivity, bringing with him the conviction that the Virgin Mary alone could bring peace to the world. Despite a lack of funds, he ordered 5000 brochures to be printed, and as he was leaving the building of the printer he encountered a woman unknown to him, who announced that she was prepared to finance his efforts. The priest interpreted this as a sign from heaven, and continued his work with untiring diligence. Every member of the Atonement Crusade was obligated to pray the rosary once a day, "for peace in the world." Pope Pius himself joined the movement, which by 1953 numbered 400,000 adults and 100,000 children. The number had grown to one million members by the time the goal of "Austria's freedom" was added to that of "peace." In 1954 Pius delivered a speech that was broadcast over loudspeakers at Vienna's Heroes Square to twice the number of people who had heard Hitler's speech there on the annexation of Austria in 1938.

The Virgin Mary did not close her eyes to the supplication "for peace in the world and for the freedom of Austria." In 1955 the four occupying powers signed the Austrian

State Treaty and granted the Austrian Republic its wish for freedom, legally secured by the country's contractually stipulated declaration of neutrality.  
See also: December 24

**Albert Sellner, *Perpetual Calender of Popes***

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