

**Saturday Fifth Week of Easter**  
**Feast of Pope St Pius V**  
**A Biographical Sketch of St. Pius V**

Today the Church celebrates Pope Pius V. This is the pope whose job it was to implement the historic Council of Trent. Coupled with all of the internal struggles the church faced at this time, he had to also deal with the influence of the Protestant Reformation and the expansion of the Ottoman Turkish Empire.

His papacy was only 6 years in duration (1566-1572), but what a six years! Pius V was faced with the overwhelming responsibility of getting a shattered and scattered Church back on its feet. The family of God had been shaken by corruption, by the Reformation, by the constant threat of Turkish invasion and by the bloody bickering of the young nation-states. In 1545, Paul III had convened the Council of Trent in an attempt to deal with all these pressing problems. Off and on over 18 years, the Church Fathers discussed, condemned, affirmed and decided upon a course of action. The Council closed in 1563.

Pius V was elected in 1566 and was charged with the task of implementing the sweeping reforms called for by the Council. He ordered the founding of seminaries for the proper training of priests. He published a new missal, a new breviary, a new catechism and established the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) and classes for the young. Pius zealously enforced legislation against abuses in the Church. He patiently served the sick and the poor by building hospitals, providing food for the hungry and giving money customarily used for the papal banquets to poor Roman converts.

In striving to reform both Church and state, Pius encountered vehement opposition from England's Queen Elizabeth and the Roman Emperor Maximilian II. Problems in France and in the Netherlands also hindered Pius's hopes for a Europe united against the Turks. Only at the last minute was he able to organize a fleet which won a decisive victory in the Gulf of Lepanto, off Greece, on October 7, 1571.

I want to pause for a minute and tell you about the Battle of Lepanto.

On one side of the battle was the Ottoman Empire, which had been aggressively expanding for over two centuries by this time. They were at war with the Republic of Venice, but were also attacking other European ships, including those coming back from the New World. On the other side was a coalition of Christian nations called the Holy League. They were organized by Pope Pius V to defend Christian Europe against these Turkish would-be invaders. The Holy League was remarkable in bringing together most of Europe, including nations who normally were at each other's throats.

This unlikely European group entered into a rickety alliance, goaded and pressured by the Pope, who sent out an urgent summons to Catholics everywhere to support this stand against the expansion of Islam. Catholic volunteers came from as far away as Britain and Scandinavia to support the efforts of the Holy League against the Muslim Turks, and for one of the few times in

the post-medieval society of the sixteenth century, Europe managed to agree upon the necessity of addressing a common threat.

Why does this battle matter to us in 2016?

1. If the Catholic forces of the Holy League had failed back in 1571, Europe (and thus, the New World) might well have become part of the Ottoman Caliphate. So, for those of us in the historically-Christian- Western countries, like Canada, Lepanto is a major part of our history.
2. The battle marked a turning point in the Caliphate's attempted domination of Europe: as a navy, the Ottoman Empire never recovered from Lepanto.
3. The triumph of Christianity and Western civilization at Lepanto was accredited to the Virgin Mary. In fact, when Mary is referred to as "Our Lady of Victory," the *victory* in question is Lepanto. That's how significant this battle was.

Pius the Fifth was instrumental in coordinating the Holy League and is illustrative of the influence of the papacy in helping to direct and shape world events. Think also, for example, of the role St. John Paul II played in bringing about the dismantling of Soviet Communism in the 70s and 80s.

Here is one more worthwhile fact about St. Pius V.

Pius's ceaseless papal quest for a renewal of the Church was grounded in his personal life as a Dominican friar. He spent long hours with his God in prayer, fasted rigorously, deprived himself of many customary papal luxuries and faithfully observed the spirit of the Dominican Rule that he had professed. His decision to keep wearing his Dominican habit led to the custom of the pope wearing a white cassock.