The Hispanic “Fathers”

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I have been asked to provide some sort of an introduction to the Hispanic “Fathers,” and to do so with particular attention to worship. The title of “Fathers” requires a bit of clarification, for among the so-called fathers there are a number of mothers, even though most of them are anonymous. During this session we will say more about one of them who is of great interest to scholars today. And in order to bring forth the subject of worship, as requested, I will pay particular attention to a writing by one of the later Spanish Fathers that deals precisely with some elements of worship —particularly baptism.

However, before entering into the subject of the Spanish Fathers themselves, it must be clear that during the early centuries of the history of the church Spain was part of the Roman Empire, and people there would generally identify themselves primarily as part of the Empire, and then perhaps as Spanish —in the same way that most Californians today would say first that they are Americans, and then that they are Californians.

Secondly, a word is needed about the origins of the church in Spain. The best known ancient text hinting at such origins appears in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, where he says that he wishes to “proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been named” (Ro. 15.20), and later adds that, after taking to Jerusalem the results of the collection for the poor, he “will set out by way of you to Spain” (15.28). Indeed, some scholars claim that part of the purpose of

Paul in writing to the Romans was to have their support in his mission to Spain. Late in the first century, in his letter to the Corinthians, Clement, bishop of Rome, says that Paul "**reached the western ends**." Since this letter was written in Rome, which would have been Paul's natural steppingstone to Spain, it merits some credence. Even so, there is some doubt as to whether Paul ever fulfilled his wish to go to Spain.

Secondly, there is the all-important legend about the preaching of St. James in Spain. According to that legend, James the Elder was assigned to preach in Spain. While he was there, and doubting his mission, the Virgin Mary —who was still alive— appeared to him on a pillar, urging him to continue on his mission. (This part of the legend is the reason why the name "Pilar" is common among Spanish-speaking women, who are really named after the "Virgen del Pilar.") According to the legend, after James returned to Jerusalem and was beheaded by order of Herod, his body was carried to Cape Finisterre (*finis terrae*, "the end of the earth") and buried in a "field of stars" (Compostela).

There is no real reason to believe this legend, which does not appear in early Christian literature before the eighth century. But the legend is important because pilgrimages to Compostela became so common that the Camino de Santiago became the backbone from which Spain itself was born, and Santiago became the patron saint of Spain, intervening in battles to such an extent that he came to be known as Santiago Matamoros —St. James the Moorslayer. To this day, there is not one country in Spanish America that does not have at least one city named

Santiago.

Finally, there is another tradition that affirms that St. Peter sent seven emissaries —some say seven “deacons” to Spain. But this too is more than doubtful.

In short, when it comes to the origins of Christianity in Spain, there is nothing we can affirm with any degree of certainty.

It is not until the early 300s that we come to the first clear report of the life of the church in Spain. These are the acts of a synod that met in the city of Illiberis, or Elvira, just outside present-day Granada. Oddly enough, we know for certain that the meeting took place on May 15, but the year is still a matter of debate. It was probably around the year 305 A.D. Its canons provide interesting insight into the life of the church at the time; but they are particularly interesting for our purposes here because among the 19 bishops signing its decrees we find one who may well be considered the earliest of the Hispanic Fathers of the Church: Hosius of Cordova.

We have very little of the writings of Hosius —a letter that he and another bishop wrote to Bishop Julius of Rome, and another that he wrote much later to Emperor Constantius, the last surviving son of Emperor Constantine. But even though we have so little of his writings, there are abundant references to him. Several attest to his firmness during what Christians called “the

Great Persecution" —the last before Constantine put an end to persecutions. Somehow, Constantine learned of Hosius, and almost as soon as the persecutions ended, in 313, Hosius became the Emperor's main advisor on religious matters. When a dispute broke out between Bishop Alexander of Alexandria and one of his presbyters, Arius, and soon expanded throughout the eastern reaches of the Empire, Constantine sent Hosius with a letter addressed jointly to the bishop and to his presbyter and entrusted Hosius with the task of mediating between them. Hosius discovered that such mediation was impossible, and his report to Constantine led to the convocation of the Council of Nicea, which met in that city in 325. Hosius played a crucial role in that council —although exactly what that was is not clear. His name appears first in the list of bishops present —which has led some to suggest that he presided over the Council. Other documents describe Constantine as presiding —in which case Hosius would seem to be the expert theologian sitting by the emperor and giving him advice and clarification. Eventually Eusebius of Caesarea, the famous church historian, proposed that the assembly adopt the creed of his church in Caesarea. Since this did not deal directly with Arianism, it was proposed —some say that by Hosius, or by Hosius to the emperor— that the formula "of one substance with the Father" —homousios to patri— be added, as well as other changes. The final result was the Nicene Creed, which —with a few modifications— we have been reciting here at the beginning of our sessions. This is the most widely accepted of all Christian Creds —more that the Apostles' Creed, which is generally used only in Catholic and Protestant churches, but not among the Eastern churches.

Although the exact participation of Hosius in the process is unclear, there is no doubt that whenever Christians repeat this creed —be it here in California, in Rome, in Nanjing or in Moscow— we are echoing what Hosius held and defended 18 centuries ago!

Sadly, that was not the end of the story. The council was not only an ecclesiastical affair, but also a political one. Therefore, the few who refused to sign the creed and the anathemas that went with it were not only deposed of their ecclesiastical posts, but also sent into exile by the government.

This was a fateful move, for it meant that from then on theological controversies were no longer settled by the church and its authorities. Now if you disagreed with others, instead of trying to convince them, you could try to convince the authorities, and then have such authorities depose and punish your opponents.

Hosius himself suffered the consequences of this new order. A few years after the Council, Constantine himself began to change his mind, and Hosius found himself in an increasingly difficult and painful struggle in defense of the Nicene faith and of its main defenders —particularly Athanasius, who became the champion of the Nicene faith. Constantine was succeeded by his three sons, who did not agree on religious policies. Finally, the sole survivor and sole emperor, Constantius, was a decided Arian. As Jerome said, “The world awoke from its slumber and found itself to be Arian.” Athanasius was repeatedly exiled and allowed to return to

Alexandria, only to be exiled once again. Emperor Constantius pressured Hosius so that he would admit and support the Arian party. Hosius fought valiantly, refusing to accept the Arian dictates of Emperor Constantius. He was summoned to Milan, where the emperor demanded that he reject the decisions and the Creed of Nicea. He refused, and was allowed to return to Cordoba, but the emperor sent representatives with orders to force Hosius to recant and agree to the condemnation of Athanasius. One of the extant letters of Hosius was written at this time, when he was at least in his nineties, or perhaps over a hundred. It is addressed to Emperor Constantius. Hosius told him:

> From the beginning, when there was persecution in times of your grandfather Maximian, I remained firm in the confession of the faith. If you now persecute me, I am ready to suffer whatever may be necessary rather than betraying the truth and shed innocent blood. … I am writing to you because I am concerned over your own salvation. … Those who now are around you wish to make you a minister of evil, and you follow their designs; but at the final judgment you will stand alone.

And he also writes words that remind us of his own attitude when, after the Council of Nicea, he supported Constantine's decision to banish those who did not agree with its decisions: "Do not claim authority over issues of the church, or try to give us orders about them." Sadly, what Hosius now deplored in the policies of Constantius, he had earlier welcomed in the policies of Constantine.

Finally, the old man broke, and agreed to part of what Constantine demanded, admitting the Arians to communion, but refusing to condemn Athanasius. The last days of his life were reported in various ways. Athanasius says that when Hosius was about the die he put things in order, telling of the violence he had suffered, rejecting Arianism, and calling all to do likewise

(Hist. Ar. 45.5). But in his own city of Cordoba his name was erased from the list of bishops. Centuries later Isidore of Seville (to whom we shall return) echoed a legend that Hosius died of a sudden stroke as a clear punishment for his defection.

A sad ending to a great life, and a dire warning to all Christians who through the ages have sought the support of the powerful as a substitute for dialogue and genuine discussion with others differing from them.

But let us turn from tragedy to poetry. In 348, two years before Constantius, the great defender of Arianism who applied pressure on Hosius, became sole emperor, and when Hosius was at the high point of his career, a boy was born to a well-to-do family in southern Spain and given the name of Aurelius Prudentius Clemens. Posterity would know him as Prudentius, and recognize him as one of the greatest Christian poets of all time. Being born into a wealthy Roman family meant that he had an excellent education. Early in the following century (in 405, five years before his death), as he published his Latin verses, he declared:

> I am now 57 years old, and God will call me soon. In all these years, what good have I done for the sake of eternity? … As a child I attended the school of an exacting grammarian. I began wearing the toga of manhood at 17, and I was taking courses on rhetoric. I must confess that after completing my studies the years of my late adolescence were stained by sins and luxurious living. As a man, I became a lawyer, and my work as such filled me with bitter experiences. This led me to civil administration, and I was honored to serve as prefect of important cities. There I ruled with honesty and fairness, favoring the good and burdening the guilty with the fear of punishment. As a result, as a culmination to my civil career, I was called to the emperor's court. … Hardly noticing it, I have become old. What good will these honors do me once I am dead? I'll be told: "Your soul has now lost the world that you served throughout your life. Now you will be in the hands of God, before whom you have nothing.

> I know what I must do. Even now, near the end of my life, I wish se set my folly aside. Since I can no longer celebrate God with good works, I shall celebrate him with my voice. Day and night, without ceasing, I shall praise the Lord. … And as I sing and write these hymns, I shall hope that my soul, free from bodily bondage, will fly to the heights where my songs will point.

And elsewhere he writes, also in verse:

> God accepts even the poorest songs. Note that even in the highest palaces of the powerful one finds, besides a shining amphora of silver and precious stones, a modest earthen vessel. If they serve their master, each has its use. Christ allows me a corner in his house, as an old and useless vessel.

It is difficult for us today to appreciate the poetry of Prudentius, for the principles of Latin poetry are alien to us. But to this day there are some translations that are worth pondering. Take for instance this hymn, which is a classic in Christian worship. The music —in a form of Gregorian chant— may not be exactly the sort of music one would expect in most Latino churches. Actually, Prudentius would probably have said that this music was too modern. But imagine how much theology people would learn as they sang these words; note that here one finds elements of the various kinds of theology that we've discussed; and imagine how deeply that theology would enter not only the minds of those who sang them, but also their hearts:

Of the Father's Love Begotten

1 Of the Father's love begotten,
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the source, the ending He,
Of the things that are and have been,
And that future years shall see,
Evermore and evermore.

2 This is He whom they in old time

Chanted of with one accord,
Whom the voices of the prophets
Promised in their faithful word;
Now He shines, the long-expected;
Let creation praise its Lord,
Evermore and evermore.

3 O ye heights of heav'n, adore Him;
Angel hosts, His praises sing;
All dominions, bow before Him,
And extol our Lord and King.
Let no tongue on earth be silent,
Every voice in concert ring,
Evermore and evermore.

4 Christ, to Thee, with God the Father,
And, with Holy Ghost, to Thee,
Hymn and chant and high thanksgiving,
And unwearied praises be;
Honor, glory, and dominion,
And eternal victory,
Evermore and evermore[1]

The message is part of our inheritance. Were we to seek a present-day Hispanic equivalent to such words, what would that look like? I think that is worth pondering.

Probably at the same time when Prudentius was at the high point of his career as a civil administrator, far in the lands of the Bible a pilgrim was writing a diary that would be lost for fifteen centuries —and even then, would only be known in part. The pilgrim's name was Egeria. She was a woman from Galicia, in the northwestern corner of Spain, probably near Compostela, where later legend would claim that Saint James was buried. Much later, pilgrims would travel westward from far-away lands to visit the supposed tomb of James near Egeria's home; but

[1] Aurelius Clemens Prudentius (348-circa 413); Translated by John Mason Neale (1818-1866).

Egeria travelled east, to visit the sacred places of biblical history. As she travelled, she wrote a travelog reporting to her “sisters” in Galicia. Apparently, these “sisters” were nuns, in which case Egeria herself would have been a monastic. Perhaps they were her sisters by birth.

The document that was found in the nineteenth century is not complete. It begins as Egeria approaches Mount Sinai with her party —exactly who they were is not clear. In general, her journey led her from Constantinople to Jerusalem in 381 —the same year when the great Second Ecumenical Council met in Constantinople. In Jerusalem she attended the celebrations of the Easter season and visited the holy sites both in the city and nearby. Later in the same year she left Jerusalem and travelled to Egypt —not just to Alexandria, but into the interior, to the regions of the Thebaid, where she visited with the monastics who had made their home there. Back in Palestine, she visited Nazareth, Capernaum, and several other holy sites. Then she went back south again to Mount Sinai, from there to Mount Nebo, and back to Jerusalem. On the way back to Constantinople, she stopped at Antioch, and from there went to Edessa, reputedly the first city to embrace Christianity. She also stopped in Tarsus. Finally, she returned to Constantinople, and was planning to go back across the sea to Ephesus when her diary ended.

Egeria’s travelog is particularly interesting, not so much for the places she visited, where legend was often mixed with fact, but also because of the people she met, and what she says about them, their life, and their worship practices. Some of these worship practices she describes in

great detail —particularly those that she witnessed in Jerusalem during Lent and through the Easter season. Surprisingly, she often implies that there was very little difference between what was done in Jerusalem and what she and her sisters traditionally did at the other end of the Roman Empire. She says, for instance: “The eight days of Easter they celebrate till late hours, like us, and up to the eighth day of Easter they follow the same order as people do everywhere” (39.1). As a result, her journal, originally written mostly as a report to her sisters in far-away Galicia, is now one of the major sources we have for the study of early Christian worship, particularly on special feast days.

No one knows whether Egeria ever made it back to Galicia. If so, she would probably have arrived home around the year 385. At approximately the same time, and most likely in the region of Galicia from which Egeria hailed, a young boy was born who would eventually write the first Christian attempt at a universal history. His name was Orosius, and he is usually known as Paulus Orosius. Little is known of his youth or his education —which clearly was excellent.

His life took a difficult turn when he was some 25 years of age. Germanic tribes that had long lived beyond the Rhine, but now had to flee the advance of the Huns, entered northern Spain and took possession of all that is now Galicia and Portugal. As chaos covered the area, Orosius fled. In a passage about the repeated ills of his time, he refers to:

> how I first saw the barbarians from unknown lands, how I escaped from their hostility, flattered those in power, guarded myself against those I could not trust, outwitted those who lay in wait for me, and, finally, how, when they pursued me by sea with their rocks and spears, and had almost laid their hands upon me, I escaped them when I was

covered by a fog which suddenly arose.

After his escape, Orosius made his way to North Africa, where he spent some time with Augustine. Then, with Augustine's recommendation, he went to the Holy Land, where he met Jerome. Finally, he decided to return home, and on the way back to Spain visited Augustine once again. But conditions in Spain were so chaotic that he went no further than the Balearic Islands and returned to Africa, where historians lose track of his life. Presumably, he died while still in exile in North Africa, when he was some 40 years old.

Orosius himself tells us that it was Augustine who asked him to write his most influential work, *Seven Books on History against the Pagans*. Augustine had finished the tenth of his 22 books on *The City of God* and felt that it would be good to have a companion work dealing more fully with the wider scope of human history.

What Orosius writes is more than a chronicle, listing events, names, and kingdoms. He is trying to make sense of all of it and is clearly torn. As an exile who has lost his country to the chaos of the barbarian invasions, he yearns for the peace of Rome, now disappearing. But as a native of Spain, he remembers that his land became part of the Empire through much misery and bloodshed. He therefore dares assert that,

> …the barbarians are now throwing into confusion as their enemies those whom, if they conquer them, and, may God not allow this to come to pass, they will endeavour to rule after their own fashion, and thus those whom we now regard as our most brutal enemies, will be considered as great kings by posterity.
> (3.20.12)

For Orosius, this was not just an easy platitude, or a philosophical statement. It came from the heart of one who had been forced to flee the land of his birth, and never return to it. He therefore does not favor the barbarians. Referring to their possible victory, he says, “may God not allow this to come to pass.” But he sees it happening, and he deplores it. Still, he is convinced that history, despite all its violence and brutality, somehow serves the purposes of God. Eventually, he comes to a painful conclusion:

> Even if the barbarians were sent into the territory of Rome for this purpose alone —that the Churches of Christ throughout the east and west should be filled with Huns, Sueves, Vandals, Burgundians, and a countless host of believers of different races— God´s mercy should be praised and extolled, seeing that, albeit with some loss to our part, so many people came to recognize the Truth. (7.41.8)

Orosius died sometime around the year 420, and it took almost two hundred years for his prediction to come true. When he died, the depredations of the invaders, and the ensuing chaos, were at their peak. To make matters worse, those among the invaders who were not pagans were Arian Christians, thus bringing into the church profound divisions and discord. In Spain itself, the Visigoths eventually became masters of most of the Peninsula —as well as of much of France, until the growing power of the Franks pushed them back across the Pyrenees. The Visigothic kingdom was not particularly stable —out of these 34 kings 19 were assassinated or violently deposed, and several among the rest died in battle.

Even so, the Visigothic kingdom slowly developed a measure of stability. Distinguished leaders and scholars went to Spain fleeing from North Africa, where the depredations of the Vandals were even worse. Visitors, books, and ideas began flowing again from the rest of Europe.

Signs of the new beginning that Orosius had envisioned became clear late in the sixth century. The most notable sign of a new order came in 589, when Bishop Leander of Seville convoked a council in Toledo, and in that council King Recared renounced Arianism and reaffirmed the faith of Nicea —which meant that now there would be closer ties with the rest of Western Europe. Leander died just at the turn of the century and was succeeded as bishop of Seville by his younger brother Isidore.

Isidore was a prolific writer whose many works were widely read throughout the Middle Ages. But none was as influential as his 20 books of *Etymologies*. Its title is misleading, for it does not deal only with the origins of words, but with practically everything under the sun and beyond. It is a veritable encyclopedia without peer in Christian antiquity, and therefore its content cannot be summarized in a few words. As a mere example of its wide scope, it suffices to look at any one of his 20 books and the subjects it discusses. Book 20, for instance, includes:

On the world
On atoms
On the elements
On the heavens
On the parts of heaven
On the heavenly spheres
On air and clouds
On thunder
On lightning
On the rainbow and the clouds
On winds
On waters
On the variety of waters
On the sea
On the ocean
On the Mediterranean on the gulfs of the sea

On tides and straits
On lakes and stagnant waters
On rivers and floods

While others of the many works of Isidore works were more creative, the influence of the *Etymologies* was unparalleled. It was through them that the Middle Ages came to know much of the wisdom of antiquity. Therefore, if a father is someone who transmits a legacy to later generations, Isidore is certainly one of the most significant among the Spanish Fathers of the church.

Finally, we come to Ildephonsus of Toledo, who —as promised earlier— will give us occasion to look into matters of worship. While most of the other Fathers of the Spanish church were descendants of the residents of the area at the time of the Germanic Invasions, Ildephonsus himself was of Visigothic stock. He was born in 607, and therefore was just over thirty years of age when Isidore died. Like Augustine and many others long before him, Ildephonsus had no desire to be a pastor or a bishop. He would rather follow the monastic life. But when his uncle, who was the bishop of Toledo, died, Visigothic King Recesvinth forced him to accept the vacant bishopric.

For our purposes here, what most interests us here is his treatise *On the Knowledge of Baptism*. Its first chapters are a theological introduction into the background of baptism, which Ildephonsus sees prefigured from the very beginning of history. For instance; if, as Paul's Epistle to the Romans says (5.14), Adam was a figure or type of Christ, Eve, formed from Adam´s side, is

a figure or type of the church, formed from the wounded side of Christ. At the other end, John's baptism, which was for repentance but could not confer pardon, announced the fuller form of baptism, that was to be established by Christ, and which is both of repentance and of forgiveness and new birth.

Paradoxically, says Ildephonsus, Christ does not baptize, yet he does baptize. He baptizes, for it is he who cleanses. He does not baptize, for it is his lower servants who perform the rite. This means that one "can safely go to the lower servants, knowing that there is a higher Master" (16). In consequence, says Ildephonsus, "no matter whether the one baptizing is a good servant, or a bad one, the one receiving baptism knows that this baptism is valid, for the one really baptizing is the One who holds the power to baptize, and therefore the power of this sacrament is not with the office of the one administering it, but in the power of the Master" (16).

Even though at the time of Ildephonsus it was mostly children who were being baptized, he still makes provision for adults going through the ancient process of the catechumenate. Near the end of that process, the catechumens are taught the Creed. Ildephonsus devotes ten chapters to a detailed explanation of the Apostles' Creed. Since baptism was usually conferred at Easter, on the previous Thursday (what today we call "Maundy Thursday"), those to be baptized on the following Sunday are presented to their pastor, before whom they must recite the Creed and give an account of it.

The custom of baptizing at Easter was so central at the time, that Ildephonsus says that the baptismal font is to be sealed throughout Lent, and not to be opened until Easter, except in cases of emergency. (Since at that time it was commonly believed that those who died unbaptized could not go to heaven, a deathly ill unbaptized child or adult had to be baptized immediately.)

Ildephonsus explains this practice of sealing the font and its symbolism:

> Closing the front during Lent except in cases of an extreme need means that during those days no one throughout the world should be baptized. Opening it on Easter with the blessing of the bishop means that the mystery of the resurrection of the Lord is manifest. By this mystery he opened to humankind the entrance into life, so that, buried together with Christ in his death, we may rise again with him into the glory of God. (107)

Ildephonsus is clear about the importance of baptizing only on Easter and Pentecost:

> The tradition of the apostles and the Fathers established that [the opening of the font for baptism] should be done at Easter and Pentecost, and only in the presence of legitimate bishops. In distant parishes it is allowed to open the font at the proper time, [without the presence of the bishop] so that distance will not impede so great a gift, which must be immediately received. But in churches whose bishops are near this should not be done, to avoid dividing the people from place to place and violating the venerable dignity of bishops. Apart from these two occasions, there is freedom to baptize, but only upon fear of death. (108)

Back to the rite itself: We know from other sources— and Ildephonsus confirms— that once they have received and "returned" the Creed, catechumens are called *competentes*. According to Ildephonsus, this means that they are co-petitioners: they are requesting baptism as a body.

Ildephonsus clearly understands that baptism requires repentance. In the case of adults being baptized, they must bring with them their own acts of repentance. In the case of children. This will be signaled by bringing them to the font on a piece of harsh sackcloth.

Once at the font, there is a series of exorcisms, which Ildephonsus outlines. (He also acknowledges that in some areas, after their exorcism, those to be baptized are given some salt; but he adds that this is only a recommendation which is not followed everywhere.)

Now, just as Moses struck the waters with his rod and opened the way to salvation, the bishop touches the water with the cross (*signaculo ligni crucis*), and opens its way to salvation.

After a further exorcism, oil is poured on the water, to float over it as in the beginning the Spirit moved over the waters. This is followed by an ancient ritual, the "renunciations," whereby the one about to be baptized renounces (1) to the devil and his angels, (2) to all their works, and (3) to their rule.

Ildephonsus is used to a baptismal pool with three steps leading into it, and three on the other side, coming out of it. He therefore says that the three steps going down are the three renunciations of the devil and his power. The three going up and out mean that the baptized rises through the confession of the Trinity.

These two directions, up and down, also signify two commitments: one, to leave aside the devil and all evil, and second, to put one's trust on the Triune God.

Apparently, some people performed a triple immersion, and some a single one. Ildephonsus does not insist on either one: "Being immersed only once signifies the single Godhead; and being submerged three times signifies the three days of Jesus in the tomb" (117).

This baptism may not be repeated for any reason. "This sacrament is so holy and so sublime that even if it is administered by the most perverse it cannot be sullied" (121).

When those being baptized emerge from the waters, and after a song of thanksgiving for their liberation, they are led to a place where the unction of the Holy Spirit is signified by anointing them with holy oil, thus giving them the name of "Christian," since Christ's own name derives from chrism. This was done in the Old Testament for priests and kings. Therefore, says Ildephonsus, "the entire church is anointed with holy oil to be a member of the most holy King and the eternal Priest. We are anointed because we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood" (123).

Finally, the rite of baptism is completed by the bishop, who imposes his hand on the neophytes so that they may receive the Holy Spirit.

We know from many other sources that immediately after their baptism the neophytes were robed in white tunics as a sign of victory, and that as long as they wore these tunics they were considered “infants” or “babes” in the faith. Then they were escorted to the place where the congregation was gathered, and to join in communion for the first time.

Ildephonsus does not tell us exactly at what point in the entire ritual the neophytes were given their white tunics; but he does say that on the third day after Easter, in a formal ceremony led by the bishop, the neophytes would set them aside.

The rest of the treatise is a rather detailed explanation of the Lord’s Prayer, apparently intended to serve as a bridge into a second treatise, *The Itinerary in the Desert*, dealing with Christian life.

Ildephonsus says little about communion —not that he did not think it was important, but simply that he did not write a treatise on it. Clearly, for him, as for most Christians through the ages, the center of Christian worship was communion itself. He does provide glimpses into to significance of communion, and his eucharistic theology, but says little about how communion was celebrated, or the rites and actions accompanying it.

Ildephonsus died in 667. He is probably the least known and the least influential of all the Spanish “Fathers” and the one “Mother” we have studied. Yet it was the worship practices that he partially reported, and the devotion expressed and reinforced in those practices, that would

keep the faith alive, thus providing the fertile ground on which the faith that Hosius defended, the faith that Prudentius sung, the faith that took Egeria to far lands, the faith that helped Orosius understand the wider scope of history, the faith that guided Isidore to explore every mystery in creation, would survive and overcome the many challenges that would soon confront it.

The first such challenge came less that half a century after the death of Ildephonsus: In the year 711 Muslim Moors from North Africa crossed the Strait of Gibraltar (what was then known as the Pillars of Hercules) and invaded both Spain and France. They were defeated by the Franks two decades later (732) and retreated back to Spain. Eventually, they controlled practically the entire Iberian Peninsula, where they remained for over seven and a half centuries.

During those centuries the faith of Hosius and Isidore was sorely tried. But the vision of Orosius, that out of chaos a new reality would come, was secretly working its way. It was difficult from people in Spain to travel as Egeria had done earlier; but now, thanks to the legend about Santiago, people from all over the world were traveling to Egeria's land. Thanks to those pilgrimages, a new nation was emerging. When most of Europe, and not only Spain, was going through a difficult time of obscurantism, Isidore's writings were an important source of oxygen for what seemed to be a dying flame. Finally, most surprisingly, it was thanks to those Muslim invaders whom Europeans would have considered barbarians that much of the knowledge of ancient Greece was salvaged. Aristotle reentered Western Europe through Spain and Sicily,

where Muslims brought them. That insignificant but most important number, the zero, was brought from the Far East by Muslim scholars.

Slowly, and almost unnoticeably, out of ancient ashes new life emerged. Out of Greek, and Roman, and Celtic, and Germanic, and African, and Muslim ashes Western civilization emerged. Orosius would have considered himself vindicated!

So today, no matter how difficult our times, we can sing with Prudentius:

O ye heights of heaven, adore him,
Angels hosts, His praises sing.
Powers, dominions, bow before him,
And extol our God and King.
Let no tongue on earth be silent.
Every voice in concert ring,
Evermore and evermore!
Evermore and evermore!
Evermore and evermore!
Evermore and evermore!
Amen.

Timeline – The Hispanic "Fathers"
(Many dates are approximate or debated)

Hosius of Cordoba 257-359
- Great Persecution of Diocletian – 303
- Synod of Elvira – 306?
- End of Persecutions – Constantine – 312
- Council of Nicea – 325
- Constantius II sole ruler – 351

Prudentius 348-410
- Council of Constantinople – 381
- Publishes his poems – 405

Egeria's travels – 381-86

Orosius 385-422
- Flees from invaders – 410
- Visigothic Kingdom – 410
- Travels to Hippo – 414
- To Palestine – 415

Isidore 560-636
- Bishop of Seville – 600

Ildephonsus 607-667
- Abbot – 650
- Bishop of Toledo – 657

Moorish invasion and end of Visigothic Kingdom – 711