

Today is the Memorial of St. Nicholas of Myra. As far as hard, factual data - we know that he was bishop of the city of Myra, and that he died sometime around the year 350 AD.

He was at the council of Nicea in 325 AD, where under the guidance of the Emperor, Church leaders were attempting to resolve the Arian Heresy.

Arius, a bishop who had some crazy ideas, and was carrying on about how Jesus wasn't really God ... nor what He really human. St. Nicholas got so worked up that he supposedly walked up to Arius during the discussion, and smacked him across the face.

Now, assault - especially in the presence of the Emperor - was a serious offense, and Nicholas was stripped of his episcopal (that is, bishop-ly) honors for a time. But eventually it was determined that Nicholas was justified in his ... rather physical defense ... of Our Lord's true Divinity and true Humanity.

We hear this in the (long) Creed that we sometimes use on Sundays and Solemnities in the part that begins, "I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ ..." All of that "God from God," "begotten not made," up to and including "and became man," came out of this dispute in the year 325 AD.

Now, since our secular custom of Santa Claus comes from the real St. Nicholas ... well ... it certainly sheds new light on how the historical bishop from the fourth century would have dealt with "naughty or nice."

St. Nicholas is a very popular saint in the Church, and aside from having been turned into Santa Claus by US marketing interests in the late 19th century ... he is the patron of children, coopers, sailors, fishermen, merchants, broadcasters, those falsely accused, repentant thieves, pharmacists, archers, and pawnbrokers to name a few.

He was known for his generosity with money - especially in helping those in need; and we've already hear of his intense devotion to the true teachings of the Faith.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ - let us pray for a deeper zeal for our Faith. Through the intercession of St. Nicholas, may we share his intense love for the Truth, as well as grow in Faith, Hope, and Love. May our love of God show forth in a generosity like St. Nicholas' in all that we say and do.