Did You Know...

✠ News and trivia from our parish and the Catholic Church
- - contributed by the Christ Child Church Women's Club - - ✠

Christ Child Catholic Church
Dedicated to Growth in Christ and to the Challenges of Loving Service

23230 Summit Road, Los Gatos, CA 95033 ✠•✠•✠•✠•✠ (408) 353-2210 ✠•✠•✠•✠•✠ www.christchild.org

<u>Did you know it was once common to put dead persons on trial?</u>

One of the most excessive, and bizarre, occasions of this practice was the 897 AD trial of Pope Formosus.

FORMOSVS ·I· PP · CORSICA

Pope Formosus lived during a tumultuous era, full of intrigue both internationally and within the Catholic hierarchy. In 871-875, Formosus was given a variety of assignments, including multiple missions to Francia. But in

those fractious political times, he fell from favor with Pope John VIII, fled from Rome, and was excommunicated in 876.
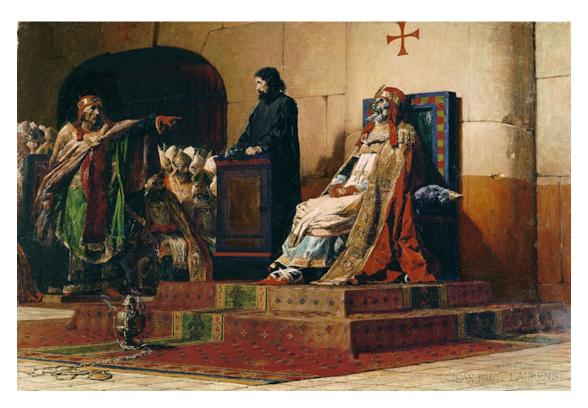
But Formosus was not a priest to knuckle under, and only two years later (878), he managed a pardon under Pope Marinus I. Formosus began to prosper, politically speaking, and worked under Marinus I and two more Popes, St. Adrian III and Steven V -- all in the space of the 13 years between 878 and 891.

In fact, Formosus had become so powerful that he was elected to the Papacy in 891. He began working to "liberate" Rome from its current co-emperorship (Guy III and son Lambert), up to and including a request to King Arnulf of the East Franks to invade Italy!

Not bluffing, Pope Formosus crowned King Arnulf as Holy Roman Emperor -- but while Arnulf was preparing the attack, he became ill with a serious paralysis and had to withdraw. Shortly thereafter, Pope Formosus himself died. (He was succeeded by Boniface VI, who reigned for 15 days!)

When Formosus died, the whole dispute settled unto a lengthy uncertainty, plagued by amazingly contentious behavior on the part of the ruling clergy.

In 897, Pope Steven VI held the famous (infamous?) Cadaver Synod, the posthumous trial of Pope Formosus. The corpse was exhumed, dressed in Papal vestments, and propped up in the courtroom. He was then found guilty on multiple charges. All of his previous pronouncements were declared invalid, and the three fingers of his right hand (used for blessings) were cut off.

The aftermath of this macabre debacle was as astonishing as the event itself. Since Formosus had consecrated many of the remaining clergy, it was unclear if they were actually the bishops and cardinals that he had declared them to be, and great confusion ensued. Formosus' body was buried in a cemetery for foreigners, but was secretly dug up and thrown into the Tiber -- then secretly snatched from the river bank, and eventually re-buried in St. Peter's basilica.

The whole horrific mess looked really bad to the general population, and shortly after the trial, a public uprising put Pope Steven VI in prison. By August of 897, he had been killed by strangulation.

Formosus' conviction didn't stand either, being overturned by Pope Theodore II -- but then overturned _again_ by Sergius III.

Today, we often struggle with the politics and "battles" between political figures, and our differences of opinion can make for some truly uncomfortable dinner conversations.

But let's face it, the worst stuff that's thrown back and forth between friends and relatives is pretty pale compared to the antics of history. We should all take some time to reflect on how truly "civilized" we are -- at least in comparison to our forebears

And we should always ask for God's blessings, and understanding, of our differences -- while knowing full well that we've already received it.

Still Curious? See these links ---

https://www.britannica.com/biography/Formosus
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cadaver_Synod
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Formosus
https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_(1913)/Pope_Formosus

--- Karin and Greg Illes

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