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**100 SAINTS  
EVERY CATHOLIC TEEN  
SHOULD KNOW**

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## INTRODUCTION

### Called to Be Saints

A priest once told me that, as a follower of Christ, I was called to be a saint. I attempted to correct the priest, explaining, “Father, sainthood is not for me; it is for extraordinary people ... folks like Mother Teresa.”

You see, at this point in my life, I had fallen for the lie. I had begun to believe that the saints were perfect on Earth, that they never had doubts, sinned, or struggled. In short, I did not think a horrible sinner like me could ever be considered for sainthood. The problem with that thinking, though, is that it does not take into account God’s grace and our ability — with God’s grace — to truly change.

That day, I had the mistaken notion that sainthood was for the few rather than the many, but I was wrong. God’s desire for you (and me) is everlasting life with Him in heaven, which means that He wants you to live a life worthy of the call (Ephesians 4:1). Living a life worthy of the call is a life of sainthood.

God desires for you to be so in love with Him and so committed to sharing His truth and love that you are known as a saint in heaven. Living this way might mean you are considered a saint in the eyes of the world, like St. Teresa of Calcutta, but it could also get you killed, like the countless martyrs who have gone before us.

Sure, it is not likely that we will ever be officially canonized saints by the Church, but that does not mean we cannot become “unrecognized” saints. After all, we are still called to pursue, seek, and, hopefully, achieve sainthood whether or not the world ever formally declares it.

Holy does not mean perfect; it means set apart. But the word “holiness” turns many people off. Some think it is self-righteous, others think it means you cannot have any fun. Still others think holiness is not realistic in today’s society where you are supposed to “look out for number one.”

Our call from God to be holy is a reminder that He has set us apart within the world. It does not mean we ignore the world, other people, or sin; it means we discover how we are to relate to the world. It means we realize that this world is not our final destination and live lives that set us apart while we are here. We are ordinary people who are made extraordinary, not by what we do but by a Father who claims us, loves us, and calls us to live for others.

The reason this call is often ignored, however, is because we are not always honest with ourselves. True saints acknowledge the darkness and refuse to be mastered by it. Saints are constantly drawn to the light (to God, Himself).

Most sinners think they are saints, but true saints know they are sinners. It is a sinner’s self-awareness that starts them on the path toward God. What allows for sainthood is a sinner’s honesty about “where they really are” in relationship with God.

God knows our sin, but it is our reaction and response to sin that makes the difference to Him. Choosing the light of God transforms us from sinners into saints. Choose to live like a saint today, and then choose to do so again tomorrow. You will not always be “successful,” but that is OK. God’s grace is enough.

As you read and pray through this book, we hope you will learn that your sainthood is not only possible but desirable. With courage, pray this prayer as you journey with the saints, “God, remove from my life this day anything that will keep me from sainthood,” and know that you are not alone.

## **THE GREATEST SAINT**

### **The Blessed Virgin Mary**

I am about to share with you stories of 100 saints — some famous and some not-so-famous — but before we get to any of these, I would be very short-sighted not to mention the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is not “just another saint”; she is the greatest saint. Though she would not want the attention or praise — she is far too humble for that — she absolutely deserves it.

Put simply, Mary is Catholicism. She is the perfect disciple, everything we are called to be. While we will never be perfect like Mary, our pursuit of Christ should lead us to saintliness like hers — a saintliness that is rooted in humility, trust, service, and love.

Sometimes people get confused as to why Catholics “make such a big deal about Mary” or go to her, at all, when it comes to prayer. Oh, I do not know, maybe because Mary is the Mother of God!?!? Mary is our guardian and mother, who loves us and prays for us. To be clear, at no time has the Catholic Church ever suggested taking the attention or focus off of Christ. We, as Catholics, are encouraged, implored, and commanded to look to Christ and focus on Him in our prayer. Mary does not take the place of Christ or get in the way of Christ being our mediator to God. When we pray, we invite Mary to join her prayers to ours, praying with us to Christ. Mary does not and would not do anything to divert the glory away from Jesus.

I mean, think about it ... God created Mary. He picked her — and her alone — for the most important job in human history. God descended upon her and grew within her!



Stop and think about it: Jesus listened to her, loved her, and honored her above any other, not because she wanted it but because she deserves it ... because she is different. It was her “yes” to God that set our brothers and sisters back on the right path. It was her “fiat” that changed history and the world forever. “Let it be done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). One “yes” opened the door to hope — hope in salvation, hope for life after death, hope for us.

Jesus shows us how to love His mother. He wants us to know her, respect her, and trust her, so He entrusted us to her while He hung on the cross. Jesus gives us the Blessed Virgin Mary so we can know and experience the love that only a mother can give, that only His mother — created and chosen by God — can give.

As you pray through the lives of these 100 saints, God is inviting you to get to know Mary, to meditate on her heart as a window into His heart. He calls us (and called every saint before us) to honor her by modeling her humility, openness, chastity, and abandonment.

Just as the Blessed Virgin Mary reflects Jesus’ light more radiantly and fully than any other human in history, we are called, as children of the Mother of God, to reflect the love of Christ to the entire world.

May the Mother of God bless you and may her prayers be with you as you read and pray through this book. She will hold you and walk with you whenever you call upon her, always directing your path perfectly and gently back to her Son ... like a good mother does.

Our Lady, queen of heaven and Earth, pray for us!

## **St. Agatha of Sicily**

**Born:** A.D. 231

**Died:** A.D. 251

**Feast Day:** February 5

**Patron of** breast cancer, rape victims, and nurses

### **Background**

Do you ever watch a movie set in a different era and think to yourself, "I would have LOVED to live then"? Maybe it is a Western set in the 1800s or a movie with a black-tie gala from the 1920s or, even, something set in the future that leaves you wondering if you were "born in the wrong era" for your personality.

Saint Agatha of Sicily could probably relate.

Unlike many other saints who were born into poverty, Agatha was raised in a wealthy Christian family in the third century. At 15 years old, Agatha pronounced her desire to remain a virgin and live a life consecrated to God. Unfortunately for her, living during a time of great Christian persecution meant this was a dangerous way to live. On top of that, the Roman prefect named Quintianus had a thing for Agatha. Whether it was her looks, her family's money, or a combination of the two, his advances continued, even though Agatha wanted nothing to do with him.

Quintianus sent her to live in a brothel (a home filled with prostitutes), but Agatha repeatedly refused any "customers" and sent every man on his way, adamantly professing her purity and love for God. After refusing Quintianus' advances time and again, Agatha was imprisoned, suffered repeated

tortures, and then endured the brutal act of having her breasts cut off.

Agatha remained imprisoned but received no medical attention. Legend has it that, following this horrible mutilation, St. Peter appeared to her in her cell and healed her wounds. Quintianus lost his mind and ordered her to be burned to death on a bed of hot coals, yet she remained unscathed. An earthquake struck Catania during this last act of torture, which caused Quintianus to become fearful for his safety. He had Agatha returned to prison and then fled the city. Agatha died a few hours later in the year A.D. 251.

Saint Agatha is a great example of a girl who was born into good circumstances and fell into bad situations, not because she was bad but because she was so good. Agatha kept her heart and eyes fixed on the Lord, and He remained with her through the hardest of times. She is a great example of humility, purity, and courage for both genders and all ages. Saint Agatha is a powerful intercessor, too, for anyone who is battling against breast cancer. Ask her to pray with you and trust that the one who focused on Christ during her torture can handle anything you throw her way to pray about.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Depicted in countless works of art
- Has become a modern patroness in the fight against breast cancer

## **St. Agnes**

**Born:** A.D. 291

**Died:** A.D. 304

**Feast Day:** January 21

**Patron of** young girls, chastity, and rape survivors

### **Background**

Not long after St. Agatha died, another heroic young female saint came onto the scene: St. Agnes. Also born into and raised by a wealthy, Christian family during a time of persecution, many men were interested in Agnes. From a young age, several guys focused their eyes on Agnes, wanting to be the one she chose to marry. The sons of military officers, politicians, and wealthy landowners sought her attention, but Agnes' only love was Jesus.

Around the age of 12 or 13, one young man was so upset by her refusal of him that he revealed to the authorities that she was a Christian (a charge punishable by death at the time). Agnes was stripped naked and dragged through the streets to a brothel. Refusing to sin, Agnes prayed that God would preserve her from the sexual sin that pervaded the house. Legend has it that her hair grew at a miraculous rate as she prayed, covering her nakedness — imagine Rapunzel, only Christian and without the tower. Some traditions also say that every man who tried to force himself upon the young saint was struck blind by the Lord.

The Roman prefect who ordered her to be stripped and humiliated suddenly dropped dead, but, as the story goes, Agnes prayed over him and he was miraculously restored to life. Convicted for her Christianity, Agnes was led out of

her cell and bound to a stake to be burned alive. When the guard went to light the wood, however, it would not burn. When it finally caught fire, the flames parted way around her, preserving her from harm. She was eventually beheaded (or stabbed, depending on the tradition you research).

Saint Agnes is another young Christian martyr known and revered for not only her purity but for her courage. She is a living testament to the fact that sexual abuse is horrid and deplorable in the eyes of God, that the victim is still beloved by God and pure in His sight. Saint Agnes is mentioned in the Litany of the Saints with great respect and admiration, and stands as a young, strong example of what holiness looks like in the face of embarrassment, threats, and persecution. She is often pictured holding a lamb because the Latin word for "Agnes" is *Agnus*, which translates to "lamb." This why *Agnus Dei* means "Lamb of God."

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Heroically pronounced her belief in Christ
- Died a virgin-martyr at the age of 12 or 13

## **St. Aloysius Gonzaga**

“It is better to be a child of God than king of the whole world!”

**Born:** March 9, 1568

**Died:** June 21, 1591

**Feast Day:** June 21

**Patron of** Catholic youth, students, and AIDS sufferers

### **Background**

Is your future already “mapped out” for you? Have you known or “been told” since you were young what you would eventually be and “do” with your life? Maybe your parents have plans for you to follow in their footsteps or you have known since you could talk that you wanted to be a doctor or teacher or soldier or musician or ... fill in the blank.

Aloysius Gonzaga could relate. Born into a princely family in Florence, Italy in the 16th century, Aloysius was raised amidst the royal courts, surrounded by high-ranking military officials. His father had major military aspirations for his young son. At age seven, however, Aloysius began to show that he followed orders from a “higher” authority than any government. He developed a sincere and rigorous prayer life and, by age 11, was teaching the Catholic faith to poor children in the neighboring villages, fasting, and spending several hours a day in deep prayer.

Young Aloysius wanted to serve God with his entire life and desired adventure beyond the military, courts, or government. He came across a book about the Jesuit missionaries in India and fell in love with the idea of sharing the Gospel with the world. After a four-year debate with his father, he was finally

allowed to join the Jesuits. He was so prayerful that his spiritual director, St. Robert Bellarmine, actually had to tell him to take breaks from prayer and participate in recreation. Aloysius was fasting so much that he was also forced to eat more.

An incredible example of self-control and self-denial, Aloysius worked with fervent passion. While serving in a Jesuit hospital, he cared for sick patients and, eventually, contracted the very disease he was helping to fight. He became so weak he could barely get out of bed and yet, he continued to pray, remaining disciplined in his daily prayer until he died at the age of 23.

We can learn a lot from the prayer life of this great saint. While a high school student cannot ignore their homework, friends, and family in order to spend five hours in the chapel, you can probably do more than you are currently doing. Pray more. Set alarms on your phone to remind you to stop and pray. Discover what holiness looks like for you based on both your love for God and your daily duties. Take a page from the book St. Aloysius Gonzaga never had the chance to write.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Deeply committed to and disciplined in daily prayer
- Gonzaga University in Washington state is named after him

## **St. Ambrose**

**Born:** A.D. 339

**Died:** A.D. April 4, 397

**Feast Day:** December 7

**Patron of** beekeepers, beggars, and learners

### **Background**

Recently, I was struck by a random fact I learned about Walt Disney — namely that the great innovator was afraid of mice. Yes, the man who gave us Mickey Mouse was actually fearful of rodents. When I think of that story, I immediately think of St. Ambrose, who had to remind people he was not even baptized when they begged for this virtuous and gifted leader to become their bishop.

Raised to be a lawyer and politician, Ambrose did not have his sights set on ministry or Church work. When the bishop of Milan died in A.D. 374, people converged on Ambrose, wanting him to lead the Church. Neighboring bishops encouraged him and, soon after, he was baptized and ordained a deacon and then a priest and then a bishop, all within about a week. Ambrose was so humbled that he began an intense study of the Bible and practice of fervent prayer.

His natural ability to speak — no doubt influenced by his background in law and politics — quickly catapulted Ambrose into an incredible preacher, as few had his natural oratory ability. He was so talented that even St. Augustine — a pagan at the time — began to regularly attend his sermons and eventually converted. Ambrose took on every heresy of the time, excommunicated corrupt leaders and politicians, and defended the lives of the innocent and vulnerable in a



culture where life was not respected (not unlike today). His talents were vast, and he influenced and changed the Church through his preaching, writing, musical arrangements of the psalms, spiritual direction, and leadership.

Saint Ambrose gave up a career in law and politics, which he was “qualified for,” to serve God — a job he felt he was unqualified to do. He ultimately trusted that God provides everything necessary for those He calls to a specific task or vocation. God might call you to do something different than you, or even your family and friends, expect, but St. Ambrose’s example should give you courage to trust that God makes a way for us.

#### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Baptized and ordained a deacon, priest, and bishop within a week’s time
- Instrumental in the conversion of St. Augustine of Hippo, one of the greatest saints in history
- Declared a “Doctor of the Church,” an honor bestowed on only 36 saints (to date)
- Wrote “De Sacramentis” on the sacraments and “De Spiritu Sancto” on the Holy Spirit
- Composed Ambrosian chant hymns, including *Te Deum* and *Veni Redemptor Gentium*

## **St. Angela Merici**

“Do not lose heart, even if you should discover that you lack qualities necessary for the work to which you are called. He who called you will not desert you.”

**Born:** March 21, 1474

**Died:** January 27, 1540

**Feast Day:** January 27

**Patron of** sickness, those who are disabled and physically challenged, and those who are grieving the loss of parents

### **Background**

Some people view hardship and suffering as a sign that God has somehow “abandoned” them. Angela Merici saw hardship as an opportunity to grow. Orphaned at age ten, she and her sister went to live with their uncle. When her older sister died not long after, Angela had a choice: abandon God or draw closer to Him. Lucky for her (and us), she chose the latter and went on to become an advocate for young women in the Church.

Noticing how many young girls were uneducated, Angela began to instruct these women in the faith. She shared her faith, prayer life, and love for the Lord with them. Soon after, she invited a dozen of the young women to live in community and according to a “rule of life.” Though they did not wear habits, they began to live a life of prayer and sanctity. They evangelized and formed other young women, not solely to become nuns but to follow whatever vocation they were called to follow. Angela wanted all women to grow in and live a life of holiness, not simply those women who were called to religious life. She understood the world needs holy wives and mothers, too.

She went on to found the Ursuline Sisters. Over time, the order opened orphanages and schools, offering a teaching and discipleship model and ministry that came to be used throughout the world — not bad for an orphan who could have blamed God for her bad fortune and “abandoned ship” before she hit her teen years.

Saint Angela is quoted to have said, “Do not lose heart ... He who called you will not desert you.” Have you ever felt inadequate in your work, even though it was clear God called you to it? Perhaps it is not about your ability but your openness to God’s work within you.

#### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Drew close to Christ despite the hardship of being orphaned at a young age
- Sacrificed her home and time in order to be an advocate and educator of young women in the Church
- Founder of the Ursuline Sisters

## **St. Anne**

**Born:** Around 50 B.C.

**Died:** Around A.D. 12

**Feast Day:** July 26

**Patron of** child care providers, grandparents, childless people, children, homemakers/housewives, and mothers

### **Background**

Since there are no “accidents” or mistakes when it comes to God, we must believe that He gave us the mothers He did for a very specific purpose. Everything about them — their loving heart, overprotective nature, temperament ... everything good (and even the stuff you roll your eyes at) — was part of God’s design. Now, if God put that much attention into your mom and mine, imagine how much attention to detail went into picking the Blessed Virgin Mary’s mom, Jesus’ grandmother.

To be honest, little is really known about St. Anne. Scripture does not even tell us her name. All we know, believe, and celebrate comes more from tradition than from the Bible. We learned her name from extra-biblical sources (non-official, non-canonical writings) and oral tradition. Sources talk of her great holiness, loving marriage, devoted husband St. Joachim, and the way the Blessed Virgin Mary was raised in devotion and faith, to name a few of her attributes.

Like most things in life, however, you can judge something (in this case, St. Anne) by the fruit it (rather, she) bears. You cannot have a woman as special as Mary without the love of God and holy parents. If you stop to think about it, it does not make sense that God would preserve Mary via the Immaculate Conception and then entrust her formation and care to “just

anyone.” Logically speaking, God specifically chose Anne (and Joachim) for this mission, to raise the mother of His only Son. That minor detail is, actually, a major deal.

Saint Anne could not have known how her story would go or what God’s long-term plan was for her life. She merely trusted God and sought to follow Him each and every day. In a similar way, you cannot know right now where God is leading you or where your life will take you. Your best bet is to simply follow the Lord, asking Him each and every day (like St. Anne did) what He desires for you. Trust in His plan — it is perfect.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Gave birth to and raised the queen of heaven and Earth — not bad

## St. Anselm

“For I do not seek to understand in order to believe, but I believe in order to understand. For I believe this: unless I believe, I will not understand.”

**Born:** 1033

**Died:** April 21, 1109

**Feast Day:** April 21

No official **patronage** exists for this saint.

### **Background**

You may have a lot of friends who are “not into” religion or are just, basically, indifferent to it. If you are honest with yourself, you may find that you are indifferent to it, too. If so, St. Anselm is a great saint to ask to pray for and with you. Over time, Anselm came to love the faith and develop fascinating new ways to articulate it to a world that desperately needed the Church’s truth.

Though he had been interested in God as a teen, he lacked the support of his family. It was not until Anselm was in his late twenties that he fully opened his heart and mind to the truth about God’s existence. A very intelligent man, he became the abbot (leader) of his monastery and was known for his incredible articulation of the faith, as well as for his gentle and amazing leadership ability. He became an archbishop in England, went toe-to-toe with an unsupportive king, and skillfully navigated political waters, all the while serving the poor, teaching the faith, and fighting against slavery. He was a true hero of the faith.

Anselm was an extremely logical thinker, one who married reason and faith so skillfully that he earned the title of “Doctor of the Church.” He led with faith and knew that the more we prayed and thought, the greater our understanding would be.

You may not understand — or even believe — all of the deepest truths of the Catholic faith. You may not be sure you even want to be Catholic. Do not give up and do not give in. Like St. Anselm, keep asking the tough questions and, over time, you will unearth the fullness of truth God has waiting for you.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Skilled teacher and orator
- Served as archbishop in England
- Authored “Cur Deus Homo,” “Monologion,” and “Proslogion,” which argue the existence of God
- Declared a “Doctor of the Church,” an honor bestowed on only 36 saints (to date)

## **St. Anthony of Padua**

“Christians must lean on the cross of Christ just as travelers lean on a staff when they begin a long journey.”

**Born:** 1195

**Died:** June 13, 1231

**Feast Day:** June 13

**Patron of** lost items, people, and souls

### **Background**

You know those people who never seem to sleep? They are up late doing homework or online until all hours, only to be the first one out of bed heading to school, work, or an activity the next morning. Somehow, they always find time to get everything done. I imagine that is how Anthony of Padua was, too. Born in Portugal in the late 12th century, Anthony's dad was a captain in the royal army. As a teen, though, Anthony desired to serve God over country. When he saw five Franciscan priests brutally martyred for the faith, Anthony was so inspired by their heroism that he immediately sought to join the Franciscan Order. A wild turn of events landed Anthony in Sicily, Italy and, eventually, on to Assisi where a young St. Francis was forming and sending out missionaries.

Anthony of Padua was known for his holiness but not necessarily his preaching. Until one day, when the priest who was supposed to give the homily fell sick and Anthony was chosen as his replacement. His sermon began quiet and meek, but he eventually preached with animation, passion, and zeal. Witnesses say it was as though he was seized by the Holy Spirit. Word spread, and St. Francis quickly sent Anthony on a mission to preach throughout Italy. Crowds



came to hear about this holy orator and soon, no church was big enough to hold the crowds. He would preach all day and hear confessions well into the night.

Saint Anthony is best known as the saint you go to when you lose something. At one point in his priesthood, another man had taken Anthony's prayer book. After looking everywhere, Anthony prayed for it to be found or returned. Soon after, because of Anthony's ardent prayer, the man returned it. For centuries since, Catholics of all ages and cultures have sought St. Anthony's intercession in retrieving lost articles. I am here to say that it absolutely works. Saint Anthony can find stuff even Google cannot find.

We can learn so much from this holy man's example. Follow your passion. Make prayer a priority. Work hard every day. Surround yourself with holy people (saints, if possible). Be willing to say "yes" to things, even if you do not think you "have the gifts" to do it. Believe prayer will change things. Follow God with all you have and all you are. You do that and people may just be coming to you for intercession, even a thousand years from now.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Gave up his worldly desires to become a missionary for Christ
- Captivating preacher
- Composed one of the greatest works of theology and literature in the Church, his "Collections of Sermons"
- Declared a "Doctor of the Church," an honor bestowed on only 36 saints (to date)

## **St. Athanasius**

“The Lord did not come to make a display. He came to heal and to teach suffering men.”

**Born:** A.D. 296

**Died:** A.D. May 2, 373

**Feast Day:** May 2

**Patron of** theologians and faithful Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christians

### **Background**

The truth hurts. Hearing uncomfortable truths about ourselves is challenging to our pride and ego. Speaking uncomfortable truths to others — especially to those who are not quite ready, willing, or humble enough to hear them — can be outright dangerous. Athanasius learned this lesson the hard way.

Born in Alexandria, Egypt, Athanasius was a well-educated, brilliant, and controversial saint in the early Church. A priest and, eventually, a bishop, Athanasius was born at a time when the great heresy of Arianism was gaining popularity and confusing countless Catholic Christians. When Athanasius became bishop of Alexandria, he waged a great fight against the Arian leaders and, though outnumbered, refuted them at every turn. He was instrumental in the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325, from which we received the Nicene Creed (which we still recite at Mass today).

He was so fervent and unwavering in his teachings against the heresy that he ruffled a lot of political feathers, finding himself banished and exiled by (then) Emperor Constantine. Though he was restored, he was deposed soon after, once

again. Over the course of Athanasius' life, he would eventually be banished five times and spend over 17 years of his life in exile. To say that he lived on a political and sociological roller coaster would be an understatement. While some questioned his approach and tone, no one ever questioned Athanasius' zeal for the faith and love for the Lord and His truth.

Athanasius wanted everyone to know Jesus and live in the truth of who Christ really was, not watered-down ideas of Him. You might get frustrated at times with family members or friends who say they love God but act otherwise. You might, too, get annoyed with people who claim "my God this" or "my God that" in an attempt to justify their selfishness or sins. In those moments, ask St. Athanasius to help you find the right words to share the truth in love and maybe you will avoid some of the pitfalls that befell this great saint of our Church.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Played an instrumental role in the Council of Nicaea
- Considered a political champion of the faith
- Most famous written works are "The Life of Anthony" and "On the Incarnation"
- Declared a "Doctor of the Church," an honor bestowed on only 36 saints (to date)

## **St. Augustine of Hippo**

“You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

**Born:** A.D. November 13, 354

**Died:** A.D. August 28, 430

**Feast Day:** August 28

**Patron of** brewers

### **Background**

You have probably heard that you are designed by God for sainthood. If you are anything like me, your response was probably, “Me, a saint? Um, no. I am not holy enough. Try that guy or that girl over there.” If so, you and Augustine would have been great friends.

As a young man, Augustine had no intention (or desire) of becoming a saint. In fact, he lived in a way that rejected sainthood. Augustine drank, partied, chased after women, and lived an immoral life. He fathered a child with a mistress out of wedlock. Augustine, though very intelligent, was all about himself and cared nothing about God (even though his mother, St. Monica, was a devout and prayerful woman). Her constant prayers for his conversion are one of the reasons we now call her a saint, too.

It is impossible to do justice to Augustine’s story in this little bio. Like many of the others mentioned here, this entire book could be about his story. His dad was a pagan. He had terrible friends. He used his intellect to justify sin and deny God. Eventually, young Augustine came across a priest who preached with such passion and clarity that his mind and

heart were opened to Christ's truth. That preacher was St. Ambrose of Milan, who would become Augustine's mentor.

That encounter changed Augustine's life. His brilliant intellect was on display as he almost single-handedly took on heretics promoting Manichaeism. He traveled throughout Africa, teaching as a priest and, then, bishop. His preaching converted thousands. His writings have helped convert millions. It is not an understatement to say that St. Augustine is one of the most important and influential saints in the history of our Church. His words have influenced and shaped countless elements of our Catholic doctrine and teaching.

This great saint reminds us that no sin is too great for God's mercy. We will never know the great plans God has for us until we humble ourselves and put our gifts and talents at His service. This world cannot and will not ever satisfy us — only God can do that. The next time you fall into the trap of thinking you are "too big a sinner" for God to love, desire, or use, remember St. Augustine. The fact is that God has made saints out of far worse people than you.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Considered one of the most influential saints of the Church
- Famous for having written "Confessions" and "City of God"
- Declared a "Doctor of the Church," an honor bestowed on only 36 saints (to date)

## **St. Basil the Great**

“A tree is known by its fruit; a man by his deeds. A good deed is never lost; he who sows courtesy reaps friendship, and he who plants kindness gathers love.”

**Born:** A.D. 330

**Died:** A.D. January 1, 379

**Feast Day:** January 2

**Patron of** hospital administrators

### **Background**

Is it more important to you to be famous in the eyes of the world or “known” in the eyes of heaven? Basil had a lot of talent and was well on his way to becoming a famous teacher when he decided to seek the Lord instead.

This should not have come as a shock to people. As a young man, Basil fed the hungry, worked in a soup kitchen, organized relief for victims of famine, fought against prostitution ... you know, the usual extra-curricular activities for a teen. So years later, was it really a surprise that such a good guy would become a priest (and then bishop), found monasteries, build hospitals, and preach to hundreds, all while fighting the great heresy of Arianism that was dividing the early Church? Basil's yearbook superlative should have read: “Most likely to be awesome ... at everything.” I mean, you do not get the title “the Great” without being epic.

When St. Athanasius died, Basil became the great defender of Catholic doctrine against the growing Arian following. He fought tirelessly for truth in hopes of holding together a Church that was fragmenting before him. He even reached

out to the pope, working to clarify what the Church taught to Catholics and others who were being swayed.

His writings heavily shaped the Church and his preaching helped convert, retain, and save countless souls from corruption and dissension. Basil's example reminds us that "fame" in the world's eyes is fleeting, but to be known and celebrated in heaven will give your life meaning and allow the fruit of your life to be far-reaching. Basil accomplished far more in his life following God than he ever could have relying solely on his own gifts and talents.

And you can, too. Ask the Lord what He designed you to do and then have the courage, like Basil, to follow Him. If you find yourself questioning the faith or feeling drawn to voices that contradict what you believe or have been taught to be true, ask St. Basil the Great to pray with and for you. He will make the time to intercede — he always did.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Worked tirelessly to provide care to those in need
- Bold in his efforts to squash the heresy of Arianism in the Church
- His most influential writings are compiled in the popular publication, "The Complete Works of St. Basil"
- Declared a "Doctor of the Church," an honor bestowed on only 36 saints (to date)

## **St. Benedict**

“The first degree of humility is prompt obedience.”

**Born:** A.D. 480

**Died:** A.D. March 21, 547

**Feast Day:** July 11

**Patron of** Europe, kidney disease, monks, poisoning, and schoolchildren

### **Background**

Some days it may feel like you are the “only one” who is actually trying to live a holy or moral life. You might look at your peers at school or work and begin to feel like no one else shares your desire to do the right thing or live the right way. In moments like these, it is especially important to remember that although you might feel alone in your pursuit of holiness, you are not helpless or abandoned. God will bring like-minded people into your life through His Church. That being said, when you live radically for God, only two things can happen: people are drawn to you or people will reject you. This was absolutely the case with Benedict. The more he studied, prayed, and grew in holiness, the more he was forced to withdraw from his peers and the world around him.

So holy was Benedict that he was able to work miracles. When word spread, Benedict had to withdraw from society even more, spending three years in solitude as a hermit and monk. During this time, he worked alone in the fields. His days consisted of prayer and work. When he later formed a religious order — known (still) today as the Benedictines — this actually became their motto: *ora et labora*, which translates to “pray and work.” Benedict developed a strict



“Rule for Life” — which the monks throughout the order still live by — that offers discipline, a daily prayer rhythm, and freedom from worldly things.

While a group of holy priests followed him, others deeply detested him. At one point, one of his monks, who was tired of Benedict’s intense desire and expectations of holiness, tried to kill the great saint with a piece of poisoned bread. As the story goes, a raven swooped in through the window and snatched the bread from Benedict’s hands before he could eat it. The raven then fell over dead as proof of the poison.

We could talk about the miracles attributed to St. Benedict, including raising a child from the dead, multiplying flour and oil in times of hunger, and having prophetic visions that came true. We could point to the many monasteries he founded or the countless people to whom he offered spiritual direction. What was most amazing about this great saint, however, was his sincere work ethic and desire for true holiness.

Surround yourself, like St. Benedict did, with holy people who will join you on your faith walk. If you currently lack those friends, ask St. Benedict to pray with and for you, that the Lord would send souls such as those into your life. Remember, pray and then work, and watch the Lord bless your efforts.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Miraculously survived two assassination attempts by fellow monks
- Developed the Rule of St. Benedict, one of the first guides for monastic living

## **St. Bernadette**

"O Jesus, I would rather die a thousand deaths than be unfaithful to you!"

**Born:** January 7, 1844

**Died:** April 16, 1879

**Feast Day:** April 16

**Patron of** illness, poverty, shepherds, and people who are ridiculed for their love of God/piety

### **Background**

At first glance, there was nothing extraordinary or "notable" about young Bernadette Soubirous. She was not a particularly good student, nor was she rich, athletic, or popular. Born into a poor family in a town in southern France called "Lourdes," she grew up in tough conditions, struggling with asthma and other health issues.

In 1858, the Blessed Virgin Mary began appearing to 14-year-old Bernadette in a cave by the river near town. Given Bernadette's meek and "lowly" status, she was dismissed, at first. People refused to believe that the Mother of God would appear to such an average and impoverished girl. Bernadette described Mary as a young teen girl (probably about 16 years old) who was dressed in a white robe with a blue sash. Mary appeared to Bernadette a total of 18 times and revealed her identity saying, "I am the Immaculate Conception."

Bernadette shared Mary's words and instructions to build a chapel at the spot of the visions and over time, people came to believe. In fact, a spring welled up beneath the rock at the site of the visions and water soon flowed from the rocks.

For more than 160 years, countless people have traveled to the shrine in Lourdes, where they have bathed in the healing waters and have been miraculously cured of ailments and diseases.

Young Bernadette lived a tough life. People mocked and ridiculed her for her social status and “supposed” visions. Though many came to believe, in part, because of her heroic refusal to be silenced, many dismissed her. She battled chronic health problems, was forced to live in seclusion for many years, and died when she was 35 years old. Regardless, she was a woman of courage, conviction, humility, and virtue. She refused to allow others’ opinions of her to negatively influence her opinion of herself and her intense love for God.

Notice how God chooses the humble and meek when seeking someone to carry His message, and that is still true today. If you have ever felt mocked, cast aside, or misunderstood, ask St. Bernadette to pray with you. She dealt with the drama on Earth and now enjoys the victory of heaven, no doubt seated near another saint who came from humble beginnings, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Saw and received messages from the Blessed Virgin Mary on 18 separate occasions

## **St. Bernard of Clairvaux**

“A saint is not someone who never sins, but one who sins less and less frequently and gets up more and more quickly.”

**Born:** 1090

**Died:** August 20, 1153

**Feast Day:** August 20

**Patron of** candle makers

### **Background**

Some people get out of bed counting their problems and others counting their blessings. Which type of person are you? Saint Bernard of Clairvaux was definitely the latter.

Bernard was born in a small village in northeastern France and spent a better portion of his life in poor health. Suffering from intestinal issues, anemia, and a host of other medical problems, Bernard was constantly uncomfortable, yet his demeanor never revealed it. He did not let his personal struggles steal his joy or keep him from doing the Lord's work. Bernard began over 60 monasteries, was a prolific spiritual writer, and worked tirelessly to heal broken relationships (spiritually) within the Church and (politically) between feuding France and England.

Bernard's love for the Blessed Virgin Mary was profound. Few saints have written nearly as much as he did about the Mother of God. His writings helped deepen the faith and Marian devotion of countless souls, including Sts. John XXIII and John Paul II. Follow his example and ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to pray with you each and every time you pray. Ask her — by her intercession — to help your love for Jesus grow

constantly deeper and greater. Pray the Hail Mary throughout the day, asking the Lord to give you a heart like His mother's own immaculate heart, and watch how quickly and beautifully your life changes.

And remember: Everyone has a cross to bear. Everyone faces struggles in life. Saint Bernard went through great personal and physical hardships. He understands that the struggle is, indeed, real. Some people let obstacles stop them, others allow difficult times to propel them to greatness. Take a page from St. Bernard's book and embrace your cross with joy and trust. God's got this. God's got you.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Served as an advisor and counselor to many in power
- Helped bring about the amending of the papal schism during the 12th century
- Wrote many works, most importantly, "Sermons on the Song of Songs" and "Sermons on the Blessed Virgin Mary"
- Declared a "Doctor of the Church," an honor bestowed on only 36 saints (to date)

## **St. Blaise**

“Father of mercy and God of all consolation, graciously look upon me and impart to me the blessing which flows from this holy sacrament.”

**Born:** Unknown

**Died:** A.D. 316

**Feast Day:** February 3

**Patron of** throat illnesses, animals, wool combers, and wool trading

### **Background**

Living as a Christian in today's world is not easy, but living as a Christian in the early fourth century was deadly. Back when Christianity was illegal, believers were threatened, hunted, charged, tortured, imprisoned, and, eventually, martyred. This was the time period and culture that Blaise, a doctor and bishop, lived and ministered within. Still, with seemingly the whole world and the governor of Cappadocia against him, Blaise served God with passion and courage.

Blaise developed a reputation as a healer and miracle worker. It is said that people came from great distances to see this wonder worker in hopes of being healed from a variety of ailments. Probably the most famous story revolves around a young boy who was choking on a fish bone. As Blaise happened to be passing by (on his way to prison, no less), the boy's mother put her choking son at Blaise's feet. Blaise cured the child immediately, which only made the charges against him (of following Christ) proven all the more.

Still to this day, every year on St. Blaise's feast day, churches offer the "blessing of the throats," where participants can come forward during Mass and have their throats blessed. During the blessing, the priest, deacon, or lay minister places two wax candles that are tied or molded together to form a cross-like shape at the base of one's neck. The candles used in the blessing are an ode to the candles a woman brought to Blaise while he was imprisoned in a pitch-black jail cell, offering him light in the midst of the darkness.

It is difficult to know for sure how many of the miracles attributed to St. Blaise actually happened and how many grew out of legend. What we do know is that St. Blaise was a man after God's own heart who constantly poured out his gifts and talents, putting them at the service of all those he encountered. Faced with animosity, danger, imprisonment, wild animals, and, eventually, martyrdom, St. Blaise's entire life was a testimony to God's greatness. Not only is he the guy you go to for intercession when you have a sore throat, he is also an incredible example of what it means to give your entire life in service to others, all for the love of God.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Renowned physician of his time
- Known, according to legend, for his healing miracles

## St. Catherine of Alexandria

**Born:** Around A.D. 287

**Died:** Around A.D. 305

**Feast Day:** November 25

**Patron of** lawyers, librarians, philosophers, students, and teachers

### Background

I just love being told when I am wrong ... about as much as I love people who put the *empty* juice container back in the fridge. I have a hard time believing even Jesus would forgive those people. Just kidding ... He is God, it is His job to forgive. Seriously, though, do you have that one friend who always has to be “right” whenever there is a debate? Maybe that “friend” is actually you. In either case, St. Catherine of Alexandria would be a great saint to get to know and ask for prayer. She actually was a “know-it-all,” but in the best and humblest way.

Born in Alexandria, Egypt in the late third century, Catherine was the daughter of nobility but, like some other princesses turned saints, she decided she would rather serve in God’s Kingdom than reign in man’s. As a young girl, Catherine had a dream that Jesus put a beautiful ring on her finger and when she woke up, the ring was still on her hand. How is that for an impressive engagement story?

Catherine abandoned her pagan faith as a teen and became skilled in Catholic philosophy and debate. When the emperor began to persecute Christians, Catherine went to talk to him, and her beauty and poise earned her an audience. She was such a skilled speaker that the emperor could not refute any



of her arguments against paganism. Frustrated, he brought in 50 pagan philosophers to prove her wrong. Once again, Catherine's faith and intelligence made room for a miracle – the philosophers realized the falsehoods of paganism and converted on the spot. Then, the enraged emperor immediately martyred them (whoops).

Later, when she refused to marry the emperor, Catherine was sentenced to a torturous death by a horrific machine. Just before the blades touched her, an angel appeared and destroyed the machine. When she was eventually beheaded (much later), it is said that instead of blood, sweetened milk flowed from her wounds.

If you are wanting to grow in knowledge of the faith or how to articulate it, ask this great saint to pray for and with you. If you are looking for a bold saint, one who will inspire you to great and heroic work for the Kingdom, look no further than St. Catherine of Alexandria. If we were all as courageous as she, the world would be a much holier place.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Heroically protested the persecution of Christians
- Skilled in philosophy and debate
- Known for her miracles
- One of the most beloved saints of the early Church

## **St. Catherine of Bologna**

“Let every lover who loves the Lord come to the dance singing of love, let her come dancing all afire desiring only Him who created her and separated her from the dangerous worldly state.”

**Born:** September 8, 1413

**Died:** March 9, 1463

**Feast Day:** March 9

**Patron of** art and artists

### **Background**

Are you a creative soul? Are you more joyful playing music, drawing, painting, or composing poetry than solving math problems or conducting science experiments? If so, you and Catherine of Bologna would have gotten along really well.

Born into a wealthy and prominent family in Bologna, Italy, Catherine had the connections and “fast track” to success. At 11 years old, she was invited to live in the royal palace as her friendship with the marquis’ daughter grew stronger. She had a private tutor, art lessons, and a bright future as a noblewoman. It was during her teen years, though, that Catherine developed a strong and devoted prayer life and lost her desire for nobility.

With this newfound direction in hand, Catherine decided to return to her family home, join together with some of her holy girlfriends, and start serving the poor. Soon after, she joined an order of nuns called the “Poor Clare Sisters.” The order was dedicated to prayer and lived mostly in silence and true poverty. Eventually, Catherine was appointed as the abbess (like the “Mother Superior” of the order).

Over the years she continued to draw and paint, compose and write. Every way she utilized art was for the glory of God. She illustrated manuscripts, prayer books, and Bibles. She created original hand lettering, copying entire works as she went.

Given her wealthy family and immense talent, Catherine could have used her gifts and contacts to grow in riches and fame. Instead, she put her skills at the service of God and His Kingdom. She never sought to be “known” or “out front.” In fact, her humility meant that her incredible art was not really appreciated for its greatness until long after her death. Still, it has blessed countless souls.

The Lord has blessed you with talents in certain areas, too. Ask St. Catherine of Bologna to pray that you, like her, would have the desire to use your talents to bring glory not to yourself, but to the God who entrusted them to you.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Founded a monastery for the Poor Clare Sisters
- Most famous written works are “The Seven Spiritual Weapons,” a guide for the novices in her community, and a 5,000-line poem called, “Rosarium Metricum”
- Her painting of St. Ursula is on display at a gallery in Venice, Italy
- Her personal breviary, paintings, and poetry have been preserved

## **St. Catherine of Siena**

“Proclaim the truth, and do not be silent through fear.”

**Born:** March 25, 1347

**Died:** April 29, 1380

**Feast Day:** April 29

**Patron of** fire prevention, people who are ridiculed for their faith, miscarriages, and sexual temptation

### **Background**

Being the 25th kid in a poor family (yes, you read that correctly) would certainly be a challenge. Having 24 older siblings would likely leave many children feeling almost “forgotten,” but little Catherine from Siena, Italy certainly made her presence known. She had a deep love for the poor and would frequently give her possessions away, along with her family’s food and clothing (without asking permission), to people in even greater need.

When Catherine was 16, her older sister Bonaventura died, leaving her husband a widower. At that time, it was not unusual for a newly widowed man to take one of the wife’s sisters as his new wife (and you thought “The Bachelor” was a rocky start to a relationship). Catherine was deeply in love with the Lord and desired to serve only Him, so she did everything she could to avoid her parents’ attempts at the newly-arranged marriage. She cut her hair short to appear less beautiful, fasted, and refused to bathe or speak. Her parents finally relented and allowed Catherine to join the Third Order of St. Dominic. Though she did not become a cloistered nun, she joined the sisters in their routine of prayer and donned a habit while living at home and serving her community.

Over the next several years, Catherine had a series of visions of Jesus. Some say Catherine was illiterate, but others say she slowly learned to read at a grade school level. Regardless, the depth of her faith and insights into God were revealed through her speech and, later, writings (she dictated to others to write for her). So wise was this fiery young woman that, though fairly uneducated, she was named one of only 36 “Doctors of the Church,” a title reserved for saints with profound and immense insight into the heart and mind of God.

Catherine was a force to be reckoned with, calling out politicians, military leaders, and even the pope, at one point, when the papacy relocated to France (during turmoil in Italy). Catherine urged the pope to return to Rome, which he later did. She was fearless in the face of persecution and virtuous amidst declining health. While St. Catherine is known for her “bold moments” of faith, it was the way she lived her day-to-day life, caring for and serving others, that made her a saint. Catherine marched to her own beat and did things a little “differently” but, in doing so, she reminds us that following Jesus does not have to be predictable, joyless, or boring.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Devoted her life to caring for the poor and sick
- Became involved in politics and gave consultation to the pope
- Brokered peace during a war between Italian city states
- Established a monastery for women in 1377
- Had mystical visions and experiences of Christ

## **St. Cecilia**

“Arise, soldiers of Christ, put away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.”

**Born:** Second century

**Died:** Third century

**Feast Day:** November 22

**Patron of** musicians and singers

### **Background**

If people know of St. Cecilia, it is usually because she is the patroness of musicians and singers. The reality of Cecilia's story, however, strikes a chord that goes much deeper.

Cecilia lived during the great persecution of Christians in the third century. She was born into a wealthy Roman family, and her parents had grandiose plans of marrying her off (even though Cecilia had vowed her virginity to Christ). Against her wishes, they arranged her marriage to a man named Valerian. Cecilia's witness and holiness converted her new husband, though, convincing him to respect and protect her virginity in the process.

With her new husband/accomplice and evangelist by her side, they converted Valerian's brother and hundreds more through their preaching and passionate witness. Cecilia, Valerian, and Valerian's brother continued their ministry by burying the bodies of martyred Christians — a practice that was itself illegal at the time. Eventually, Cecilia's preaching and refusal to worship the false gods of Rome led to her arrest.

When they set out to kill her, it took several attempts. Suffocation failed. Torture failed. The first three attempts at beheading failed, as well. In fact, the final blow that led to her beheading caused her to bleed to death for three days. What did Cecilia do as she bled out during those three days, you ask? She continued to preach about the love and mercy of God, converting even more souls in the process. It is said that, given her immense holiness, Christians even soaked up her blood on sponges and napkins to keep as relics.

You might have family members or friends who you have “given up on” when it comes to the faith. Perhaps you have shared the faith or tried to reason with them but have hit roadblocks. Maybe their minds or hearts are somewhat closed. Maybe you feel like it is a waste of time and energy and you just want to give up. Do not give up. Ask St. Cecilia to pray with you, helping you to be patient and steadfast, and ask the Holy Spirit to give you the right words when the time comes.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Successfully converted her husband and hundreds of others
- Known for her preaching, even as she lay dying
- Heroically stood firm in her faith despite persecution

## **St. Charbel of Lebanon**

“The war of the evil one against the Lord is his war against the family, and the war of the evil one against the family is the core of his war against the Lord.”

**Born:** May 8, 1828

**Died:** December 24, 1898

**Feast Day:** July 24

**Patron of** Lebanon

### **Background**

I can hum a song and beatbox at the same time. I know that there are exactly 440 words in the Book of Obadiah (it is in the Bible, just FYI). My favorite color is black (and do not say, “it is not a color” ... if it is in the crayon box, it counts). None of these facts about me are very noteworthy or impressive, but that is OK. There are probably random facts about you, or strange talents and weird habits you have, too. The things that seem uninteresting or “unimpressive” are often what make us unique and noteworthy. Saint Charbel of Lebanon is a perfect example of this, as he is one of the lesser known saints of our Church but also one of the most impressive.

Born in a small mountain village in 1828, Charbel became a monk and lived by a rule that included taking vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Ordained a priest at age 29, Charbel spent the next 16 years of his life living humbly, working hard, and praying with great discipline. During this time, however, Charbel longed to live in even stricter silence and in total abandonment to God.



It was at this point that Charbel took “roughing it” to a whole new level, living as a hermit until he died 23 years later. He kept a strict fast, spent most of his day in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, and slept on a slab of stone with a half stump of wood for a pillow. Through his personal daily prayer and penance, he offered himself as a sacrifice for all, praying that the world would return to God. He endured frequent hunger, poverty, physical fatigue, and unbearable cold with the unflinching courage of a martyr.

After he was buried, great light of extraordinary brightness began emanating from Charbel’s modest grave; it cut through the darkness of night and could be seen from a great distance. The holy “night light” continued for 45 days after his death. In fact, when Charbel’s body was exhumed and examined in detail, it was noticed that his corpse was secreting both sweat and blood yet showed no signs of deterioration.

You might not feel like you are extraordinary. Saint Charbel did not appear extraordinary, either. What made St. Charbel so “ordinary” on Earth is one of the things that makes him so extraordinary in heaven. He was impressive because he did not try to be impressive. If you struggle to see what is “special” about you or what you have to offer the world, ask St. Charbel to pray with you. The Lord brought you into the world, into this time and place and family and circumstance for a reason. Trust in His plan and perfect timing. Follow Him today and then, again, tomorrow. Years from now, people may just be talking about you in the same respected way they talk about St. Charbel.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Known as a “wonder-worker” in his community, even among some Muslims
- Rigorously self-disciplined in prayer

## **St. Charles Lwanga**

**Born:** January 1, 1860

**Died:** June 3, 1886

**Feast Day:** June 3

**Patron of** African Catholic youth action, converts, and torture victims

### **Background**

You might struggle with the idea of God — maybe you doubt His existence or are just not quite “sure” either way. Perhaps you were not raised in the faith or it seemed “forced” on you, so you were left with more issues than openness. Regardless of the case, history proves one thing beyond a doubt: Some of the greatest saints the world has ever known began as atheists and agnostics. It is not about where you came from but where you are going.

Charles Lwanga was one of 22 Ugandan martyrs who converted from paganism. He was only Christian for a day, technically, as he was martyred the day after his baptism. He is living proof that what makes someone holy is not the length of their faith life but its depth.

Charles was known by all as the most athletic, handsome, and brave among the royal pages who worked in the Ugandan courts. He inspired his friends, protected them from abuse, and encouraged everyone to embrace their chastity and live faithfully.

The pagan king was quite superstitious and, though usually “tolerant” of Catholicism, eventually grew to despise it and its Christian followers. Charles was so vocal and visible in

his love for God that he was sentenced to be burned at the stake. Just prior to the wood being lit, Charles asked to be untied. He then laid down upon the sticks, meaning it would take even longer to die and be even more painful. While he burned to death, he did not cry or moan. Some say he even sang songs and hymns of praise for God counting him worthy to die in such a way.

You might get mocked for your faith by those who do not understand you or do not love God. You might be the one who has mocked others. Regardless of where you are with God — how close or far — take St. Charles as a model of virtue and integrity. Ask him to pray that you, like him, would be a person of conviction and mercy toward others, even those who do you wrong. Seek the truth — like St. Charles did — and when you discover God, have the humility to serve Him with your dying breath.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- His life is documented in the biography, “African Triumph: Life of Charles Lwanga”

## **St. Christopher**

**Born:** Unknown

**Died:** A.D. 251

**Feast Day:** July 25

**Patron of** safe travels and children

### **Background**

When Offerus' mother converted to Christianity, she prayed for a son who was strong in the faith. Her prayer seemed to have worked overtime — tradition tells us that Offerus (who later became known as Christopher) grew to be over seven feet tall and was extremely strong. Once he grew up, the "giant" man set out on a mission to serve the strongest king he could find.

Offerus moved from king to king, seeking the most powerful. Noticing one of these kings crossed himself any time Satan's name was mentioned, Offerus took this as a sign that the devil was a greater king and set out to find Satan. While traveling, he ran into evil men, one of whom claimed to be the devil so he served that man. They came upon a cross one day and the evil man fled at its sight. Offerus, taking note, sought out the mightiest king: the one upon the cross who evoked fear in the evil one(s).

Having no real clue who this king was, Offerus asked a nearby Christian hermit about the cross. The hermit explained that he would have to begin praying if he was going to serve Christ. This next part is unique, especially to saints: Offerus told him no. He could not pray and he would not fast, but he could serve. He told the hermit he would serve by carrying travelers safely across the river. He carried many across the raging

waters until one day he carried a child unlike any other — revealing, as he grew larger and heavier, that He was Christ, who carried the weight of the whole world. The man from Canaan pledged his life and was baptized in the same river he served in.

He took the name Christopher, which means — you guessed it — “Christ bearer.” After becoming a Christian, he converted many souls with his simple witness. The local king was not too happy about this, so Christopher was beheaded when he refused to deny his faith.

People disagree about how much of Christopher’s story is true and how much is legend. Some claim he is no longer a saint but that is incorrect. He is still a recognized saint, but he is no longer the “headliner” saint on his feast day.

Whether or not St. Christopher, as described here, lived the life people say he did, we can all agree that every Christian soul needs strength. You can be confident in asking the saints, including St. Christopher, to pray with you for increased strength in the face of persecution, temptation, or suffering as they have been through it all. The more you ask, in prayer, for the Holy Spirit to unleash your inner strength and virtue, the more you become a “Christopher” (Christ-bearer) to the world.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Sought ceaselessly to serve others
- Martyred for the faith

## **St. Christina the Astonishing**

**Born:** 1150

**Died:** July 24, 1224

**Feast Day:** July 24 (although she has not been formally beatified)

**Patron of** lunatics, mental health professionals, those who are mentally ill, against insanity, and against mental illness

### **Background**

Have you ever felt “different” from other people, like you don’t quite “fit in”? Christina sure did, as she never lived what you would call a “normal life.” Born into a peasant family in the 12th century, Christina was orphaned at a young age and was raised by her two older sisters — and that is probably the most normal part of her life.

After suffering a severe seizure at about 21 years old, Christina died. What happened next is straight epic. In front of dozens of witnesses, Christina sat up in her coffin during her funeral Mass, flew up into the rafters of the church (some say she levitated, others say she shot forth like an arrow), and refused to come down because of “the stench of the people’s sin.” When she was eventually “ordered” down by the priest, she landed on the altar, stepped down, and told those remaining (the few who had not run out in fear) that she had been to hell, purgatory, and heaven before returning from the dead. She had chosen to return to Earth with a specific ministry to pray and encourage prayer for all of the souls trapped in purgatory.

The events of Christina’s life in the decades that followed were equally “astonishing.” Her strong sense of smell was a constant battle for her; Christina was literally able to smell the

sin of those around her. The odor was so repugnant that she would climb trees, hide in cupboards or large ovens, and even levitate just to avoid contact with sinful people.

A Dominican professor of theology who knew Christina personally documented her miraculous life and strange abilities, adding eyewitness testimonies to abolish most concerns about this story being pure legend. While some called her crazy, many closest to her praised her humility and holiness. Fittingly, she is now the patron saint of psychiatrists.

You might not always feel like you “fit in” with your family or circle of friends. You might feel “different” at times, but that is a glorious thing in the Kingdom of God. Ask St. Christina to pray with you for a heightened awareness of sin and a more ardent desire to avoid it. If we all feared and avoided sin with St. Christina’s energy, countless more souls would enjoy the splendors of heaven.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Rose from the dead
- Fervently prayed for those in purgatory

## **St. Clare of Assisi**

“Totally love Him who gave Himself totally out of love for you.”

**Born:** June 16, 1194

**Died:** August 11, 1253

**Feast Day:** August 11

**Patron of** eye disease, goldsmiths, laundry, good weather, telephones, telegraphs, and television

### **Background**

The daughter of an Italian count, Clare had money and status in a world where those two keys opened all the doors, but that was not enough. From childhood, she shunned the ways of the world and embraced the simplicity of Christ. At 18 years old, after hearing St. Francis preach, she decided to follow his example of selling everything and serving God, and she soon started an order of women religious. The sisters lived a life of such extreme simplicity that when Pope Gregory IX visited Clare, he offered to absolve her vow of poverty. She kindly refused, saying that the only thing she wanted absolution from was sin. Cue the mic drop.

While she was living at the convent, an army of soldiers that was tearing through Italy arrived there and was ready to break down the gates. Clare (who was very ill and bedridden), rose from the bed, went to the tabernacle, and brought the Blessed Sacrament out to the top of the front gate in a monstrance. Kneeling, she asked God to protect her sisters — and He responded. As Clare lifted the Eucharist, the army was thrown into a panicked frenzy and retreated, leaving the sisters safe. As Clare grew older, she fell ill and could no longer get out of bed for Mass. Missing Mass was a no-go for Clare, so she



was granted a miracle: an image of what was going on during the liturgy would appear on the wall of her room. Because of this paschal projection, Clare is the patron saint of television and media.

It is often easier to talk about what you believe than it is to act on it; however, St. Clare did both. She did not just talk the talk, she walked the walk. Invite her to pray with you, asking her to help you see all of the areas of your life that keep you from being completely sold-out for Christ. When God reveals these areas to you, ask St. Clare to pray for you, that you would have the reckless abandon for God that she had.

#### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Founded the Poor Clare Sisters, a religious order that observed the Rule of St. Clare
- Many of her works have been compiled into books, including “St. Clare’s Legislation,” “St. Clare’s Blessing,” and “Letters of St. Clare”

## **St. Clelia Barbieri**

**Born:** February 13, 1847

**Died:** July 13, 1870

**Feast Day:** July 13

**Patron** of the Little Sisters of Our Lady of Sorrow and people who are ridiculed for their piety

### **Background**

Relatively “unknown” by most Catholics, Clelia Barbieri was so impressive, in part, because her daily life would have been considered by many to be unimpressive. Born into a holy family in mid-19th century Italy, Clelias’ faith and love for God were fostered by her mother from an early age. Losing her father to cholera when she was eight years old, her family moved to a house right next to the local parish. Clelia was an avid sewer and weaver, spending all day sewing and spinning to help support her family. When she was not working with her hands, she could be found at the church praying.

Over time, her love for the poor and dedication to a prayerful life drew others to her. She began a small community of women who lived and prayed together. They opened a school and began teaching children. She had deep, mystical prayer experiences where she experienced and underwent the pain, suffering, and anguish of Christ and Our Lady of Sorrows. So deep was Clelia’s love and heart that the Lord, in His mercy, allowed her to experience levels of intimacy and insight in prayer that many other saints probably never did.

Her household of female friends became more structured and was recognized by the Church. At the age of 21, she became the “Mother” of The Little Sisters of Our Lady of Sorrows. She

died only two years later, but her order lives on today with three-dozen community houses from Italy to India to Tanzania. Over 300 sisters now live and serve under this order's mission and title. Saint Clelia has the distinction of being the youngest founder of a religious community in the history of the Church.

In St. Clelia we have an example of an “ordinary” woman who was able to experience and accomplish extraordinary things, simply through humble service and a devoted prayer life. She loved God. She loved her sisters. She loved the people God put in her path. You are capable of all of these things, too. The next time someone tells you that your mission is to become a saint (as they told St. Clelia at a young age, too), rather than saying you could never be a saint, put your head down, offer a prayer, and get to work.

#### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Deeply dedicated to prayer
- One of the founders of The Little Sisters of Our Lady of Sorrow
- Became “Mother” of her community by the age of 21

## St. Cyril of Alexandria

“Indeed the mystery of Christ runs the risk of being disbelieved precisely because it is so incredibly wonderful.”

**Born:** A.D. 377

**Died:** A.D. June 27, 444

**Feast Day:** June 27

No official **patronage** exists for this saint.

### Background

Do you have a temper? Do you ever speak without thinking or — worse yet — think, realize you should keep your mouth shut, and then let words fly, anyway? Well, if you think that disqualifies you from sainthood, meet St. Cyril of Alexandria. Born in the late fourth century, Cyril avoided the Christian persecutions, living in a time when Christianity was finally legal. That being said, it was still a tumultuous time when various “leaders” began having different or divergent theories as to this Jesus figure, His true nature and whether or not He was who Catholics claimed Him to be.

Cyril of Alexandria was a fierce fighter of heresy, an archbishop, and a sound and passionate (but at times, impulsive) preacher. He fought against Nestorius, a well-known heretic, clarifying that Christ was fully human and fully divine — 100 percent of each, not 50/50 (or anything else). He defined and spoke out about the importance of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom he titled “God-bearer” (a term that ruffles some feathers still to this day). In fact, he was the pope’s representative to lead the very important Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431, where he clarified Mary’s role and continued to fight heresies.

Cyril was eventually deposed and imprisoned before he made his way to Alexandria. As new heresies popped up, Cyril was there waiting to knock them down and keep God's faithful and Church on the straight and true doctrinal path. Though Cyril lived a somewhat tumultuous existence, his clarity of thought and teachings were so airtight and timeless, so much so that he was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1882, over 1,400 years after his death.

Cyril loved truth and was not averse to proclaiming truth, no matter the cost or upset hearts and minds along the way. He dedicated his life to making sure people knew the truth about Christ and offering sound explanations as to why we believe what we believe.

If you ever waver in your faith, getting into that "tug of war" between your mind and heart, allow this great thinker to pray with and for you. Through St. Cyril of Alexandria's intercession, ask for the courage to keep looking for the true answer, even in the face of tough questions.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Passionate preacher who fought against heresy
- Originated the title for Mary, "God-bearer"
- Among his writings are commentaries on John, Luke, and the Pentateuch; treatises on dogmatic theology and Apologia against Julian the Apostate; letters; and sermons
- Declared a "Doctor of the Church," an honor bestowed on only 36 saints (to date)

## **St. Dominic Savio**

“I can’t do big things. But I want all I do, even the smallest thing, to be for the greater glory of God.”

**Born:** April 2, 1842

**Died:** March 9, 1857

**Feast Day:** May 6

**Patron of** boys, choirs, people who are falsely accused, and juvenile delinquents

### **Background**

Have you ever changed the way you normally speak or behave when you are around a younger child? Maybe it is a little brother or sister, a cousin, or someone you babysit who causes you to suddenly become really self-aware. You speak differently. You clean up your language. You gossip less. You pay closer attention to the music you listen to or the shows you watch. That level of self-control and desire for virtue (for yourself and others) is what set Dominic apart.

Born in Riva, a small town in Italy, Dominic became a student at an oratory (a society run by priests to instruct in preaching and other works) that was run by (later St.) John Bosco. Bosco was so amazed by Dominic’s humility and virtue that he quickly allowed the young man to help him in his daily work with troubled youth in Turin, Italy.

It is said that Dominic was constantly in prayer, spending hours a day on his knees before God. He even had mystical experiences (called “raptures”) where he had visions of God, heaven, and other divine events. So afraid of leading any of

his friends or classmates into sin, Dominic's sole desire was to be holy and live as an example of virtue.

Sadly, Dominic was often sick. Born with serious health conditions, he lived in a time with scarce medical help. He developed lung problems and, over time, became too weak to work or function, only finding the strength to pray. Dominic died before his 15th birthday, but made such an impact on his mentor, St. John Bosco, in the few years he lived that Bosco himself wrote Dominic's biography. Some thought Dominic was too young and his life too un-extraordinary to be considered for canonization, but Pope Pius X disagreed and canonized him in 1954.

In St. Dominic Savio, we are given the reminder that you are never too young — even as a teen — to influence and change peoples' lives for the better. He made a daily choice to live for God in everything he did — work, play, prayer, service — not for attention but for God's glory. Ask yourself if you are the type of person who is leading those around you to heaven by your words and actions, and then ask St. Dominic to pray with you that you, like he, would become an even better example to all those you meet.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Deeply devout and committed to daily prayer
- Received visions of God during his short life
- His life is chronicled in, "The Life of Dominic Savio," by St. John Bosco
- Countless schools are named after him

## **St. Dymphna**

**Born:** Seventh century

**Died:** Seventh century

**Feast Day:** May 15

**Patron** of those who are suffering mental or emotional affliction and victims of incest

### **Background**

If you have ever suffered with mental illness or loved someone who does, the story of St. Dymphna is one you need to know. As previously discussed, certain saints' stories are difficult to accurately discern regarding what is fact and what is mere legend. Dymphna's story — while probably leaning on and encompassing good amounts of "legend" — certainly has several factual aspects that lend credibility to her life and powerful intercession.

Born in Ireland in the early seventh century, Dymphna had a strong Christian mother and a powerful pagan father. At the age of 14, Dymphna took a vow of chastity and consecrated herself to Christ. Not long after this vow, Dymphna's mother (and main supporter of her faith) died, leaving her ailing father, Damon, in charge of the household. As his physical health declined, so did his mental health. He was so overwhelmed with sadness that some of the king's counselors suggested that he remarry the most beautiful woman he could find. Blinded by grief and mental illness, Damon found no one as beautiful as his former bride except Dymphna. Out of his mind, he sought to "marry" his own daughter. Yes, gross, but keep reading.



Dymphna fled the country with some friends and headed for Belgium. Her father and some troops hunted them down and found them hiding in a town called Geel. At just 15 years old, she was martyred by her own (now, quite mentally ill) father and buried in a cave. A church was erected in her honor and when the original church burnt down centuries later, another even larger church was constructed there above her tomb. Numerous miracles have occurred there and are attributed to the intercession of St. Dymphna. Some of her remains can also be found at the Church of St. Dymphna in the United States.

Saint Dymphna stands as a brave and heroic example of purity and chastity for all young people. Likewise, her strength in dealing with her mother's death and her father's mental illness revealed her to be wise and compassionate beyond her years. Saint Dymphna is a powerful intercessor for anyone who experiences mental illness in their family, who struggles with purity, or who is a victim of emotional or sexual abuse.

#### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Made a vow of chastity at 14
- Died a martyr for the faith
- Numerous miracles are attributed to her intercession
- For over 700 years, residents of Geel have cared for the mentally ill as Dymphna did

## **St. Elizabeth Ann Seton**

“Live simply, so that all may simply live.”

**Born:** August 28, 1774

**Died:** January 4, 1821

**Feast Day:** January 4

**Patron of** in-law problems, widows, death of parents, opposition of Church authorities, and against the death of children

### **Background**

Have you ever dreamt of being rich? I mean really rich. What is the first thing you would buy? A big house? A new car? Maybe you would pay to have your favorite music artist play music at your next birthday party. At what point would you say the money “affected” you? Is it when you begin taking your helicopter places to avoid parking? Is it when you begin blowing your nose with 50-dollar bills? Would the money change you? Now, imagine how hard it would be to be rich and become a saint. Enter St. Elizabeth Ann Seton.

Born into the high society of New York City-life, Elizabeth was a well-educated socialite and prolific reader, who has the honor of being the first native-born American to be canonized. Her love for Scripture proved very helpful when her young husband (whom she loved deeply) was orphaned and had to take over his family’s booming import business. She heeded Christ’s call to provide for her family (see 1 Timothy 5:8) and took on the care of his seven younger siblings. Not long after, her husband William’s health and business both failed, leaving the family’s welfare in Elizabeth’s hands. They set out for Italy where they had business associates and, as William neared

death, they both converted to the Catholic faith. After William died, Elizabeth began looking for what to “do” next. So strong was her intellect, wit, and charm that her friends encouraged her to pray about becoming an educator.

Elizabeth eventually began the first free Catholic school in America, as well as the congregation of religious sisters who worked there. She took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, herself, and eventually became known as “Mother Seton.” She developed tuberculosis not long after, and the disease took her life at age 46. Elizabeth had a deep devotion to the Blessed Mother, the Eucharist, and Scripture. She was canonized in 1975.

Elizabeth Ann Seton was a strong woman, who not only survived but thrived in the face of deep personal loss and ongoing suffering. She did not let the weight of her own cross affect how she helped others bear their crosses. In her time as a wife, mother, convert, teacher, and religious sister, it seemed there was not a vocation or role she could not handle. She loved marriage, family, education, and the Lord (not in that order). Ask St. Elizabeth Ann Seton to pray with and for you for anything from strained relationships to struggling grades and encounters with suffering.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Heroically raised seven children (who were orphaned after her father-in-law’s passing)
- Converted to Catholicism
- Deeply devoted to the Eucharist, Scripture, and the Blessed Virgin Mary
- Established the first free Catholic school in America
- First American-born saint to be canonized by the Church
- Her writings are archived in various anthologies that can be found online and in print

## **St. Elizabeth of Hungary**

“How could I bear a crown of gold when the Lord bears a crown of thorns? And bears it for me!”

**Born:** July 7, 1207

**Died:** November 17, 1231

**Feast Day:** November 17

**Patron of** bakers, those who are falsely accused, those who are homeless, nursing services, tertiaryaries, widows, and young brides

### **Background**

The story of this next saint is like something you would see in a Hallmark Channel movie — the kind where we find out that the main character is “secretly” a princess from a small, foreign country. It seems like that because that basically is the story, only this princess tale has an unpredictable ending (unlike Hallmark movies).

Elizabeth was the daughter of Alexander II, the King of Hungary, making her (literally) a princess. Though her parents arranged her marriage at 14, she fell deeply in love with her husband (and future king), Louis. The happy couple had three beautiful children and — inspired by Elizabeth’s compassionate heart — worked together to serve the poor and homeless of their kingdom. Not everyone in the royal courts shared the future king’s affection for Elizabeth, however, as they found her interactions with the poor inappropriate and “beneath” royalty.

When her beloved husband was killed during the Crusades, Elizabeth’s extended family and friends accused her of mismanaging the kingdom’s finances (in her work with the poor), so she had to flee the castle and find shelter from the

very poor she spent years protecting and serving. Eventually, she was invited back into the castle where she continued her efforts and charitable works until she died at 24 years of age. So amazing was her life, she was canonized only four years after her death and is still beloved for her heart of love that extended beyond the throne.

Elizabeth of Hungary reminds us that you do not have to be old to become a saint. She did not allow her age to hold her back from experiencing some of the greatest gifts in all of creation — love, marriage, parenthood, serving others, etc. She may have been a queen, but she was inspired to leave “the world” behind as she gave to and served the poor, sick, and homeless. Look at your life. Where do you have more than you need? Look around your room, in your closet, around your house ... is there something you can do without that would help others? Ask St. Elizabeth of Hungary to pray with you and — through her intercession — to open your eyes and heart to how your blessings can bless others.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Incredibly generous to the poor and sick
- Patroness of the Franciscan Third Order and of all Catholic Charities

## **St. Felicity**

“Now I’m the one who is suffering, but in the arena, another will be in me suffering for me because I will be suffering for Him.”

**Born:** Unknown

**Died:** A.D. March 7, 203

**Feast Day:** March 7

**Patron of** mothers, expectant mothers, ranchers, and butchers

### **Background**

Think of your best friend, the person who stands beside you and has your back no matter what. For St. Perpetua, that friend was St. Felicity. Born in Carthage, Africa during the great Christian persecutions of the early third century, both women were converting to the faith and preparing for their Christian initiation when they were arrested and sentenced to death. They were baptized in prison just days before their death. In fact, Felicity kept a diary in prison that documented all of the details of the days leading up to her martyrdom.

It turns out that Felicity was pregnant when she was sentenced to death, but she trusted in the Lord and, luckily, delivered a healthy little girl, who was soon after adopted by Christians just before Felicity and her companions were sent into the arena. In the arena, Felicity and Perpetua faced a death unlike any other. They were stripped naked and attacked by wild animals, mocked, and defenseless. Eventually, they were clothed, only to be sent back out to face gladiators. Both women died by the sword before the cheering crowds that day.

Felicity and her best friend, Perpetua, remind us of the importance of Christian friendship and accountability. Side by

side, they knew there is strength in numbers and that living the Christian life — while not easy — is “easier” when you have someone to walk the walk with. They did not just cling to one another, they clung to Christ. The strongest friendships are those that are built on faith in the Lord (see Sirach 6:14).

Even though she was pregnant — and that would have gotten her out of her martyrdom — Felicity trusted the Lord with her whole heart, no matter what the outcome would be. She was prepared to face and embrace suffering if it meant giving glory to God. The next time you go through suffering, invite St. Felicity to pray with you to have the strength to bear it with humility and joy, as she did.

#### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Baptized into the Church while imprisoned for her faith
- Gave birth to a baby girl just a few days before her execution
- Martyred with St. Perpetua in A.D. 203
- A famous account of her martyrdom is recorded in, “The Passion of St. Perpetua, St. Felicitas, and their Companions”

## **St. Francis of Assisi**

**Born:** 1181 or 1182

**Died:** October 3, 1226

**Feast Day:** October 4

**Patron of** animals, merchants, and ecology

### **Background**

Few saints enjoy the kind of “rock star” status that St. Francis of Assisi has. Since his death in 1226, many souls have been challenged by his holy example and countless gardens have displayed statues in his honor. It is kind of ironic, if you think about it ... there is St. Francis, known for his love of animals, now serving as a target for pigeons everywhere. Still, Francis was so humble even he probably would have thought it was funny.

Francis was born in Assisi, a little town in northern Italy. The son of a wealthy cloth merchant, he was a wild child and lived a pretty crazy young adulthood by most people’s accounts. He joined the army, fought in the fourth Crusade, and was intent on becoming a knight. He was captured soon after and eventually made his way home, where he began to reveal a deep-seeded love for the poor. Something was happening in Francis’ heart.

At the age of 26, while praying before the crucifix in an old, rundown chapel, he heard a voice from the crucifix say to him, “Francis, repair my church, which has fallen into disrepair, as you can see.” Francis took the words literally and quickly began “fixing” the dilapidated building. In time, Francis came to understand that the Lord was talking about rebuilding the greater, universal Catholic Church, not just the chapel building.



Francis went forth with nothing earthly to his name. He traveled the countryside, begging and preaching the Gospel message. Most people ridiculed him, but a small group of people who also renounced their possessions began to travel with him. Within about 15 years, he was leading over 5,000 friars and an order of religious sisters (the Poor Clares, begun by St. Clare of Assisi). He crafted a strict rule of life to live by, which called for absolute poverty, authentic humility, and great discipline.

He wrote beautiful prayers and was a gentle and compassionate soul. Francis preached against greed and worldly excess to a world (and even some of the Church) that did not want to hear it. He went without food for himself while giving what little he had to others. His Franciscan brothers reported witnessing incredible miracles while in his presence over the years, including watching him levitate, bilocate, tame wild animals, heal paralytics, and cleanse lepers of their leprosy. He is said to have cured those who were mute, deaf, and blind and to have even exorcised demons from people who were possessed simply by walking into the room they were in. As if this was not enough, while praying in 1224, Francis was granted the gift of the stigmata — the marks of Christ's five wounds — upon his own body, which bled for the remaining two years of his life.

Francis of Assisi had a deep love for God, people, animals, and the environment. Put simply, he saw God in everyone and everything. Above all, he cared for and loved the sick and poor in a way that few others ever have. His mission was to demonstrate the love of God through actions and not just words. Invite St. Francis of Assisi to pray with and for you. Ask him — by his intercession — to help you see Christ in others and to witness God's design and handiwork throughout creation. If you do, you will not only grow in holiness and awareness but selflessness and humility, just like this great saint.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Experienced a profound conversion at the age of 26
- Had a great love for animals
- Founded the Order of St. Francis: the Franciscan Friars
- Known for many miracles throughout his life
- Composed the popular prayers, “The Prayer of Humility” and “The Canticle of the Sun”
- His writings are compiled in various anthologies

## **St. Francis de Sales**

“Do not wish to be anything but what you are, and try to be that perfectly.”

**Born:** August 21, 1567

**Died:** December 28, 1622

**Feast Day:** January 24

**Patron of** Catholic writers, Catholic press, the deaf, journalists, and adult education

### **Background**

When I was young, I wanted to grow up and become a Jedi. It seemed like a legitimate and quite possible career move, so I was really bummed when I grew older and learned that lightsabers did not exist yet (I am still hoping Elon Musk or the team at Apple are secretly working on this). Next, I wanted to be on Saturday Night Live, but that did not exactly pan out. In college, I wanted to graduate and make money. Instead, I went into ministry. My parents were not super excited about it, but I knew it was what God was calling me to do and they eventually came around to the idea. This might be the only thing I have in common with St. Francis de Sales.

Born into a family of aristocrats in France in the 16th century, Francis' parents had high hopes for their son — most likely in the form of a law degree, politics, leadership, etc. — but Francis had other plans. Beginning in his teen years, Francis recognized a desire to become a priest, though he hid this fact from his disapproving family who had already chosen a wife for him. Though he did end up studying theology and received a law degree, Francis' sights were set far “higher” than what Earth had to offer. He wanted to serve God.

He dedicated his life to evangelization and teaching, seeking to set straight the conceptions and misconceptions of the Catholic faith during the Protestant Reformation. Francis watched as thousands left the Catholic Church to follow those who were protesting it, like John Calvin, but endured freezing cold, homelessness, angry crowds, and hostility at every turn in order to preach and write at an incredible rate. He even wrote his sermons on paper and slid them under the doors of peoples' homes in hopes that they would read them and come (back) to the Church. After converting tens of thousands at the time (his writings bringing even more to God to this day), Francis died at the age of 55 and was later canonized and honored as a Doctor of the Church.

Sometimes when we are seeking holiness, we focus so much on ourselves — what we do and do not do — that we almost forget the people around us. Though he started and led a religious order, Francis did not turn in on himself. He was constantly aware of the people around him and their need for direction, virtue, and holiness. The more he looked inward, the more he saw the outward (all of the people God put in his path).

You may think you are too young or not holy enough, but there are people in your life right now who need Christ in you. Ask St. Francis de Sales to pray with you and reveal to you all those souls God has placed in your path to lead back to Him.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Earned a doctorate degree in law
- Helped convert an estimated 40,000 souls to Catholicism
- Most famous written works are “Introduction to the Devout Life,” “Finding God’s Will for You,” and “Roses Among Thorns”
- Declared a “Doctor of the Church,” an honor bestowed on only 36 saints (to date)

## **St. Francis Xavier**

“I will go anywhere and do anything in order to communicate the love of Jesus to those who do not know Him or have forgotten Him.”

**Born:** April 7, 1506

**Died:** December 3, 1552

**Feast Day:** December 3

**Patron of** Catholic missions, African missions, Goa India, China, and missionaries

### **Background**

How many people do you have in your life whose opinion you really respect? Beyond your parents and grandparents, who do you look to for life advice? Who would you listen to if they challenged you or inspired you to change the course of your future? If you are lucky, you may have a handful, possibly a youth minister or teacher or, perhaps, a coach.

Living and working as a teacher in Paris, Francis Xavier had big plans for his life. When a friend and mentor named St. Ignatius of Loyola began to challenge him, he began to think even bigger. Francis was a brilliant man and had what was assuredly a bright and successful future ahead of him. During that time, however, Francis was coming to know the Lord — and himself — far better through Ignatius’ “Spiritual Exercises.” In 1537, at the age of 31, Francis was ordained a priest for the “new” order of priests Ignatius started, called the Society of Jesus (known as the “Jesuits”).

Francis eventually became one of the greatest missionaries for Christ the Church has ever known. He lived in Venice, the East Indies, and India. He evangelized and ministered to the widest possible assortment of peoples, cultures, and belief systems. He lived among them, ate with them, and dwelt in the poorest areas. He even lived among the lepers. He learned enough Japanese to begin communities and churches throughout Japan. He had planned to move into China next, but he died before he was able to arrive there.

Saint Francis Xavier is a great example of someone who could have been successful at anything he tried, but who was so in love with the Lord that he was humble enough to “forego” the highest honors of the world in order to bring heaven to the “lowest” of Earth.

You might think you have to have “all of the answers” before you can share your faith with your family or friends who do not believe what you do, but St. Francis Xavier proves that the most important tool in evangelization is to listen to the other, to share space and be willing to be uncomfortable while you earn the right to be heard. Saint Francis Xavier literally “met people where they were at” and helped guide them to Jesus. If there are people in your life who you want to know God more intimately, take a page from this amazing saint’s book — put your own plans aside and show them that you care about what they think, not just what you believe.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Zealous preacher and evangelist
- Ordained a priest and took vows of poverty, obedience, chastity, and service
- Served as a missionary in India, Malaysia, and Japan

## **St. Gabriel the Archangel**

**Born:** N/A

**Died:** N/A

**Feast Day:** September 29 (along with St. Michael and St. Raphael)

**Patron of** messengers, telecommunication workers, and postal workers

### **Background**

If you were to ask people you know if you are a positive or a negative person, what would they say? Does your “story,” daily post, or normal mood paint the picture of someone who is happy or sad, up or down, positive or negative? While you are no angel (and neither am I), the answers to these questions say a lot about who we focus on and the life we seek.

Saint Gabriel is one of only three archangels named in Scripture (along with St. Raphael and St. Michael). Archangels have specific jobs or “missions,” and Gabriel’s was that of a divine messenger (which is why he is often depicted holding a trumpet, announcing good news).

It was Gabriel who appeared in the Book of Daniel, interpreting the prophet’s visions and speaking in dreams. It is Gabriel who appeared to John the Baptist’s father, Zechariah, the priest who had the honor of burning incense in the sacred area of the temple. It is Gabriel who visited the Blessed Virgin Mary in Nazareth to announce the good news that she is the chosen one to bear the Son of God. And it is Gabriel who visited Joseph three times in his dreams to reassure and guide him as he preserves and protects the Holy Family from imminent danger.

God could have sent a prophet to the Holy Family, but, instead, He sent an angelic messenger because the news God wanted to share had cosmic significance — it would impact both heaven *and* Earth. Saint Gabriel reminds us of God’s excitement over Jesus and Mary (and Joseph), His fidelity in the plan to save us all, and His power over all of creation — in heaven and on Earth.

Saint Gabriel’s mission was to point others to Jesus, the Messiah. Is that your mission? Does your life point others toward Jesus or do you leave that up to those who are “holier”? Are you like St. Gabriel? Do you joyfully or reluctantly (or never) share what God is doing in your life? When you encounter others who are overwhelmed — like Mary was — do you bring encouragement, bidding them “do not fear” as the angel did to the Blessed Virgin Mary, or do you let them face the future on their own? You are created to point others to God, to share the good news of Christ. Ask St. Gabriel the Archangel to pray with you, that you may unleash a new boldness in your example and witness to all.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Appeared to the Blessed Virgin Mary at the Annunciation
- Known as “the Messenger of God”
- Depicted in countless works of art throughout the centuries



## St. Gemma Galgani

“If all were to know how beautiful Jesus is and how loving He is, they would all die of love! And yet, how is it that He is so little loved?”

**Born:** March 12, 1878

**Died:** April 11, 1903

**Feast Day:** April 11

**Patron of** students, pharmacists, against temptations, against the death of parents, and against tuberculosis

### Background

Gemma Galgani was born into a poor, Italian family in the late 19th century. More of an introvert, Gemma was a kind and quiet girl, liked by her teachers and classmates but increasingly misunderstood as she grew older. People just did not seem to “get her.” Her poor health often left her on the outside looking in, but her immense love for God directed her entire life.

As she grew into her teen years, Gemma began having mystical experiences of God. As she experienced hardships and challenges — like having to become a mother figure to her seven siblings following her mom’s death — she would remember Jesus’ Passion and sufferings, uniting her pain to His. Even when young men proposed marriage (and, certainly, an easier lifestyle), Gemma only wanted to pray and speak to God. She spent long periods in silent prayer, where she found the most joy and peace.

Though her ever-declining health kept her from becoming a nun, it did not stop her from increasing in holiness. She

had visions and prophecies about things that were to come. She even bore the wounds of Christ — called the “stigmata” — that caused blood to flow from her feet, hands, and side. Every Thursday evening (not coincidentally, the night of the Last Supper), she would begin to feel the pain and fall into a prayerful, trance-like state (called “rapture”). The wounds would appear and last through Friday. The stigmata began appearing when she was 21 years old and continued for about four years until she died from tuberculosis in 1903.

Gemma’s self-awareness is one quality that makes her so incredible. Though deep and profoundly holy, she was well aware of her own sin. She professed her need for Jesus and His mercy every day of her life. You may be “the holy one” that no one in your circle quite understands, or perhaps you are the “sinner” who thinks you have done too much for God to forgive. Regardless, St. Gemma stands as a model for both types of people, and for every soul in between. Ask St. Gemma to pray for and with you, seeking her intercession to grow in self-awareness and remember who you are, whose you are, and who you are meant to become.

#### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Bore the wounds of Christ, the stigmata
- Predicted the establishment of the monastery in Lucca, Italy years before it happened
- Authored “The Diary of St. Gemma Galgani”
- Her spiritual director, Fr. Germanus, C.P., wrote “The Life of St. Gemma Galgani”

## St. Genesisus

“There is no other Lord of the universe besides Him whom I have seen. Him I adore and serve, and to Him I will adhere, though I should suffer a thousand deaths for His sake.”

**Born:** Unknown

**Died:** Between A.D. 286 and 303

**Feast Day:** August 25

**Patron of** actors, lawyers, comedians, converts, dancers, people with epilepsy, musicians, and victims of torture

### Background

Sometimes we think that following the Lord means “giving up” everything we enjoy or are passionate about. Nothing could be further from the truth (unless all we enjoy is sin). The story and life of Genesisus is a living testimony to the fact that the Lord will meet us in our passions and, if we are open, redirect them for His glory.

Genesisus was born in Rome during the Christian persecutions in the late third century. Known for his acting and comedy, Genesisus was a natural and gifted on stage, even performing for Emperor Diocletian. Once, during a play publicly making fun of Christians and their “baptism,” the pagan actor was moved and — in the middle of the play — had a conversion to the very faith he was mocking. Genesisus said he saw angels around him and began asking them if he, too, could be baptized. His actions enraged the emperor, who ordered Genesisus to stop and continue worshipping their pagan gods. When the actor refused, he was beheaded.

Genesius offers us two important reminders about living the faith. First, he did not have a perfect past. He was not always a “good person.” Like most of the saints, Genesius had a less than holy beginning, but God looked past his unworthiness and declared his worth. Second, his refusal to abandon his newfound faith when hardship and threats came demonstrate the interior strength and resolve it takes to live as a Christian ... still today.

Saint Genesius is a great patron for actors, comedians, and performers, but also for any soul who was not raised in the faith but was open to God’s voice and humble enough to make concrete changes in response to God’s truth and mercy.

**Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Successful actor
- Experienced a profound conversion during a performance
- Martyred for the faith

## **St. Gertrude of Nivelles**

**Born:** A.D. 626

**Died:** A.D. March 17, 659

**Feast Day:** March 17 (along with St. Patrick)

**Patron of** cats, the recently deceased, gardeners, travelers, those with mental illness, and those with a morbid fear of mice and rats

### **Background**

If you have ever found yourself watching hours of random and hilarious cat videos on YouTube, St. Gertrude of Nivelles may be a saint you can relate to. It is not because Gertrude was a creepy lady who raised a hundred cats in solitude with no friends ... quite the opposite.

Born into a prominent family living amidst the royal courts in Belgium, Gertrude was raised in an extremely holy family (her father, Pepin of Landen, is beatified while her mother, Itta of Metz, and sister, Begga, are canonized saints). When asked as a teen by the Belgian king which young suitor she would like to marry, Gertrude announced her intention to marry only Jesus and consecrate her life to Him. She was installed as the abbess (leader) of a Benedictine monastery of nuns and served in that role until the age of 30, when she handed over her duties to devote herself strictly to the study of Scripture. With waning health (due to years of intense fasting), she spent the last few years of her life in intense prayer.

It is said that Gertrude became the patroness of cats due to her strong love for and kindness to the felines who lived around the monastery where she lived and prayed. Others maintain it is because she prayed daily and fervently for the

souls who are trapped in purgatory, whom artists of the time often depicted in paintings as mice. It is as though Gertrude was scurrying around trying to guide souls in purgatory to heaven by her intercession.

Gertrude was a picture of hospitality, always willing to love and serve the pilgrims who ended up at her doorstep or were passing through her town. Ask yourself, “Do I go above and beyond to help others? Do I seek out and welcome a stranger? Am I willing to be uncomfortable, so others feel welcome or come to know God’s love?” If not (or if you have room to improve), ask St. Gertrude of Nivelles to pray with and for you that you, like her, might have a heart for those who are new, those who are in need, and those who may not know the love and community you have been blessed with.

#### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Intensely devoted to the study of Scripture
- Had a great devotion to the holy souls in purgatory

## **St. Gianna**

“One cannot love without suffering or suffer without loving.”

**Born:** October 4, 1922

**Died:** April 28, 1962

**Feast Day:** April 28

**Patron of** mothers, physicians, and unborn children

### **Background**

Born Gianna Beretta in 1922, this future saint grew up in an amazing family from Milan, Italy. She was well-educated, smart, and had a true heart of service. She earned a degree in medicine and surgery by age 27, served the elderly in her free time, and opened a pediatric medical clinic at the University of Milan before turning 30. Gianna is that one friend in high school who you just know is going to “make it” in life because she excelled at everything she did.

Gianna loved living life. She climbed mountains, was an avid skier, volunteered, and fell in love with a man named Pietro at the age of 33. Married a year later, they had two little girls and were living the dream. Early on in the pregnancy with their third child, however, Gianna began to experience an odd pain, eventually learning she had developed a fibroma (a benign tumor) in her uterus. Desiring to save her life, the doctors recommended surgery, but Gianna — as a doctor, herself — knew that it would almost certainly result in the death of her baby. Selflessly and courageously, Gianna endured the pain and risk of death for the next seven months, praying and asking the Lord to prevent the baby from feeling any of the unspeakable pain she felt.

A few days before she gave birth, she ordered the doctors that, should it come down to saving her life or the baby, they were supposed to save the baby. On April 21, 1962, Gianna gave birth to another daughter, whom they named Gianna Emanuela. The doctors tried hard to save her life but after a week of trying, Gianna passed away on April 28 at the age of 39. Gianna was canonized a saint by (then) Pope John Paul II on April 24, 1994.

Gianna loved worldly adventures, but she understood that the greatest adventure on Earth was a life sacrificed for the love of another — especially family. She found adventure in her marriage and children, in everyday tasks and not just in her final sacrifice. Saint Gianna is a great reminder that it is not only priests and nuns who are saints. There are countless unnamed saints who lived and served anonymously as parents through the centuries. Gianna did not allow a bad diagnosis or grim outlook to steal her joy or distract her from God. She knew God loved her no matter what came her way. Take St. Gianna as an example, and invite her to pray with you for your future vocation (if you are called to marriage) and also for the courage to live passionately for others, as she did. Saint Gianna taught us that if we love fiercely and deeply, there is nothing we cannot overcome.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Successful doctor and owner of her own medical practice
- Generously served the poor, young, and elderly as a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul
- Sacrificed her own life to save her daughter's life
- Her writings are recorded and shared in "The Journey of Our Love" and "Love Letters to My Husband"



## St. Gregory the Great

“Act in such a way that your humility may not be weakness, nor your authority be severity. Justice must be accompanied by humility, that humility may render justice lovable.”

**Born:** Around A.D. 540

**Died:** A.D. March 12, 604

**Feast Day:** September 3

No official **patronage** exists for this saint.

### Background

Saint Gregory would have been the guy in high school voted “Most Likely to Succeed.” His resume would have been longer than his peers’ term papers. He has so many accomplishments and changed the Church in so many ways that it is almost impossible to mention them all here, so we will just hit a few highlights.

Gregory was born in Rome in the middle of the sixth century. He was brilliant, likable, kind but firm. He began in politics, was later ordained a priest, and, after that, served beneath the pope. Years later, when Gregory, himself, became pope, he removed bad priests from office, used the Vatican’s wealth as ransom for prisoners who were held captive, and allotted every ounce of the Church’s power to aid and feed the poor and hungry. He reformed the Mass (liturgy), clarified doctrines that had been misinterpreted, redefined our calendar system, and played a huge part in what we now know as “Gregorian chant” (yes, it is named after him). He taught priests and bishops how to be better servants. If his priests were unwilling to serve or interact with the poor or those who were most in need, Gregory removed them. He refused to eat until the poor had eaten first

and, even then, usually dined with at least a dozen poor souls. Gregory was one of a kind. For this reason, he is known not merely as “St. Gregory” but “St. Gregory the Great.”

Gregory’s personality is well-represented by the Gregorian chant he designed — a fiery combination of passion and praise. He loved people and the Lord with all his heart. He refused to let “how things *had always been done*” dictate what needed to be done. Gregory reminds us that art and beauty ought to draw the viewer and hearer to God, not to self. Though he was constantly surrounded by poverty, death, and dark political times, Gregory focused on the light, truth, and beauty. He reminded us that in order to live as a Catholic Christian, you have to get comfortable with being uncomfortable.

If you ever feel overwhelmed by the negativity and evil of the world, ask St. Gregory the Great to pray with you to keep hope alive and maintain a good attitude. This “great” saint (literally) is a living example that things will get better if you trust and serve God. Focus on God and there is no telling how much you can accomplish, whether people voted you “Most Likely to Succeed” or not.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Served for five years as the mayor of Rome
- Became a Benedictine monk after resigning from office
- Founded six monasteries
- First monk to be elected as pope
- Most famous written works are “On Pastoral Care,” “Homilies,” “Dialogues,” his sermons on Ezekiel and the Song of Songs, and “Moralia in Job”
- Declared a “Doctor of the Church,” an honor bestowed on only 36 saints (to date)

## **St. Ignatius of Loyola**

“Go and set the world on fire.”

**Born:** October 23, 1491

**Died:** July 31, 1556

**Feast Day:** July 31

**Patron of** retreats, soldiers, Jesuits, and the Spiritual Exercises

### **Background**

Many people have heard of the Jesuits, the order of missionary priests who have travelled the world bringing the Gospel to the most remote locations. Far fewer know its founder: a five-foot-two, red-headed soldier from Spain named Ignatius.

Ignatius of Loyola was the youngest of a dozen children who were born into Spanish nobility. He received a military education and entered the army in 1517. After several battles, he was dramatically wounded and left crippled for life. During his quite lengthy time of recuperation, he had little to do but read only two books: one on saints and one on Christ. Needless to say, he could no longer run from God — spiritually or physically — and the good shepherd made His presence known.

As his knowledge of Christ grew, so did his humility. Everything changed in Ignatius' exterior life, as his interior, contemplative life was unleashed. He took a vow of chastity, hung up his battle sword, and left the busyness of the world for a mountain cave, where he began living what we now know as his “Spiritual Exercises.” He travelled as a missionary, studied theology and philosophy, and was repeatedly imprisoned for his rather “unpopular” methods of evangelization.

Wherever he went, the power of God went with him. Ignatius often received visions in prayer, during which his face was said to shine radiantly (as reported by St. Philip Neri). It was not uncommon, either, for him to be seen levitating or speaking directly to the Blessed Virgin Mary. He could read the secrets and sins of the people who came to him for counsel. He bilocated and healed many, even after his death.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola is a great example of an ordinary guy whom the Lord used to do extraordinary things. He struggled with worldly temptations but overcame those struggles with heavenly grace. Ignatius of Loyola was a picture of boldness, and he embraced his own personal sufferings and the obstacles of this world with a fierce abandon, reminding all to live not for our own glory but for the Lord's.

Ask St. Ignatius of Loyola to pray for you to grow in knowledge, wisdom, and boldness for the Gospel. Invite him to pray with you when you are feeling unprepared or too unworthy to preach or teach the truth of the Church. When you are overwhelmed or are in a difficult season of your faith journey, remember his words, "If God causes you to suffer much, it is a sign that He has great designs for you, and that He certainly intends to make you a saint."

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Born into Spanish nobility and served honorably in the military
- Experienced a profound conversion after reading about the lives of the saints
- Devout missionary and evangelist
- His motto of *ad maiorem dei gloriam* ("all for the greater glory of God") or "AMDG" became the foundation of the Jesuit order
- Most famous for developing the "Spiritual Exercises"

## **St. Isidore the Farmer**

“The more we are afflicted in this world, the greater is our assurance in the next; the more sorrow in the present, the greater will be our joy in the future.”

**Born:** Sometime in 1080

**Died:** November 30, 1171

**Feast Day:** May 15

**Patron of** farmers and laborers

### **Background**

Living in the suburbs, surrounded by 21st century technology, one might think that working as a farmer over 900 years ago would have been boring — Isidore of Madrid would beg to differ. Isidore tilled and planted, sowed and plowed from sunrise to sunset every day. He loved farming, but he loved God even more. He joyfully offered every moment of work to God as a sacrifice of love (consider that the next time you complain about your job).

Isidore and his wife, Maria (who was also canonized a saint), lost their only son at a young age. Rather than becoming bitter toward God, they dedicated their lives to prayer and service. They did not just grow food for their livelihood but farmed enough to feed the hungry in the surrounding communities. The couple was so holy that people around them began to witness miracles. It is said that if Isidore was running late to the fields because he attended Mass, an angel could be seen plowing the field for him prior to his arrival. Others witnessed Isidore feeding the hungry with food that miraculously kept multiplying in order that the hungry crowd may be satisfied.

Even after his death, the people of Spain asked for this humble saint's intercession and were amazed at the results. In 1211, the Spanish King of Castile asked for Isidore's help during war. The saint appeared with a message that eventually led to Spanish victory. Centuries later when a different king was sick and bedridden, St. Isidore's incorrupt body was taken from the shrine and carried in a procession to the king's bedside. By the time the relic made it there, the king had fully recovered.

You might not think you have much to "give" to God. You probably think you are "just a teen" with little money or influence in the world, but you are wrong. Saint Isidore is proof that no matter what hardships come your way and no matter how "simple" or "boring" your life may seem, your attitude is everything. Saints Isidore and Maria remind us that common married couples can live as saints and regular, "ordinary" souls can do extraordinary things. Live your life for God and He will do more through you than you can possibly fathom.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Wrote "Isidore of Seville: The Medical Writings" and "Etymologiae"
- Said to have performed miracles
- Regarded as a hero and one of Spain's greatest saints
- Declared a "Doctor of the Church," an honor bestowed on only 36 saints (to date)

## St. Jerome

“A false interpretation of Scripture causes that the gospel of the Lord becomes the gospel of man, or, which is worse, of the devil.”

**Born:** A.D. March 27, 347

**Died:** A.D. September 30, 420

**Feast Day:** September 30

**Patron of** archaeologists, biblical scholars, librarians, students, and translators

### Background

Saint Jerome was a lot of things — insanely smart, hot-headed, disciplined, book-ish, intense — but “easy to hang out with” probably was not in his top ten. Jerome dedicated his life to his studies and while his brains got him into a lot of trouble, his love for God and contributions to the Catholic faith also changed the world forever.

Jerome was born in Dalmatia and moved to Rome and Germany for his studies. Considered by St. Augustine and many others to be one of the (if not the) smartest saints in the entire communion of saints, he was a very learned man, the finest of Scripture scholars, and a master of Latin, Hebrew, Greek, and Chaldaic languages. He served as the private secretary for the pope and translated the entire Bible into Latin (called the “Vulgate”). Jerome’s writings helped shape the Christian world and forever changed the Church, which is why he earned the title of Doctor of the Church. A well-traveled man, Jerome was constantly looking for ways to learn and grow in holiness.

Jerome spent five years in the desert, praying, studying, and offering penance. He then moved on to Bethlehem, where it is said he lived in the cave where Christ was born. He eventually died there, and his remains can be found in the Church of St. Mary Major in Rome.

Saint Jerome sometimes gets a bad rap for being too difficult to get along with. He had exceedingly high expectations of himself and others. He wanted everyone to know and love God and expected everyone to work as hard as he did at growing in knowledge and holiness. Ironically, those are the very attributes that grew him in virtue over his life and eventually made him a saint. Jerome always made time for God, though, and his prayer life would humble and stack up to even the greatest of saints.

We can take a lot from St. Jerome's story and example. You do not have to "be" perfect to become a saint, but chasing perfection certainly helps one grow in discipline and virtue. Ask St. Jerome to pray with you, not only if you have a short temper but if you want to grow in knowledge — especially knowledge of Scripture — and if you want the courage to stand for truth in the midst of a culture that rejects it at every turn.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Translated the entire Bible into Latin
- Lived and died in the cave where Christ was born
- Most famous written works are "On Famous Men," "Dialogue Against the Luciferians," "Against the Pelagians," "Apology Against Rufinus," and "Commentary of Jeremiah"
- Declared a "Doctor of the Church," an honor bestowed on only 36 saints (to date)



## **St. Joan of Arc**

"I am not afraid ... I was born to do this."

**Born:** January 6, 1412

**Died:** May 30, 1431

**Feast Day:** May 30

**Patron of** France, captives, martyrs, prisoners, rape victims, and soldiers

### **Background**

If she were born in the 21st century, young Joan of Arc would have assuredly been YouTube famous. There was something about her that people just wanted to follow. So many stories and legends have been told and re-told about St. Joan of Arc, so it is difficult to tell what is historically accurate and what is the fruit of a large "fan base."

Born a farmer's daughter in northeastern France in 1412, few could have believed the mark this humble young girl would leave on the world. Ravaged by war with England, France was not doing well. Many in Joan's village were forced to abandon their homes as the English invaded and began to occupy much of northern France. At only 13 years old, Joan began to hear voices that were calling her to a special "mission." Charged with restoring France and installing Crown Prince Charles of Valois as the rightful king, Joan took a vow of chastity, avoided an arranged marriage, and enlisted a band of followers to help her fulfill her mission.

At 16, she cut her hair short (like a man's), dressed in men's clothing, and made an 11-day journey to the site of the prince's palace. After a brief but powerful meeting, the prince

agreed to let her fight. Joan led several assaults for the French army and her reputation spread quickly. She was a wildly successful leader, fending off France's enemies at every turn. Eventually she was captured, though, and brought up on over 70 charges including witchcraft, heresy, and dressing like a man. The king (whom she had helped restore to the throne) decided to distance himself from her and did nothing to help negotiate her release.

After over a year in captivity, at the age of 19, Joan was given a death sentence. She was taken to the old marketplace in Rouen, France and was burned at the stake. Twenty years after her death, a trial cleared her name and in 1920, Pope Benedict XV canonized her a saint.

Joan of Arc had many admirable traits. Her courage, selflessness, and love of the Lord are all obvious and noteworthy. Possibly even more impressive, though, was her openness and obedience to God's call. When she heard the voice of God, she did not flee but forged ahead with trust and valor. Leading an army of men (as a teen girl) is not possible without absolute trust and great faith. She knew that with God on her side, she could accomplish anything.

Joan could have "played small." She could have let the negative voices that surrounded (and misjudged her) win. She did not. The next time you doubt yourself or your strength, ask St. Joan of Arc to pray with you. By her intercession, ask the Holy Spirit to unleash the hidden greatness within you and leave your mark on the cultural battlefield of your world.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Received a divine vision to save France from its enemies and install Charles as the rightful king
- Captured, imprisoned, and burned at the stake at 19

## St. John XXIII

“Consult not your fears but your hopes and your dreams. Think not about your frustrations, but about your unfulfilled potential. Concern yourself not with what you tried and failed in, but with what it is still possible for you to do.”

**Born:** November 25, 1881

**Died:** June 3, 1963

**Feast Day:** October 11

**Patron of** papal delegates, the patriarchy of Venice, and the Second Vatican Council

### Background

There are several adjectives people use to describe popes — holy, prayerful, intelligent, compassionate — but funny does not usually come to mind, at least not before Pope John XXIII. Born Angelo Roncalli, the man who would become known in the 1960s as Pope John XXIII was a “larger than life” figure, both physically and in personality.

The Holy Spirit was definitely moving when the College of Catholic Cardinals elected Roncalli to be the new pope. His wit, charm, and down to Earth humility were a welcome addition to the Vatican’s ongoing commentary on theology and morality, war and politics. Ordained a priest in 1904, Angelo was a profound thinker and teacher on the collegiate and seminary levels. He was a stretcher-bearer in World War I and saw, firsthand, the horrors of war. He served as a Vatican diplomat in various places, forged alliances with countries and governments, and was able to help save the lives of over 24,000 Jewish people during World War II. After he became pope in 1958, he captivated people around the world with his humor but, also, with his holiness. In 1962,

Pope John XXIII played an instrumental role in helping resolve the Cuban Missile Crisis.

This pope called the Second Vatican Council, where cardinals and leaders from around the world converged on Rome to pray and discuss changes that needed to be made in the Church. The effects of that council are visibly seen throughout the Catholic Church today. He died in June of 1963 and was canonized a saint by Pope Francis in 2014.

Angelo Roncalli was the funny, humble kid next door. He was a good student but no valedictorian. He would have “been on the team” but not the superstar. He was a good theologian but there were others who were “brighter.” Yet, the Holy Spirit chose him through the papal conclave. His private journals revealed (years later) that St. John XXIII was still that humble farm boy at heart, even after being elevated to the highest status in Christ’s Church on Earth. He was a living example of true holiness and a reminder to us that all things really are possible with God. Invite St. John XXIII to pray with you to dream bigger. Invoke his intercession as you discern the vocation God created you for, a vocation that might seem “too big” for you but for which you are uniquely qualified.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Studied canon law
- Worked as a secretary for his bishop, a Church history teacher in the seminary, and a publisher for the diocesan paper
- Served as a papal diplomat during WWII, helping to save 24,000 Jewish people
- Involved in efforts to help resolve the Cuban Missile Crisis
- Most famous encyclicals include “Mother and Teacher” and “Peace on Earth”
- First pope to be honored as the Time Magazine “Man of the Year”

## **St. John Bosco**

“Whatever you do, think of the glory of God as your main goal.”

**Born:** August 16, 1815

**Died:** January 31, 1888

**Feast Day:** January 31

**Patron of** boys, editors, and youth

### **Background**

Earlier you read about the story of young St. Dominic Savio, student of Giovanni “Don” Bosco, a.k.a. St. John Bosco. To put it in more modern, sci-fi terms: St. Dominic was the Padawan apprentice and St. John Bosco, a Jedi Master.

John knew what it was like to have a tough childhood. Born into a poor family of farmers in 1815, he lost his father when he was only two. Though very intelligent, John was forced to delay his dreams of priesthood and work to help support his mother and siblings. At the age of nine, John had his first vision, one in which a man with a radiant face and flowing robes called him to lead a group of unruly boys who were behaving like wild animals. Years later, John would fulfill this prophetic vision, feeling called to the missionary field of youth ministry.

John served and guided the poor young boys in the city of Turin, many of whom had turned to crime and other sins in order to survive the difficult urban reality into which they were born. He offered a Catholic education and safe forms of recreation to thousands. He cared for them and guided them in the ways of the Gospel.

Over time, John recruited fellow priests and other friends to help him in his ministry, many of whom left, unable to take any more

of the hardships that came with ministering to such a challenging group. He was constantly being attacked verbally, physically, and spiritually, but he was not distracted from his mission.

The saint's life was never boring, to say the least. His visions became more detailed and miraculous as the years went on. Pope Pius IX even asked John to record his visions, believing them to be prophetic and valuable to the Church. His records still exist today, so you can read, in detail, the visions and truths the Lord entrusted to this great servant of youth.

John Bosco died in 1888, but his great work is carried on by the Salesians, the order he founded, and also by all who reach out and serve the young Church through youth ministry. He refused to look upon young people the same way society did, believing that all young souls needed to live a saintly life was love and truth. If you are a teen who struggles to believe in your own inherent goodness, ask this great saint to join his prayers to yours. Saint John Bosco saw the good within everyone, which makes it even more fitting that he is one of the famous “incorruptible” saints we hallow today — his outside is a perfect reflection of the beauty he possessed on the inside.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Relentless in his pursuit of caring for troubled youth
- Received countless visions and prophecies from the Lord
- Known to have a great mastiff (named “Grigio”) who acted as his protector from time to time
- Most famous written works are “The Life of Dominic Savio,” “The Life of St. Joseph Casaffo,” “The Spiritual Writings of St. John Bosco,” and “Dreams, Visions & Prophecies of Don Bosco”

## St. John Chrysostom

“If you cannot find Christ in the beggar at the church door,  
you will not find Him in the chalice.”

**Born:** A.D. 349

**Died:** A.D. September 14, 407

**Feast Day:** September 13

**Patron of** orators, preachers, speakers, epilepsy, and education

### Background

Sometimes we think that to be a Catholic means simply to “be nice.” Oftentimes, “being nice” is just a kind way of saying, “avoid conflict.” In reality, Jesus both tells *and commands* us to offer truth, even if it brings conflict. With that reality firmly in mind, we turn our attention to another Doctor of the Church who had both a sharpness of thought and tongue that few saints enjoyed.

Born in Antioch (an incredibly wealthy nation and capital of the Roman empire) to a pagan, idol-worshipping father and a devout, prayerful mother, John was extremely well educated in theology and philosophy. He was also a bit of an introvert, one who preferred living as an ascetic (someone who lives a very simple, disciplined life of prayer and self-sacrifice) and a hermit in the desert for several years. What was fascinating about John, however, was that while he was more introverted, he was an astounding, respected, and well-known preacher. In fact, “Chrysostom” is a name given to John after his death because of his amazing speaking ability (Chrysostom means “golden mouthed”).

John was forced into public life within the Church due to his immense popularity as a speaker. In A.D. 397, he was made

a bishop (against his wishes). Over time his message and tone — while respected and rooted in simplicity, humility, and Christ — rubbed many the wrong way. Even fellow bishops began to resent this powerful preacher, who battled not only heresy from the outside but hypocrisy on the inside (of the Church). He was eventually banished by the emperor and sent to Armenia, where he continued to write and communicate with great effectiveness. John died in exile, but his body was later brought back and properly buried by subsequent leaders who respected the great yet controversial saint.

John Chrysostom was not afraid to rile people up — he may have even enjoyed it. His courage and conviction in the face of scrutiny, rebellion, and outrage were not only admirable but exactly what the Church needed at that time in history. The reason he spoke as beautifully as He did was a charism from God, yes, but the passion with which he spoke came from a deep love for the Lord.

Saint John Chrysostom's story reminds us that sometimes we are called to difficult and even scary things, but if we have the courage to trust God, it will work out for His glory. When you feel yourself lacking courage or waning in discipline or self-control, ask St. John Chrysostom to pray with you. When you are feeling spiritually fatigued or doubt you "have what it takes" to live a holy life, remember that the saints did not become saints by sheer talent, but by the unwillingness to give up on themselves and their God.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Known as a great preacher and faithful spiritual director
- His most famous written works are "The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom," "Discourses Against Judaizing Christians," "Commentary on the Psalms," "On Virginity," and "Joy of All Who Sorrow: The Divine Liturgy"
- Declared a "Doctor of the Church," an honor bestowed on only 36 saints (to date)



## **St. John the Evangelist**

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.” (John 1:14)

**Born:** A.D. 6

**Died:** A.D. 100 or 101

**Feast Day:** December 27

**Patron of** authors, theologians, publishers, booksellers, editors, painters, burns, poisoning, friendships, love, and loyalty

### **Background**

Imagine Jesus “let you” attend one of His sermons (if they had sold tickets back then) and you were among the 5,000 people there. You would feel good. What if He had called you to be one of the 70 disciples He sent out in sets of two to minister? You would feel affirmed. What if He picked you to be one of the Twelve Apostles? You would be honored, humbled beyond belief.

Now, what if you were Jesus’ closest friend, called “the one whom Jesus loved,” the one sitting next to Jesus during the Last Supper, and, even beyond that, the one that Christ entrusted to care for the Blessed Virgin Mary following His Crucifixion. How would you feel?

John Zebedee was a fisherman in the family business when the carpenter from Nazareth invited him to leave his nets behind. The writer of the fourth Gospel, three New Testament letters, and the Book of Revelation might sound like the most impressive resume among the apostles, but it was actually

John's friendship and spiritual intimacy with Jesus that made him so noteworthy and worthy of admiration.

John's Gospel fills us in on several moments, stories, and episodes that are not mentioned in the first three Gospel accounts. His letters, simple yet profound, encourage and challenge the young Church to love God and one another better and more perfectly. John's vision of heaven recorded in Revelation is the most misunderstood yet hope-filled work to ever be written about our lives and eternal life. John's life was changed by Jesus' friendship and ministry, and John's ministry, in turn, changed the world and the Church forever.

You might think it was somehow "easier" for John to follow Jesus or live the Catholic life because he knew Jesus in the flesh and you do not. In actuality, we have the opportunity to know Jesus on an even more intimate level than most of Jesus' contemporaries. Through prayer, the sacraments, Scripture, and meditation we can come to know Jesus and Mary on a whole new level (like St. John the Evangelist did).

Invite St. John the Evangelist to pray with and for you that you would begin to know Jesus on the deepest possible level of intimacy, and that you — like the beloved disciple — would also lead countless souls to God through your words and life.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Left his livelihood as a fisherman to follow and serve Christ
- One of Jesus' most trusted friends
- Entrusted with the care of Mary, the Mother of God, after Jesus' death
- Most famous written works are the Gospel of John, the three epistles of John, and the Book of Revelation

## **St. John Paul II**

“It is Jesus that you seek when you dream of happiness; He is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you; He is the beauty to which you are so attracted.”

**Born:** May 18, 1920

**Died:** April 2, 2005

**Feast Day:** October 22

**Patron of** World Youth Day, the family, and young Catholics

### **Background**

People use the term “hero” pretty loosely. It used to be reserved for brave soldiers, world-changing leaders, and people who stood in the face of inequality and injustice. Now, it can be used for anyone from popular athletes to people with a strong opinion who are “YouTube” famous. I will just say it ... St. John Paul II is my hero.

At 13 years old, I saw him live for the first time. At 16, I began learning about him. By 19, I was reading his letters and encyclicals. In my 20s, I discovered his teachings on the theology of the body and at 31 years old, I held his hand and wept as he prayed over my wife and I.

It is impossible to do justice to John Paul II’s life in a page, but here are a few highlights: he attended seminary “underground” as the Nazis moved through Poland in WWII; obtained a Ph.D. in theology; and was named a bishop, archbishop, and cardinal all before the age of 47. He survived an assassination attempt, forgave his assailant in his prison cell, and visited 124 countries during his pontificate. He was

also a prolific writer and thinker, giving the Church 14 papal encyclicals and over 30 apostolic letters.

John Paul II taught the world how to live by showing them how to die, with dignity and total respect for the value of life. His love for the Blessed Virgin Mary was evident and revolutionary. He challenged and encouraged all Catholics to look more deeply at the profound gift of the Mother of God, who Christ entrusted to us from His cross.

John Paul II's love for youth was evident in his creation of World Youth Days. He traveled hundreds of thousands of miles, speaking to and encouraging millions of young souls to stand for Christ in a culture that did not understand Him (or them). He challenged the young Church (myself, very much included) to live heroic lives of service and self-sacrifice for the Kingdom.

Saint John Paul II was living proof that you do not have to be the richest, the smartest, or the most popular to change the world. He was faithful. He was passionate. He was prayerful. He loved the Lord with all of his heart and challenged us to do the same. He knew that following God did not mean abandoning your passions; rather, it meant inviting Christ into them.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Playwright and accomplished linguist
- Incredible soccer player and skier, and an avid outdoorsman
- Survived an attempted assassination at the age of 60
- Wrote 14 encyclicals and five books (plus countless other writings), canonized 482 saints, and beatified 1,338 people
- Wrote extensively on the relationship between men and women, including “Love and Responsibility” and “Theology of the Body”

## St. Joseph Cupertino

“Preach by actions more than by words. Actions penetrate the heart, words slip by and are gone.”

**Born:** June 17, 1603

**Died:** September 18, 1663

**Feast Day:** September 18

**Patron of** test takers, students, mental handicaps, astronauts, and pilots

### Background

Joseph Cupertino's life started off like a scrambled-up version of the childhood of Christ. Joseph (the one born in 1603) was not a carpenter, but his father was. Sadly, his father died before he was born and was in so much debt that his mother had to run away and give birth to Joseph in — you guessed it — a stable.

From an early age, Joseph was blessed — and if ever there were a saint who could teach you about the double-edged sword of God's blessings, it would be St. Joseph Cupertino. He would have ecstatic visions (think “resting in the Spirit”), but not just in moments of deep prayer. The smallest reminder of God's love — a painting of Christ, a simple prayer, even the sound of church bells — could send him into ecstasy.

That *sounds* great, until you realize that it left Joseph frozen wherever he was standing, eventually earning him the nickname, “bocca aperta” (open mouth). And, as you could imagine, it is pretty hard to get a steady job if you get a blast of the supernatural every time the church's clock hits the quarter hour. So, after getting harassed by his mom and

relatives — and even a few religious orders — he eventually found a home with the Franciscans of La Grotella.

You may be thinking to yourself, “OK, so this guy had a lot of visions — that only seems mildly crazy in comparison to all of the other things God has done with saints.” But you see, Joseph Cupertino also happens to be the patron saint of astronauts and pilots because he flew. Not “LeBron James hovering over people en route to a dunk” flew, but straight-up “hovering above crowds in midair until his superior told him to come down” flew.

It happened so much after he joined the Franciscans that he actually had to live in his room for almost 35 years, saying Mass and praying in a private chapel away from crowds. One of Joseph’s most famous flights was in front of Pope Urban VIII. When Joseph bent down to kiss the pope’s ring, he flew almost 30 feet into the air in front of everyone and could not get down until the head of his order asked him to do so.

If you find St. Joseph Cupertino’s story to be a little “too unbelievable,” ask yourself why. Invite St. Joseph Cupertino to pray with you and ask the Holy Spirit to open your mind to a realm of new spiritual possibilities. As Scripture reminds us, “With God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). The Church celebrates St. Joseph Cupertino’s feast day on September 18, but there is no official word from the Vatican on what he did with all of those frequent flier miles in heaven.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Frequently became immobilized by deep prayer
- Would often levitate in prayer
- Known as the patron of test takers because he was able to pass his tests to become a priest, despite being a poor test taker
- His life has been written about in various accounts

## **St. José Sánchez del Rio**

“Viva Cristo Rey! Viva La Virgen de Guadalupe!” (“Long live Christ the King! Long live Our Lady of Guadalupe!”)

**Born:** March 28, 1913

**Died:** February 10, 1928

**Feast Day:** February 10

**Patron of** youth and Mexico

### **Background**

If you were asked, “How far are you willing to go for God?” how would you respond? Where would you draw the line? Would you stand up for the faith and for God, even if everyone else was against you? Would you live proudly as a virgin — and profess it — until marriage? Would you be open to the priesthood or religious life? Would you offer your very life in defense of the Gospel?

José Sánchez del Rio did.

Born in Mexico in 1913, José begged his parents to let him join the Cristeros army as they defended the Catholic Church against the Mexican dictator, Plutarco Calles. José’s passion for God was evident and fueled him with courage, wanting as a teen to serve alongside his older brothers in the army.

He did fight in the war. In fact, he was an example to all those fighting who were far older and better trained. When captured, they locked José in a prison and tortured him with knives while he awaited execution. They cut off the soles of his feet and made him walk to his death. Even as they mocked him, he shouted, “Viva Cristo Rey!” (“Long live Christ the

King!”) Rather than getting upset or begging to be released, he prayed and forgave the soldiers who were torturing him.

Prior to his execution, the enemy soldiers promised to release him if he shouted, “Death to Christ the King!” but José bravely shouted all the more, “Long live Christ the King!” and “Long live Our Lady of Guadalupe!” José was then stabbed and shot to death at the age of 14. It is said that he made the Sign of the Cross in his own blood before falling to the ground. José was canonized by Pope Francis in 2016.

Saint José Sánchez del Río is an example and inspiration to us all — young and old alike — as to what it means and requires to live as a Catholic in the face of persecution. Hopefully you will never have to go into a religious war as St. José Sánchez del Río did, but the next time you feel outnumbered, mocked, or abused for your faith, ask this great young saint to pray with and for you, that you might be an example to all ages of what it looks like to love God with every last breath.

#### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Courageously fought for the Cristeros army
- Died heroically as a martyr for the faith
- His life is depicted in the movie, “For Greater Glory”



## St. Juan Diego

“I am a nobody, I am a small rope, a tiny ladder, the tail end, a leaf.”

**Born:** 1474

**Died:** 1548

**Feast Day:** December 9

**Patron of** indigenous people

### Background

Have you ever felt “invisible” in the eyes of the world? When people do not respect you or do not seem to “care” about your opinion, presence, or voice, how do you respond? When suffering comes, do you lean into God or abandon Him? If you have ever felt these things personally, Juan Diego could more than relate.

Juan Diego was born in 1474 in what is now Mexico City. Originally named “Cuauhtlatoatzin” (which means “the talking eagle”), Juan was not baptized until he was 50 years old. A few years later, in December 1531, Juan had a week that would not only change his life forever but would change the Church (especially in the Americas) and end up saving the lives of millions. The Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to Juan Diego multiple times, asking him to deliver a message to the local bishop. Miraculously, one apparition/interaction included Mary picking flowers that were growing atop the stony Mount Tepeyac (in December, mind you) and arranging them in the tilma (outer, burlap-esque garment) worn by Juan. When he went to the bishop with the Blessed Virgin Mary’s message and released the corners of his garment, the flowers

fell and revealed a now famous image of the Blessed Virgin of Guadalupe.

We do not know a ton about Juan Diego's life prior to his interactions with Mary in December of 1531, but we do know that modern science has no explanation for the tilma. Forensic experts have tested it and cannot explain its durability, its miraculous image (free of brush strokes), its colorful hues, nor its inverted "reflection" of Juan Diego and the bishop in the Blessed Virgin Mary's pupils. History also cannot explain the events in the decades that followed, where a pagan culture that had been accustomed to sacrificing millions ceased their sacrificial practices and adopted Catholicism as their faith and guide.

Juan Diego had very little esteem or importance in the eyes of the world, but his humility was valued by the Lord. When God desired to send a message to His people through Our Lady, this humble servant was the chosen vessel. Here was a man who had lived a hard life, who had endured great personal suffering, and who could have easily "written off" God as someone who was not real or did not care. Saint Juan Diego did nothing of the sort.

Ask St. Juan Diego to pray with you in those moments when you feel unnoticed or invisible. This man had actual interactions with the Blessed Virgin of Guadalupe. He understands God's mercy and grace on a deep and incredible level, and his intercession is (obviously) well received in heaven.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Encountered the Blessed Virgin Mary multiple times in apparition
- Obediently presented Blessed Virgin Mary's message to the bishop and community

## St. Jude Thaddeus

“But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”

(Jude 1:20-21)

**Born:** Unknown

**Died:** Unknown, but likely the first century

**Feast Day:** October 28

**Patron of** desperate situations, hospital workers, and impossible/lost causes

### Background

Have you ever been part of an awesome team or group but not been the “leader”? Maybe you were on a winning team, but you were an average player compared to a couple of standouts. Maybe you were part of a cast but did not have the lead or part of a youth group where you were not the most vocal or outgoing — and it was OK ... you were just happy to be part of something bigger than yourself. That is kind of how I imagine St. Jude Thaddeus must have felt.

As one of the Twelve Apostles, Jude (also named and referred to as Thaddeus because, hey, why not make the Bible more confusing, right?) was not mentioned much in the Gospels compared to guys like Peter, James, and John ... but that does not mean he was not important.

Jude Thaddeus was the brother of James the Lesser (another apostle), and a relative of Jesus. Following the Resurrection, Jude traveled extensively as one of the first missionaries, proclaiming the Resurrection throughout various cities in

Asia. He authored a biblical letter (called an “epistle”), fought heresies, and spread the Gospel fearlessly and against all odds (which is one reason he is the patron saint of hopeless causes) until he was finally martyred — beaten to death with a club in Armenia. His body exists and can be venerated still today in three different locations. Due to the closeness of his name “Jude” to Judas Iscariot (the one who betrayed Jesus), most refer to him as Jude Thaddeus to help avoid confusion.

You will most likely never be asked to lay down your life for your faith the way St. Jude Thaddeus did. That being said, if you continue to walk the walk and live your faith, you will undoubtedly endure hardships. You may find that people want to “martyr” you in your reputation, circle of friends, or on the team/within the group. You, like St. Jude Thaddeus, may feel like the situation surrounding you is bleak and you cannot possibly do all God is asking of you. In those moments, thank the Lord you have an example like St. Jude Thaddeus and ask this great apostle and martyr to pray specifically for your hope and strength to increase, trusting that if you stay true to the Lord, you will emerge victorious in the face of anything life throws your way.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- One of Jesus’ Twelve Apostles
- Wrote the canonical epistle named for him, the Letter of St. Jude (according to tradition)
- Invoked in desperate situations because his New Testament letter stresses perseverance despite harsh and difficult circumstances
- Patron saint of many organizations, including the well-known children’s hospital St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee

## **St. Justin Martyr**

“Sound doctrine does not enter into a hard and disobedient heart.”

**Born:** A.D. 100

**Died:** A.D. 165

**Feast Day:** June 1

**Patron of** philosophers, apologists, and lecturers

### **Background**

Have you had a massive conversion? Maybe it was on a retreat, at camp, or during a youth conference when you went away and returned a completely different person. That is kind of the story of this great, early saint. Saint Justin Martyr is, as you might have guessed by the complex name, both a saint and a martyr. Born at the very beginning of the second century (not long after the death of St. John the Evangelist), Justin was a pagan philosopher who studied all of the greatest philosophical minds until Scripture and the witness of Christians being persecuted changed his heart and mind.

Justin lived in a time when philosophy ruled and the Romans were attempting to eradicate Christianity for good. Justin thought philosophy alone would lead him to true happiness, but he was mistaken. Justin found that there was a harmony in Scripture — the harmony he had been missing — between faith and reason.

Some credit Justin Martyr as the first truly “Christian” philosopher, combining what he had learned about Christianity from some of the earliest disciples with the strong command he had from his deep studies of the great Greek philosophers.

He was also a highly respected and formidable apologist (someone who defends against attacks and informs regarding misconceptions about the faith). Justin was a “dual threat” who could dismantle even the finest thinkers with combinations of thought the world was not yet prepared to deal with.

Saint Justin Martyr reminds us that when we discover and follow Christ, we do not “forget” everything we know; it just takes on a new meaning and context. The philosophical truths he discovered finally all “connected” and came to the fullness of truth in Jesus, who is truth. His witness to the truth of the Gospel and the Resurrection some six decades after Jesus rose demonstrate a remarkable reality within the early Church, namely that it was not “just the Twelve Apostles and other eyewitnesses” keeping the Gospel alive; it was all of those who came to hear it and believe it, even in the face of persecution.

Do you have Catholic Christians in your life whose example inspires you enough to overcome your fears and doubts? If so, thank them. If not, pray that the Lord would send you some. Ask St. Justin Martyr to pray for you, too, that you — like he — might find the love of God (and His people) so tangible and overwhelming that it makes the journey from your head to your heart and back, again.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Highly respected apologist and intelligent philosopher
- His most famous written works are “First Apology,” “Second Apology,” and “Dialogue with Trypho”

## **St. Kateri Tekakwitha**

“I am not my own; I have given myself to Jesus. He must be my only love.”

**Born:** 1656

**Died:** April 17, 1680

**Feast Day:** July 14

**Patron** of the environment, ecology, people who are in exile, and Native Americans

### **Background**

Have you ever been the last person standing for your team in dodgeball when everyone on the opposing team is “armed” and gunning just for you? I recall one such day ... I started strong but, eventually, I could dodge the incoming projectiles no more. It was a massacre. It is no fun standing alone, but it does grow you in virtue (and suffering) — just ask St. Kateri Tekakwitha.

The first Native American saint to be canonized, Kateri was born with the name Tekakwitha. She was only four years old when both her parents and her brother died from a smallpox outbreak in the region where her tribe dwelt. In fact, the smallpox even left scarring on the young girl’s face and rendered her partially blind. Taken in by her aunt and uncle, they spent a great deal of time trying to find someone who would marry her.

When she was 11 (or 12) years old, Jesuit missionary priests came through the northern region of Quebec and spent three days in her aunt and uncle’s home. It was during that time that Kateri first heard the Gospel message. She, nor any member of her tribe, had never been exposed to Christianity before. It was as though her heart had finally been filled with the one thing

she had longed for her entire life. She immediately began to live the Christian life in the face of intense opposition, persecution, punishment, and mockery from people within her tribe. She did not know to ask to be baptized but lived a devout, steadfast, and zealous life of holiness from that day forward.

At the age of 18, she was finally baptized and became known throughout the region — by the tribes, the French settlers, and the Catholic missionaries — for her remarkable kindness and intense prayer, sacrifices (mortifications), and love, even in the face of brutality, mockery, and disdain from those who were closest to her. It is said that when she received the sacraments on her deathbed, her facial scarring healed almost immediately, revealing a gorgeous young woman to whom many never gave “a second look.” Kateri was 24 years old when she died and was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012.

It cost St. Kateri everything to follow Jesus, but she never turned back. Her life and fidelity should serve as an inspiration to us all, especially for those of us who may not have a ton of family support when it comes to our faith walk. She is an especially impressive role model — and valuable intercessor — for all young souls who are trying to live chastity and protect their purity. While many of us take years to really commit to Christ, St. Kateri’s heart was so pure she was courageous enough to commit to God in a matter of days. Her entire life was one of boldness and urgency, and her story is one of total abandonment to God that forces us to reexamine what we are still holding back.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Survived a deadly smallpox outbreak at a young age
- Dedicated herself and her virginity to the Lord
- Known for her remarkable kindness and steadfastness in faith
- First Native American to be canonized by the Catholic Church



## St. Katharine Drexel

“It is for each of us to learn the path by which He requires us to follow Him, and to follow Him in that path.”

**Born:** November 26, 1858

**Died:** March 3, 1955

**Feast Day:** March 3

**Patron of** racial justice and philanthropists

### Background

I will let you in on a little secret ... my wife has a really deep character flaw: She cares way *too much* about others. I mean, I care about people but not like she does. I have watched her go without sleep, without food, without quiet, without water, all while making sure everyone else — myself, kids, family, friends, strangers — are all taken care of with the greatest hospitality. You may have a mom or friend like that. Who do they think they are? Oh, wait, that is right ... they do not think of themselves. Saint Katharine Drexel was the same way.

Born in Philadelphia (yes, a saint from Philly, home of the cheesesteak sandwich), Katharine's dad was a wealthy banker. Her mother, a wonderful and holy woman, died when Katharine was only five weeks old. Her father was a holy example, though, and Katharine saw him praying, daily, on his knees beside the bed. Later, he remarried another exceptional woman and the Drexels would often open their home to those who were poor and downcast.

Katharine was no stranger to suffering. Watching her beloved stepmother battle cancer caused Katharine to really seek out those who were alone and suffering in the neighborhoods

that surrounded her. She had a particularly deep and intense desire to help the ailing, forgotten, and underserved members of the African American and Native American communities in her area.

When her father died, leaving Katharine and her three sisters with millions of dollars, the Drexel sisters were afforded an audience with Pope Leo XIII, where they asked him how to best spend their money. Katharine established a religious order — the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament — while also financing missions and schools. By the time of her death (at the age of 96), she had financed and begun more than 60 schools and 50 missions and over 500 sisters were serving in the order.

Katharine had a deep, abiding love for the Eucharist and for people. She saw everyone as equal in the eyes of God long before the Civil Rights movement began. Her desire to serve the outcast and minorities spoke volumes, not only to her love but of her courage. Katharine was not unaware of the modern world, she just refused to be mastered by it. I dare you to ask St. Katharine Drexel to intercede for you, asking God to reveal to you those places that worldly comfort, wealth, and ease may have crept in to make you more a fan of Earth than of heaven. If you really want to grow in holiness, “put your money” on St. Katharine Drexel’s prayers to help get you there.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Gave back to the Church instead of squandering her large inheritance
- Founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament
- Founded countless schools and missions that served minority populations, including Xavier University, which was initially established as a school for African Americans

## **St. Lawrence**

**Born:** A.D. December 31, 225

**Died:** A.D. August 10, 258

**Feast Day:** August 10

**Patron of Rome,** students, miners, tanners, chefs, the poor, and firefighters

### **Background**

If there were any saint who would feel comfortable at an open-mic stand-up comedy night, it would have to be St. Lawrence. Sure, he was a third century deacon, but the heat of the stage lights would have paled in comparison to what he actually went through at the end of his life.

Lawrence served as a deacon and treasurer for the early Roman church during a time of persecution under Emperor Valerian. There were seven deacons who worked with Pope Sixtus II, and Lawrence was in charge of guarding the Church's monetary treasure. He was even responsible for keeping a great spiritual treasure safe: the Holy Grail (the chalice Christ used at the Last Supper).

When the persecution of Catholics really kicked up, Pope Sixtus II and six of the deacons were taken to jail for execution. Lawrence, being the only one left behind, asked the pope why he was leaving without his deacon. Pope Sixtus II calmly responded, "In three days you will follow me."

With Pope Sixtus II and the other six deacons now martyrs, Lawrence was the only one left to run the Church. When he was brought before Rome's prefect, it was demanded that he bring all of the treasures of the Church to the empire of

Rome. Lawrence asked for three days to gather all of the riches, during which he secretly sent the Grail away to be kept safe by his parents. Next, he took every bit of gold and silver the Church had — even the vessels used at Mass — and gave them to those who were poor around the city. The holy deacon then did something both unbelievably beautiful and witty: He gathered all of the poor, the sick, and the lame he could find and brought them to the Roman prefect. He presented them as his gift, the riches of the Church.

Every comedian knows that your audience does not always like your brand of humor. The prefect was apparently a man without a love for wit, because he sentenced Lawrence to a slow and painful death, roasting in a gridiron over a fire. As he slowly died, Lawrence joked with his executioners, asking them to flip him over because he was “done cooking” on one side. Then, three days after the martyrdom of Pope Sixtus II, his ever-faithful deacon joined him in the company of saints.

It is easy to lose perspective in life. During particularly difficult weeks or years, it can seem like nothing is going our way and everything is terrible. Christ reminded us not to give in to worry or stress (Matthew 6:34) but to be present to God’s love and promise in every moment. No matter how bad things get on Earth, we are supposed to live for heaven, which is better than our wildest dreams (1 Corinthians 2:9). Ask St. Lawrence to pray with you and to help you keep a proper and joyful perspective on life.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Entrusted with the care of the Church’s greatest treasures, including the Holy Grail
- A popular account of his life can be found in St. Augustine’s sermon on the feast of St. Lawrence

## St. Leo the Great

“So without leaving His Father’s glory behind, the Son of God comes down from His heavenly throne and enters the depths of our world. The God who knew no suffering did not despise becoming a suffering man, and, deathless as He is, to be subject to the laws of death.”

**Born:** A.D. 400

**Died:** A.D. November 10, 461

**Feast Day:** November 10

No official **patronage** exists for this saint.

### Background

I like to send texts and emails in the morning while I make coffee. It does not sound like much, but I consider it a great achievement. The ability to string together a sentence before that beautiful, caffeinated glory has touched my lips is an almost gospel-worthy miracle. Well, maybe not, but still. I find it amazing. I am almost embarrassed to admit I consider such lunacy an “achievement” when I read stories about the incredible St. Leo the Great (yes, the dude’s title was “the Great” ... pretty epic).

Elected as pope in the year A.D. 440, Leo was a leader in every sense of the word. He fought and spoke out passionately against the heresies plaguing the Catholic Church at that time — most notably, Pelagianism and Manichaeism. He clarified doctrine, especially the Church’s teaching on the dual nature (human and divine) of Christ. He was a great and true pastor, caring for the needs of his flock, and an incredible preacher, setting hearts on fire with his words. He was incredibly well-versed in Scripture and had a deeply charismatic faith that

offered insights into God's love the Church had not previously heard. In short, Leo was a baller.

Leo was easily one of the greatest popes in our 2,000-year history. His ability to multitask, govern, lead, and guide is almost unparalleled. He took great pride and responsibility in his service and office. That being said, Leo never let it take away from him being a good man, a good Catholic, and a good priest. He said "yes" to all God placed before him and he never forgot his roots. Leo respected the papacy and his role as St. Peter's successor, but he was never prideful, no matter how much "power" was entrusted to him. His leadership style demonstrated great humility, smallness, and the desire to put others before himself. He lived with the constant awareness that Christ was great, and he was but a servant.

We all like to be recognized and seek affirmation in one way or another. Ask St. Leo the Great to pray with you, that you would grow in humility and seek others' holiness as much as your own. Look for ways in your daily life to emulate the example St. Leo the Great gave us, putting Christ before all else, especially ourselves.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Fought heroically against the heresy of his day
- Compassionate pastor and impassioned preacher
- Known for his work on the document, "The Tome of Leo"
- Declared a "Doctor of the Church," an honor bestowed on only 36 saints (to date)

## St. Lorenzo Ruiz

“I am a Catholic and wholeheartedly do accept death for God. Had I a thousand lives, all these to Him I shall offer. Do with me as you please.”

**Born:** 1600

**Died:** September 29 or 30, 1637

**Feast Day:** September 28

**Patron of** Filipino youth, the Philippines, people who work overseas, and altar servers

### Background

I loved the film “Rudy” when it came out. It was a classic tale of the little guy who overcame everything in order to succeed. But it broke my heart when I met the real Rudy (and his real coach, who was villainized in the film) and learned that some key parts of the movie’s storyline were false. We prefer the happy ending to reality. Martyrdom stories can be like that, I worry. If I were facing martyrdom, I would love to say that I would be laughing (like St. Lawrence) or boldly writing the “Creed” with my own blood (like St. Peter of Verona), but I am not sure I would be that hyped to die a gruesome death. That is one of the reasons I love St. Lorenzo Ruiz.

Born in the Philippines in 1600, Lorenzo’s parents raised him as a Catholic from birth. He had a nice childhood, serving as an altar boy and helping out around the parish. Lorenzo got married, had three kids, and was living the 17th century version of the “Catholic dream.” In a weird turn of events, at 36, Lorenzo was wrongly accused of murder. To protect his family and preserve his life, Lorenzo was forced to flee the country by ship. Accompanied by Catholic priests and

other Christians, their sights were set on Okinawa, Japan. Unbeknownst to them, however, the Japanese rulers were gathering and persecuting Christians at the time. Lorenzo and his companions were promptly arrested, imprisoned, and tortured for two years.

Lorenzo and his fellow Catholic Christians endured horrific torture, and, during that time, some of his companions renounced the faith to make the pain stop. But, others followed Lorenzo's bold example and remained steadfast, even though the tortures grew worse. At one point, Lorenzo asked his torturer if the pain would stop if he were to recant and renounce his faith. He was told it would. In that moment of doubt, though, the Holy Spirit emboldened Lorenzo. He pondered the idea but refused. Strengthened by God's grace, Lorenzo was steadfast until the end, never renouncing his faith. So impressive was his example that St. John Paul II traveled to the Philippines in 1981 to beatify Lorenzo for the first ever beatification ceremony outside of the Vatican. Lorenzo was canonized a saint six years later.

Lorenzo's temptation to renounce the faith and his moment of "doubt" prior to martyrdom are what make him even more amazing ... he was human, not "superhuman." We all have moments of temptation and doubt. Many of us probably would have given in, but Lorenzo refused to quit. He was faced with a choice between good and evil and in the midst of that temptation, he leaned into the freedom that only Christ offers.

When speaking of martyrdom, we often ask, "Would I die for Christ?" but rarely do we actually ask, "Do I *live for Christ*?" It is in living for Christ, daily, that we learn how to die for Him and experience the grace necessary to do so bravely and nobly. Ask St. Lorenzo Ruiz to pray with you the next time you get down on yourself for "not being as strong as other Catholics" or any time you doubt your internal strength.



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**Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Selfless husband and father
- Courageously endured imprisonment and torture
- Died a martyr for the faith

## **St. Lucy**

**Born:** A.D. 283

**Died:** A.D. 304

**Feast Day:** December 13

**Patron of** the blind, eye trouble, and other eye ailments

### **Background**

Sex! OK, now that I have your attention ... it is sad that we live in a culture where so few people are proud to live out chastity. I cannot explain how impressed and proud I am when I meet teens and young adults who have committed to and live out chastity. It is truly inspiring, which is one of the reasons why St. Lucy is so amazing — even in the face of temptation and torture, she protected her purity with a prayerful and unrelenting passion.

Born in Sicily, Italy in the late fourth century, Lucy came from a very wealthy family. Her Roman father and Greek mother were nobles and, as such, were able to afford Lucy every earthly blessing (even after her father's death at an early age). Like some of the other saints we have discussed, Lucy had a deep, abiding love for God, consecrated her virginity to Him, and desired to give all of her wealth to the poor.

When her mother arranged a marriage for her, Lucy stalled for three years. She prayed at the actual tomb of St. Agatha (remember her?) for help and strength to change her mother's mind. In response to Lucy's prayer, her mother was healed of a disease and came to believe in God and support Lucy's request to live a consecrated life. When Lucy told her prospective "fiancé," Paschasius, she would never marry him, he outed her as a Christian. The governor ordered Lucy to be

sent to a brothel to work as a prostitute. When the governor's guards tried to move her, Lucy was miraculously "unmovable" — a team of grown men could not physically move her. They then tried a team of oxen with ropes and, still, she did not move (by the grace and power of God). They tortured Lucy, tearing out her eyes (which is why she is the patroness of those who are blind and visually impaired), during which she sang hymns of joy. They tried to light her on fire, but the flames were quickly (and miraculously) extinguished. She was finally stabbed to death and died a martyr.

Saint Lucy is a heroic symbol, not only of a strong young woman but of a soul who understood the reality and gravity of sin. While many people almost seek out sin in their teen years, St. Lucy stands as an inspiring reminder that age does not matter when it comes to true holiness. She loved the Lord with her whole person and her witness was so strong we are still talking about it 1,700 years later.

The name "Lucy" means "light." Ask this great young saint to pray with and for you, especially in regard to your chastity and sexual purity. Through her intercession and the Holy Spirit's power, you can and will be a light to others, a light that points people toward virtue and mirrors the light of the world, Jesus.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Heroically withstood persecution for the faith
- Profoundly prayerful in the face of trial

## **St. Margaret of Clitherow**

“Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, have mercy on me!”

**Born:** 1556

**Died:** March 25, 1586

**Feast Day:** March 25

**Patron of** businessmen and businesswomen

### **Background**

You know that one sibling who does something wrong but seems to just “get away with it”? In situations where you would be punished, they somehow weasel out of it, maybe because they are the youngest or the “golden child.” Perhaps that sibling is you! Believe it or not, in the history of the Catholic Church, there existed saints like this “golden child” — in particular, St. Margaret of Clitherow.

Margaret was born in England in 1556. Both of her parents were Protestant in a country and time where being Catholic was ... um, less than desirable. In fact, it was dangerous. Margaret was charming, however, and intelligent and — according to people who knew her — incredibly beautiful. Just before she turned 16, she married John Clitherow and the couple had three adorable kids. Sounds like a fairy tale, huh? Well, about three years into their marriage, Margaret (who was steeped in the Word of God) was led to the Catholic Church. Boldly, she converted to Catholicism against the advice and wishes of most people in her life. She did not stop there, though — what good would all that charm be if she did not also break a few unjust laws?

Margaret believed in pushing boundaries to promote justice. She created two separate “chambers” (hideouts, basically) to

harbor and aid Catholic priests who were in danger and fleeing persecution and arrest. Along with these chambers, Margaret was able to use her considerable network and charm to keep the priests safe during intense and deadly persecutions.

In 1586, at the age of 30, Margaret was arrested. Although it is believed that she was pregnant, she was still sentenced to death. On Good Friday of that year, she was led to her death. Outstretched atop a large boulder, hands tied to posts in the form of a cross, a large, heavy wooden door was laid upon her and weight was added to it until she was crushed to death in front of cheering witnesses. While dying, Margaret remained joyful and smiling, thanking the Lord for the honor of martyrdom.

It would have been easier — far easier — for Margaret to have kept her faith quietly hidden. Instead, she refused to play small with a God whose mercy was so big. She was fearless and lived a bold life that was free of apologies. When Margaret was threatened, she became even more bold. The greatest saints rise in the darkest of times, and this incredible woman was a diamond in a rough period for the Church. She inspired the masses then and — to those who know her story — still today. Ask St. Margaret of Clitherow to pray with you to unleash the fullness of the Holy Spirit's power within you. Do not seek out trouble but, in the face of it, do not play small, either. God is with you!

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Bold witness to the Catholic Church in a time of persecution
- Charming and intelligent, aiding many in their greatest time of need
- Died a martyr for the faith

## **St. Margaret of Cortona**

“In times of desolation, God conceals Himself from us so that we can discover for ourselves what we are without Him.”

**Born:** 1247

**Died:** February 22, 1297

**Feast Day:** February 22

**Patron of** the falsely accused, people who are homeless, people who are mentally ill, and reformed prostitutes

### **Background**

Few saints' stories would have been more appropriate for a reality show than St. Margaret of Cortona's. Born in the middle of the 13th century, this farmer's daughter's life is a mix of fairy tale and Greek tragedy. Margaret was seven when her mother died, so she was forced to live under the care of her father and wicked new stepmother. As a young teen, she was seduced by a nobleman (a knight, to be exact) and ran off with him. Living unashamed as his mistress for over nine years, she bore him a son before one day discovering her lover murdered by thieves.

At that point, everything changed for Margaret. She saw the murder as a sign and immediately repented, publicly confessed, and attempted to return to her father's home, where he turned her away. Desperate, Margaret took her son and sought refuge with the friars in Cortona.

As the years went on, she tended to the sick and poor. She became a Franciscan tertiary (third order) in 1277 and began experiencing “ecstasies,” a deep, trancelike, mystical state in which the body is overcome with spiritual and physical joy

and peace. Margaret had frequent conversations with Jesus over the years; twice our Lord gave her messages for the local bishop, which he ignored. She formed an order of tertiaries like herself and dedicated all of her time to serving the poor, calling her congregation “Poverelle” (Poor Ones).

Margaret developed a strong love of and disciplined prayer for the souls in purgatory, as well. Apparently, as tradition goes, souls in purgatory would appear to Margaret, begging her intercession and prayers on their behalf. She became a powerful preacher and, as the years went on, had a particularly effective ministry reaching out to those who struggled with sexual sins and those who were considered the most hardened sinners of the day. She became known as “the Magdalene of the Franciscans.”

Though a great sinner in her youth, St. Margaret of Cortona reminds us of the power of God’s divine mercy and the grace of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Far from perfect, St. Margaret of Cortona knew the perfect one and lived each day to improve. If you or someone you know struggles with sin — especially temptation to sexual sin — or is the victim of gossip or slander because of mistakes made, ask St. Margaret of Cortona to pray with you. Saint Margaret of Cortona’s story may have begun harshly, but it ends happily ever after ... in heaven.

#### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Nourished a deep and profound prayer life
- Formed an order of tertiaries that were dedicated to serving the poor
- Her body remains incorrupt to this day

## **St. Maria Goretti**

“He loves, He hopes, He waits. Our Lord prefers to wait Himself for the sinner for years rather than keep us waiting an instant.”

**Born:** October 16, 1890

**Died:** July 6, 1902

**Feast Day:** July 6

**Patron of** youth, young women, purity, and victims of rape

### **Background**

Saint Maria Goretti's life and death has affected me so profoundly throughout my life. Growing up, my parish's name was St. Maria Goretti and it was there that I first discovered and attended Life Teen. And, it was there that I fell in love with the Eucharist and the Blessed Mother. It was at that parish that I first heard of this young woman's heroic life, and it changed my life forever.

Maria was born in the small farming town of Corinaldo, Italy in 1890. Her father died when she was still very young and while her mother worked nights, the task of caring for her younger siblings fell to Maria. She had a deep and devoted prayer life (even for a ten-year-old), offering prayers throughout the day and a nightly rosary.

There was a young farmhand, named Alessandro, who worked nearby. On several different occasions, Alessandro made unwanted advances toward Maria. Each time she fended him off, imploring him to understand that his behavior was sinful and undesired. On July 5, 1902, just before Maria's 12th birthday, Alessandro attempted to rape her. Maria managed to escape his clutches, briefly, before Alessandro — in a rage



— picked up a knife and stabbed the beautiful young virgin 14 times. Maria was rushed to the nearest hospital and forgave Alessandro for the assault along the way.

Doctors tried everything they could to save her but after two days of intense suffering and internal bleeding, Maria succumbed and went home to heaven. Alessandro, sentenced to 30 years in prison, was unapologetic and unrepentant. Eight years into his sentence, Maria appeared to Alessandro in a vision. She was dressed in white and held lilies (a symbol for purity). After that miraculous moment, Alessandro repented and converted to the Catholic faith. When released from prison, he begged forgiveness from Maria's mother (which she granted). In fact, when Maria was beatified in 1947, Alessandro was present, sitting on the stage next to her family.

Saint Maria Goretti stands as a timeless example of not only purity but courage. As a teen, the witness and intercession of St. Maria Goretti changed my life. In times of temptation, I looked to her and begged her to pray for me. In fact, when I met and began dating an amazing girl my senior year of high school, our first date was at a Sunday night Mass and Life Night at St. Maria Goretti parish. I was insanely attracted to her but inspired (by St. Maria Goretti) to do everything I could to protect her chastity. I am glad I did because that girl — the one I asked St. Maria Goretti to intercede for so many years ago — is now my wife.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Made a vow of chastity and virginity at a young age
- Deeply committed to daily prayer
- Mercifully forgave her attacker before her death

## **St. Maria Faustina Kowalska**

“Neither graces, nor revelations, nor raptures, nor gifts granted to a soul make it perfect, but rather the intimate union of the soul with God.”

**Born:** August 25, 1905

**Died:** October 5, 1938

**Feast Day:** October 5

**Patron of** mercy

### **Background**

Imagine you met your favorite music artist after a concert. Now, imagine he or she gave you their personal cell phone number and said, “Text me so we can keep in touch.” What would you do? You would feel validated ... crap, you would feel amazing, right? I mean, not only would this famous person acknowledge you, but they would want to maintain a friendship with you. Imagine now, if you can, if Christ was the one wanting to connect with you, privately. Enter St. Maria Faustina Kowalska.

Helena Kowalska (her original name) was born in Poland in 1905 to a poor and simple family. The third of ten kids, Helena was no stranger to hard times. Throughout her teen years, she worked as a housekeeper to earn money for her family. In 1925, she joined the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy and, there, worked as a cook, gardener, porter, and servant, unearthing the grace-filled chasm of humility that directed her adult life. It is probably worthy of mention at this point that Helena (later St. Maria) had an unparalleled interior prayer life, one that might make even popes blush with shame. She was a prayer warrior, spending all of her “excess” time (outside of serving God) you know ... worshipping God!

She began receiving private revelations from Jesus, Himself. Now, Sr. Faustina, had a deep, interior prayer life and she was encouraged — by Christ, Himself — to write down the revelations that God was gracing her with. In February of 1931, Christ appeared to this humble Polish nun of seemingly little consequence with a message of divine mercy for all mankind.

The image of divine mercy Sr. Faustina witnessed hangs in countless churches and parish halls. It is the pictorial exposition of our Lord Jesus of Divine Mercy. Prior to Sr. Maria Faustina, it did not exist, nor did the Chaplet of Divine Mercy (look it up) which is legitimately and insanely cool, as well. Sister Maria Faustina died of tuberculosis in Poland on October 5, 1938. Saint John Paul II (also Polish) canonized this holy woman in April of 2000.

Saint Maria Faustina is living proof that you do not have to be “big” to become a saint. By all worldly estimations, St. Maria Faustina was small. She was poor, uneducated, and dismissed by most of society. It was her faith that was so attractive to so many.

If you have ever felt like your sin was too big or too unforgivable or that you are too far gone for God to love, *I dare you* to pray with St. Maria Faustina. But be careful, God has a habit of using those who think themselves the “greatest sinners” in the most amazing, saintly ways.

### **Notable Moments/Achievement**

- Jesus’ messages to her on mercy are recorded in “The Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska”
- Her name is forever linked to the annual Feast of Divine Mercy, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, and the Divine Mercy Prayer

## St. Mary Magdalene

“I have seen the Lord.” (John 20:18)

**Born:** Unknown

**Died:** Unknown

**Feast Day:** July 22

**Patron of** contemplative life, converts, penitent sinners, people who are ridiculed for their piety, sexual temptation, and women

### Background

Gossip is a dangerous thing. It can destroy reputations, create mistrust in relationships, and, basically, has the potential to ruin lives. Perhaps you have been the victim of gossip — of lies or half-truths or, even, truths shared unnecessarily — that have hurt you or your reputation. Maybe you are the one who has shared things like this about others. In either case, damage was done but, as St. Mary Magdalene well knows, there is always hope.

No other woman (outside of the Blessed Virgin Mary) is as present or mentioned as frequently in the Gospels as Mary of Magdala. Mary Magdalene (as she is known) holds the reputation of being a great sinner before she encountered Jesus. We learn in the Gospels that Jesus “cast[ed] out seven demons” from Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9). We also know that once she was healed by Jesus, she became one of His disciples and, as evidenced by her early return and miraculous discovery at the empty tomb on Easter Sunday, one of His closest and most loyal followers. Mary Magdalene, the one once possessed by demons, was actually the first witness to Jesus’ Resurrection!

Over the years, however, she has developed a “wider” reputation. As the Gospel spread to the West, some began to say that Mary was also a prostitute and lived as a sexually immoral woman. The argument has been going on for centuries, as people have made assumptions (a scholarly and somewhat academically accepted form of “gossip”) as to Mary’s past and supposed lack of virtue. These assertions also gave way to popular fiction that suggested that Mary had a relationship with our Lord. Billions of dollars have been made off of these false accusations and ideas in bookstores and on movie screens. We know there was no “secret marriage” or relationship there. Mary was a sinner who experienced God’s mercy, which changed her life for the better.

Whether or not Mary’s past was as bad as many seek to make out, we do not know. We know what the Gospel tells us and tradition confirms: At one point, Mary was filled with demons and after Jesus’ healing, she became one of His most devout followers.

Saint Mary Magdalene is a great reminder that we need never hide ourselves or our sins from Jesus. We must seek Christ each day in the same way Mary Magdalene sought Him on Easter morning. If you have been the victim of gossip or the one who spread it, ask this great saint to pray with you for a fresh start and for forgiveness. If you have a past you are ashamed of or things from before you wish you could change, ask St. Mary Magdalene to pray with and for you that you, like her, would have the courage to move forward in Christ and leave the past behind.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- A great sinner who turned to Jesus for His mercy and healing
- Considered an unofficial disciple of Jesus
- First to witness the resurrected Christ

## St. Mark

**Born:** First century

**Died:** A.D. April 25, 68

**Feast Day:** April 25

**Patron of** notaries, lions, lawyers, opticians, pharmacists, painters, secretaries, interpreters, and prisoners

### Background

As a kid, I lamented my namesake, St. Mark, feeling as though in the large Catholic family lotto for the best saint names I had somehow lost out. I mean my older brothers' first and middle names were inspired by devil-slayers like St. Michael, snake charmers like St. Patrick, or even St. Francis, animal tamer, just to name a few. And then there I was ... stuck with good 'ol Mark whose only endearing quality in my young, sarcastic mind was that he wrote the shortest Gospel. It was not until later, during my high school years, that a youth minister taught me about St. Mark and, thus, opened my eyes to the gift my mother and father had bestowed upon me through their prayerful discernment of my name.

While Mark was not one of the original Twelve Apostles, he had the unique distinction (and privilege) of being a close friend and traveling companion to both Sts. Peter and Paul. Tradition tells us that it was actually Mark's family home where Jesus and His apostles shared the Last Supper and, likely, where the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost.

One thing we know about Mark, through his Gospel writings and missionary travels, is that he had a sense of "urgency." He may have been young, but he was driven by the Holy Spirit. He wanted people to know about this God-man named

Jesus. Rather than sitting around telling stories about “when Jesus came to my house,” Mark wrote, traveled, preached, and lived with urgency.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, his words brought hope to Christians enduring strong persecution. Given this fact, it should come as no shock that Mark’s Gospel portrait of Jesus reveals a man of action — a wonder-working warrior displaying the perfect combination of divine power and limitless mercy toward humanity.

In Mark we have the portrait of a true disciple, fueled by a passionate love for Christ but still susceptible to moments of spiritual immaturity, self-focus, and stubbornness. Mark shared the truth about Jesus — and our universal call to holiness — with every soul he encountered ... while still, personally, growing in virtue. He did not wait until he was “perfect” to share Jesus; Mark sought Christ first, trusting that His grace would fill in the gaps.

Are you like Mark, a young soul willing to follow Christ wherever He leads you? Are you prepared to use every gift, talent, and situation you are given to lead others to Him? Invite St. Mark to pray with you now. Ask the Holy Spirit to unleash a passion inside of you, a deeper sense of urgency to pursue God, and a holy boldness when sharing about His mercy and great love. Seek to be like this young saint who, as a teen, could have sat back and hidden his talents out of fear but, instead, ran forward for Christ, desiring that all would come to truly know Him.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Passionate missionary and evangelist
- Known for his Gospel narrative, “The Gospel of Mark”

## **St. Matthias**

**Born:** Unknown

**Died:** Unknown but likely A.D. 80

**Feast Day:** May 14

**Patron of** alcoholics, carpenters, smallpox, tailors, hope, and perseverance

### **Background**

Have you ever heard the superstitions about Friday the 12th? Nope, because only Friday the 13th elicits superstitious paranoia or a fear of going camping in the woods with a maniac on the loose. The number 13 is traditionally associated with bad luck. In the case of St. Matthias, however, you be the judge.

Born in the first century, we do not actually know a ton about Matthias. We first hear his name in the Acts of the Apostles, after Christ's Resurrection and Ascension. Following the death of Judas between Holy Thursday and Good Friday, and after Jesus' Resurrection appearances for 40 days and His Ascension into heaven, the apostles gathered to determine who would take Judas' spot as the 12th apostle (they wanted to keep 12 to carry on what Jesus had begun when He chose them).

So, two men were selected as potential "fits": Joseph the Just and Matthias. Now, at first glance, Joseph would seem to be the natural choice — you do not get a title like "the Just" without being a just, holy, and righteous guy. That being said, even if the apostles were leaning in Joseph's direction, they prayed and cast lots (sort of like flipping a coin in biblical times), allowing the Holy Spirit (not popularity or politics) to determine who would become the newest apostle. The lot, as you may have guessed by virtue of this entry, fell to Matthias. He had the



“good fortune” of going from the “13th apostle” (not that that was even a thing) to taking Judas’ seat among the 12.

The apostles did not look for popularity, prestige, money, political connections, theological wisdom, or earthly power (all of which would have been “useful” to them). Instead, the 11 apostles, headed by Peter, wanted “one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us ... until He was taken up from us” (Acts 1:21-22). Did you catch that? They wanted a witness who could offer witness to others. The most important thing was to find someone who knew the Lord well.

Matthias went on to become a great witness of the Gospel and of God’s love to all who would listen. One tradition tells us that much of his time preaching and serving was spent in Judea, while other traditions place a majority of his missionary work down south into Ethiopia. After years of evangelizing, Matthias was eventually martyred — some say by crucifixion while other sources claim he was chopped into pieces by a gladiator or soldier. Again, what we know about Matthias, historically speaking, is sparse, but we do know that he was the one who the Holy Spirit called into important service in the early Church.

You might feel like an unlucky “number 13” in the eyes of the world but, in reality, God’s plan for you is much more prominent in the work of salvation. Ask St. Matthias to pray with you as you discern what God calls you to in your future, and then have the courage to say, “yes.”

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Chosen as the apostle to fill in Judas’ spot after Jesus’ death and Resurrection
- Evangelist and martyr for the faith

## **St. Maximilian Kolbe**

“No one in the world can change truth. What we can do and should do is to seek truth and to serve it when we have found it.”

**Born:** January 8, 1894

**Died:** August 14, 1941

**Feast Day:** August 14

**Patron of** drug addicts, prisoners, families, the pro-life movement, journalists, and those with eating disorders

### **Background**

If you have ever played chess, you know how important it is to work and think ahead. You are not just looking at your next move; great chess players work out potential scenarios, dangers, and opportunities several moves in advance for both themselves and their opponent. Born in Poland in 1894, St. Maximilian Kolbe's life could be seen as a great chess match in the hands of God.

Originally named Raymond, this future saint was always special. Around 12, he had a vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In it, she offered him two crowns — one white (signifying purity) and one red (signifying martyrdom) — and the young, future saint chose both. Little did he know how this miraculous encounter would play out on the chess board of his life.

In 1910 (at the age of 16), he joined the Franciscans and went to Rome to study, excelling in both math and physics. He eventually took the name “Maximilian” and founded a group called “Militia Immaculatae” (meaning “The Army of the Immaculate One”), a movement dedicated to evangelizing,

teaching, and encouraging souls to be consecrated to Mary's immaculate heart.

Maximilian wanted everyone in the world to come to Christ through Mary's intercession. He began a monthly magazine and opened two evangelization centers (one in Poland and one in Japan). His vision grew but was stalled in 1939 when World War II began. Despite working tirelessly to help shelter and save the lives of thousands of refugees (mostly Jews), Maximilian was arrested and taken to Auschwitz Concentration Camp. Imprisoned there and known merely as "Prisoner 16670," he continued to minister to other prisoners, offering secret Masses (using smuggled bread and wine), confessions, baptisms, and counseling.

One day some of the prisoners escaped from the camp and ten men were chosen to be killed in retribution for their escape. Francis Gajowniczek, a married father of young children, was one of the ten selected to die. Maximilian Kolbe came forward and volunteered to switch places with Francis. Condemned to death in the starvation bunker, the great saint survived and was eventually injected with carbolic acid, dying on August 14, 1941. Saint John Paul II canonized him on October 10, 1982.

Maximilian Kolbe's list of accomplishments was long and distinguished. He helped shape Vatican II with his profound thoughts and writings. His love for the Blessed Virgin Mary has touched and changed innumerable hearts. His heroic act of self-sacrifice is the most inspiring witness any one can offer. Saint Maximilian Kolbe may have only been "Prisoner 16670" in that camp, but he was a hero in the eyes of heaven and the world. Many go through life without any sort of true passion, afraid of a life they cannot control. Put simply, many settle for playing checkers because they are afraid of the small sacrifices and challenges the game of chess requires. Invite St. Maximilian Kolbe to pray with you, that you would

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allow the Lord — the chess master — to move you where He wants to move you, to help save and guide souls, until He calls you home ... where a crown awaits you.

**Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Founded the Militia Immaculatae, a group dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary
- Held a PhD in Theology
- Imprisoned at Auschwitz Concentration Camp during WWII
- Gave his life in order to save another prisoner
- His writings can be found in two volumes titled, “The Writings of Maximilian Kolbe”

## **St. Michael the Archangel**

**Born:** N/A

**Died:** N/A

**Feast Day:** September 29

**Patron of** protection against temptation/the devil, soldiers, doctors, mariners, paratroopers, police, and sickness

### **Background**

Earlier in this book we discussed St. Gabriel the Archangel and his vital role as a messenger of God. Gabriel gave Mary (and the world) “the (first) good news” that we call the Gospel. With good news, however, also comes bad news ... and the Gospel’s bad news comes in the form of the enemy, Satan. So, just as one archangel was needed to head up the evangelization efforts of God, another archangel — St. Michael — is called upon to deal with the bad news, leading an angelic army against the devil and his demonic followers.

The term “archangel” designates a higher “rank” than other, “regular” angels. The name Michael literally translates to, “Who is like God?” demonstrating the archangel’s profound humility before the Father. It is even more impressive when compared with his nemesis, Lucifer (the devil and leader of the fallen angels), whose name means “light bearer.” Lucifer attempts to be equal to God who is the light, but Michael demonstrates that no one is equal to God, not even the angels.

What we know about St. Michael comes from brief mentions in Scripture and repeated references in tradition. He is noted in the Book of Daniel as a helper and guardian of “the children.” In St. Jude’s epistle we see him, again, as guardian and the one who contends against Satan. In the Book of Revelation

(specifically chapter 12), we see St. Michael and his army battle against the fallen angels. He is implied elsewhere in Scripture, though he is not named specifically. Tradition tells us that Michael's job is to lead God's angels in the ongoing, though unseen, spiritual battle that is constantly raging around us. He is said to escort the faithful to heaven at their hour of death, to be a champion for and guardian of all Christians, and to be the one who calls us all from Earth to our heavenly judgment.

Saint Michael is a powerful intercessor, one you should call on often, daily even. Learn the Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel and pray it every morning before you get out of bed, every night before you go to sleep, and throughout the day when you find yourself in "dark," scary, or uneasy moments. Invite St. Michael to watch over you and protect you, and remember that you are never alone in this battle. Oh, and, if you are interested, you can read more about angels in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (327-336).

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- An archangel, set apart to do God's work
- Called upon to protect us from evil
- Known as the "Guardian of the Church"

### **Prayer**

Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle, be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray. And do thou, O prince of the heavenly host, by the divine power of God, cast into hell Satan and all evil the spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

## St. Monica

**Born:** A.D. 330

**Died:** A.D. 387

**Feast Day:** August 27

**Patron of** alcoholics, conversion, married women, mothers, and victims of abuse

### Background

If someone looked at you as a teen — how you acted, the decisions you made, the friends you kept, the language you used, how “into your faith” you were or were not — would they say your mother did a good or bad job raising you? If you are awesome, they would praise your mom, but if you made bad decisions, they might blame her, right? Would that be fair to her? Just ask St. Monica her thoughts on the matter.

Monica was born in the fourth century in Tagaste, (North) Africa. Although Monica was devoted to God from a young age and lived a prayerful life as a teen Christian, her parents arranged a marriage for her to a pagan, Patricius. Patricius cared for Monica financially, but he had eyes for other women. He was also known to have a violent temper and was not what you would call a moral or virtuous man. Although her husband mocked her faith and piety, he respected her and was amazed by her kindness and virtue. In time, Monica's example won the hearts of both her husband and mother-in-law (who lived with them), as both eventually changed their ways and converted to Christianity.

Monica and Patricius had three children, the oldest (and most famous) of whom was named Augustine. Augustine was a 17-year-old student at a well-known and well-respected

school in Carthage when his father died. Augustine was living a very immoral, “partier” lifestyle that including drinking, theft, and sexually promiscuous behavior. Struggling with this reality, Monica refused to let Augustine live in her house, but she continued to pray for his conversion. Soon after, she received a vision that reassured her that her son would return to the faith and encouraged her to keep praying. So, Monica prayed even more and added fasting to her intercessory prayers. She brought Augustine home and became a true “helicopter parent.”

When Augustine decided to go to Rome to study, she followed him there. When he secretly moved to Milan, Monica, too, headed to Milan. Her deepest desire was to protect her son’s soul. While in Milan, both Augustine and Monica met with and began receiving instruction and direction from the bishop, St. Ambrose. He proved to be a critical piece in Augustine’s conversion and an answer to a worried mother’s prayers. On Easter in A.D. 387, Monica watched as her playboy became a choirboy — Augustine and his gang of friends were baptized into the Church.

Little did anyone know but Monica was very sick and died soon after Augustine’s baptism. Happy and peaceful, her deepest prayer — for the conversion of those she loved — had been answered, first, with her husband and mother-in-law and, finally, in her son whom many considered “too far gone” to save.

Monica’s unyielding witness and tireless prayer not only changed her family but changed the Church forever. You might have loved ones in your life who you have almost “given up” on. Invite St. Monica to pray with you on their behalf. Her intercession has proven quite powerful.



Additionally, St. Monica's courage and strength in the face of emotional abuse, personal humiliation from an unfaithful husband, and years of "unanswered prayers" before her son's heart opened to God should serve as an inspiration and reminder to us all. God does not work on our timetables or in ways we would design but He does work. It would have been easy for Monica to give up on God, her husband, her mother-in-law, and her son. Instead, she made herself holier and her prayer even louder, and look what happened. As much as she loved her family, St. Monica loved God more and — in the end — that is what made all the difference.

#### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Deeply prayerful and committed to her family
- Stood her ground in light of her son's immoral choices
- Instrumental in the conversion of her husband, mother-in-law, and son

## **St. Moses the Black**

**Born:** A.D. 330

**Died:** A.D. 405

**Feast Day:** August 28

**Patron of** Africa and nonviolence

### **Background**

Imagine some of your favorite villains — vile, unloving, merciless, immoral, deadly, and a little bit crazy. Saint Moses the Black could have easily been cast for that role.

Born in A.D. 330, much of Moses' early life is unknown. What we do know is that he was an Egyptian slave, who was expelled from his "master's" house for bravely (or stupidly, depending on how you look at it) stealing possessions from his master. He then became a gang leader and led a crew of 75 outlaws, who traveled up and down the Nile River looting, killing, raping, and carousing as land pirates. Legend even says that Moses swam a mile across the river with a dagger in his mouth just to stab a man whose dog had barked at the future saint. How is that for villainy?

At one point, while being pursued by the police, Moses entered a monastery, looking for a safe hiding place. It is said that while there, Moses heard the Gospel message and was so taken by the beauty of the words and people that he was overwhelmed by the love of God and developed a deep interest in and love for Christ. He begged to stay and be received as a monk in the community. Old habits die hard, however, and the transition to living as a monk was not as quick as Moses' conversion. Once when four robbers broke into the monastery, Moses "the Monk" beat them into a bloody

mess out of sheer habit before remembering his new lifestyle and vows. He then tied them up and took them to his superior (the abbot) and basically said, “It used to be that I woulda killed them, but I am thinking that is not how we do (it here)?”

He battled his own temper, sin, and temptations for years, eventually overcoming his more “natural” inclinations. He was ordained a priest and then served as the abbot for the community, guiding dozens of men into a deeper relationship with God. At age 75, when outlaws were coming through town and approaching the monastery to loot it, Moses encouraged his men to flee in peace rather than to fight, reminding them of Christ’s words that those who live by the sword will die by it (Matthew 26:52). He opened the doors and welcomed the intruders with hospitality and mercy. He was martyred that day in A.D. 405 and is celebrated, still today, not only in our communion of saints but, especially, in Northern Africa.

There are several souls leafing through this book who felt like they were horrible sinners, believing they had sinned too much for God to love or use them. If this is you, do not be mastered by your past. Invite St. Moses the Black to pray with you to reconcile and (re)focus on your future. If you do not struggle with a sin-filled past, remember that those who do still deserve mercy and love, not judgment or condemnation. Saint Moses the Black’s story reminds us that some conversions work quickly and others over time but, in the end, God is faithful and humble hearts always prevail.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Intense conversion to the faith after living a life of violence
- A monastic who was eventually ordained to the priesthood
- Incredibly welcoming and hospitable to anyone who was seeking refuge

## **St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta**

“Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love.”

**Born:** August 26, 1910

**Died:** September 5, 1997

**Feast Day:** September 5

**Patron of** the poor, the homeless, the suffering, the marginalized, and World Youth Day

### **Background**

You would be hard-pressed to find anyone born in the 20th century who has not heard of Mother Teresa. This larger-than-life rockstar of the Catholic Church was large in reputation only — standing at about four feet, ten inches — but what she lacked in physical size, she made up for in spiritual virtue. Born in Macedonia in 1910, this little, Albanian-Indian woman stepped onto the world’s stage with a simple message: “Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love.”

Teresa was baptized Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu and received all of the Sacraments of Initiation by age six. At eight, she lost her father, so her mother — a devout and hard-working woman — was left to raise her kids in the faith. In 1928, at the age of 18, Agnes joined the Sisters of Loreto in Ireland as a missionary and took the name Sr. Mary Teresa (named after St. Thérèse of Lisieux), eventually heading to India to teach. She had a powerful experience of prayer in 1946, where she felt the Lord calling her to something deeper within her vocation. The next several weeks brought visions and locutions, which led Teresa to establish a new religious community known today as the

Missionaries of Charity. Their mission was simple: serve and love the poorest of the poor.

Headquartered in Calcutta, India, Teresa began serving with her young sisters in the city streets and their community blossomed by the mid 1960s, opening houses in South America, Europe, and Africa. As the years drew on, Mother Teresa became a household name. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, was featured on the cover of magazines and newspapers, became a regular fixture on the news, and traveled the world speaking, praying, and raising money and awareness for the poor. She courageously took the world's stage and spotlight she was given to defend the dignity of all human life, rail against abortion and the death penalty, and remind all world leaders and citizens that all life is sacred.

Mother Teresa was called home to heaven in 1997. Her immense popularity allowed her cause for sainthood to be opened earlier than most (less than two years after her death). She was canonized by her friend, St. John Paul II in December of 2002.

Years after her death, a book entitled, "Come Be My light" was published. The book shared letters and conversations spanning decades of her life. It recounted a deep, daily prayer life that — for a majority of her life — "felt" very far from the Lord, not sensing His presence or consolation. It is said that the sense of abandonment the Lord entrusted to her gave her a deeper understanding of and love for the outcast, the sick, the forgotten, and the poor she was called to serve.

The fact that Mother Teresa of Calcutta remained so devout and humble all while not "feeling" the joy-filled, "retreat high" type of faith is a reminder and witness to us that faith is not an emotional response; it is something far deeper. Faith is seen in devotion, hope, surrender, self-sacrifice, mercy, and love.

If you have ever felt forgotten or abandoned by God, invite St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta to pray with you and for you that you, like her, would receive the consolations and love of God needed to not only “survive” the challenges of life but to thrive within them.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Gave of her entire life to serve the poorest of the poor in India
- Founded an order of nuns called The Missionaries of Charity
- Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979
- Her most well-known writings are “Come Be My Light,” “No Greater Love,” “Where There Is Love, There Is God,” “The Joy in Living,” and “In My Own Words”

## St. Olga

**Born:** A.D. 890

**Died:** A.D. 969

**Feast Day:** July 11

**Patron of** widows and converts

### Background

Few saints were princesses, but even fewer (really, only this one) were also mass murderers. Yes, you read that correctly. Saint Olga's resume would read princess, grandmother to a saint, and mass-murderer (most likely under the "past accomplishments" category.) To truly understand Olga's story, though, we need context.

Olga was born in Russia in A.D. 879. She was raised a pagan with no faith structure or formation to speak of. In her early twenties, Olga married Igor, the heir Prince of Kiev. They lived happily in power for decades, but neither knew the Lord nor practiced any faith amidst a truly "God-less" Russian culture. When her husband, Prince Igor, was assassinated in A.D. 945 through an enemy's plot to take over the kingdom, the princess made a decision. When the ambassadors of the enemy army came to her with the news, she greeted them and kindly asked them to return the following day. Olga then had her servants dig a large pit beside the castle. The next day the two dozen ambassadors who killed her husband and attempted to coerce Olga into a false marriage to expand their kingdom, found themselves being pushed into the new pit as Olga gave the order for them to be *buried alive*. Next, she lured some of the leaders who were behind the sinister plan to the castle, where she had them locked in a room and

set the building on fire. Finally, when Olga was able to get the remaining enemies to her castle, she got them drunk and had her guard slay them. It is estimated that in the end, Olga was responsible for the murder of several hundred of her enemies.

But Olga did not stop there. Fueled by anger and the desire for revenge, Olga had her troops set fire to the enemy's cities, slaughter their remaining troops, and sell random remaining citizens into slavery. You might be wondering how this woman became a saint, right?

Well, about nine years later, Olga was traveling through Constantinople. While there, Olga encountered the Gospel in a profound way and, thus, had a dramatic conversion. Her lifestyle moving forward was a complete 180-degree turnaround. She devoted her life to telling people about the love and mercy of Jesus. She repented for her sins, gave to and served the poor, and used her power as princess to spread the truth of Christianity throughout the pagan hillsides. She even built churches with her own money in Kiev, Pskov, and neighboring cities. Olga did everything she could, but few converts were made in her lifetime; hearts were too hardened. Most of her children and grandchildren did not even convert to the faith — except for, most notably, St. Vladimir, her grandson.

Now, to say Olga's story is unique would be the biggest understatement in this book. Her story was, for much of her life, a horrible anti-Gospel, filled with bloodshed, sorrow, and hopelessness. That being said, St. Olga teaches us that the power of the Gospel can turn even the coldest, darkest heart if they are open.

You might think your sin is too great to forgive, but you are wrong. God is not done with you or your story. Invite St. Olga to pray with you, that you might see yourself differently, not as



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the sum of your past sins but as the sum of the Father's love. Pray that you will see what God designed you to become, as well as a clear path to get there. Begin with Reconciliation — saying "I'm sorry" is the first step to sainthood, as St. Olga can attest to.

**Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Princess and convert to the faith with a notorious past
- Deeply devoted to Christ and serving the poor
- Grandmother to St. Vladimir

## **St. Padre Pio**

"Pray, hope, and don't worry."

**Born:** May 25, 1887

**Died:** September 23, 1968

**Feast Day:** September 23

**Patron of** civil defense volunteers, adolescents, Pietrelcina, stress relief, and the January blues

### **Background**

There are countless words we could use to describe St. Padre Pio, but the simplest way to put it might be this: He is like the communion of saints' Navy SEAL. To be listed in the communion of saints is a great honor to be sure, but even among that list, St. Padre Pio tends to stand out for many reasons.

While most of the saints we have been talking about in this book died hundreds of years ago, Pio died in 1968 (and was canonized in 2002). Born in 1887 in Pietrelcina, Italy, this amazing saint was ordained at the age of 22 and survived both World Wars, immense personal sufferings, and some of the worst spiritual attacks ever recorded by saintly biographers.

In 1918, while praying before a crucifix, Pio received the stigmata (the wounds of Christ), which he bore for 50 years. The pain from the wounds was great, but it intensified during the Thursday and Friday of Holy Week each year. Once, when a hernia had rendered Pio unconscious and in need of surgery, the doctor preparing for the operation looked at the saint's left side where one of the (stigmata) wounds of Christ was

located. The doctor reported that the wound was fresh and in the shape of a cross, with rays of light pouring forth from it.

Pio had the miraculous ability to bilocate, as well. Apparently, during World War II, Pio appeared in front of an aircraft, which prevented it from bombing his village. There is another report of Pio warning troops in the battlefield of dangers, saving several from certain death. All the while, Pio never left his cell in the monastery. In another instance, Pio was asked to pray for a woman who had a deadly tumor. Almost immediately, a mysterious friar appeared in that woman's room (although no one had let the friar in), blessed her, and disappeared. An exam a few days later revealed that the tumor was gone.

In the modern 20th century, word spread quickly about this holy man of God. Everyone wanted to see him and to touch him in hopes of a miraculous healing. Luckily, Pio also had the gift of levitation, which came in handy when he needed to get through a swarm of people who were eager to grab him or, at the very least, rip off a piece of his robe. Pio had achieved "rock star" status, even though he never wanted it.

The list of Pio's miraculous feats is long and incredible, but beyond all the hype that surrounded him, Pio remained humble. He served the poor and suffering with unconditional love and reckless abandon. When his fame threatened to detract from the ministry at hand, he celebrated Mass in private, and when asked not to preach publicly, he embraced the directive with strict and joyful obedience. Upon Pio's death, the stigmata wounds disappeared, leaving no scar.

If you are suffering physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually, St. Padre Pio is a powerful intercessor. He knew well the physical challenges and spiritual obstacles that come with living a holy life. You are not alone! In the saints, God gives us the tremendous gift of brothers and sisters in the

faith who live (in heaven) to pray for us. Specifically ask St. Padre Pio to pray with and for you and trust that with God's grace you, like St. Padre Pio, can bear any cross that comes your way.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Bore the wounds of Christ, the stigmata
- Able to bilocate and levitate and is credited with many miracles
- Incredible priest and humble servant of others
- His life is portrayed in "Padre Pio: Miracle Man," a 2000 Italian TV movie
- Many prayer books include his prayers

## **St. Patrick**

“Christ be within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ inquired, Christ in danger, Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.”

**Born:** A.D. 387

**Died:** A.D. 461

**Feast Day:** March 17

**Patron of** barbers, barrel makers, blacksmiths, cattle, engineers, people who are excluded, miners, and against fear of snakes

### **Background**

If you were to ask most people what they know about St. Patrick, you would most likely get a wide range of answers. And, inevitably, most would be incorrect. Much like St. Valentine, St. Patrick is more known for his now secularized holiday than for his actual feast day. Saint Patrick — who spent his life speaking out against slavery and sin and promoting virtue and prayerfulness — is now commemorated by large drunken parties and the abandonment of good judgment.

Just to set the record straight, Patrick was born in A.D. 387 in (Roman) Britain. That is right, Patrick was not even Irish; he was Welsh-Italian. When Patrick was 14 years old, he was captured by Irish pirates (yes, that was a real thing) and taken off to Ireland as a slave, where he lived in captivity until the age of 20 when a prophetic dream offered him a plan of escape. Immersed in the pagan, heretical culture of fourth century Ireland, Patrick turned his teen attention to God. He would

have another vision later in life that would lead to his place in the seminary and eventual ordination to the priesthood.

Years later, around the age of 46, Patrick was led back to Ireland — to the very nation and people he sought to escape — as a missionary, armed with the Gospel. Legend says that Patrick was sent to evangelize a Druid chieftain who — after a miraculous intervention by God — allowed the priest he was trying to kill to live, paving the way for the chieftain's eventual conversion. Over the next few decades, Patrick traveled throughout the Emerald Isle, converting hundreds and, eventually, thousands. He began building churches, training missionary disciples, and offering simplified teachings on some of the most complex theological mysteries, like the Holy Trinity (using a three-leaf shamrock as a visual aid).

In Patrick's story, we see history and legend meet. Perhaps you have seen pictures or heard that St. Patrick drove the snakes out of Ireland? Most scholars agree that there were not any actual snakes in the country; it is a myth. He was not the first Christian missionary sent to Ireland, either (that was St. Palladius). That being said, Patrick was heroic on multiple levels that have nothing to do with how he is celebrated in America in the 21st century. He spoke out against slavery, pagan worship, and was a champion of women's rights in a time when people treated them as objects (not unlike today). He stood for Jesus, speaking out against pagan influences and the debauchorous lifestyles (including drunkenness, idolatry, witchcraft, and sexual sins) that were leading countless masses into sin.

Patrick could have allowed slavery and paganism to turn his heart away from God but, instead, he used it as fuel to pray and pursue God even more strongly. He was a man of trust, humility, and passion. If you can relate to this example as a teen, thank God for the community and family He has given

you. If you doubt you would have (had) the same passion and strength as St. Patrick during your teen years, invite him into your prayer life and ask for his intercession to deepen your faith and strengthen your resolve. Lastly, if you are enslaved by anything in your life, ask St. Patrick to kneel beside you and pray that those chains would be shattered and that the Lord would set you free. Saint Patrick understands teen enslavement better than almost any other saint, and his prayerful intercession is valuable in your fight for freedom and pursuit of victory!

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Captured and enslaved by pirates as a teen
- Returned to Ireland and devoted his life as a missionary of the Gospel
- Outspoken against slavery, immorality, and pagan worship
- Champion of women's rights
- His most well-known writings are "Confessions of St. Patrick" and "Letter to Coroticus"

## St. Paul

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”  
(Philippians 1:21)

**Born:** Unknown

**Died:** A.D. 67

**Feast Day:** June 29 (along with St. Peter)

**Patron of** missionaries, evangelists, writers, journalists, authors, public workers, rope and saddle makers, and tent makers

### Background

Growing up, there was a picture Bible in my house that housed one particular picture that always held my attention. It was called “the Martyrdom of St. Paul.” In it, St. Paul knelt as his Roman executioner wielded a sword in the air, just moments before he would lose his head. At the time, I had no concept of who St. Paul was or what he did. Yet, the picture was engaging to my innocent eyes. How did this obscure tent-maker from Tarsus change the world in such a dramatic way that every corner of it would hear his words thousands of years later?

Once a persecutor of Christians himself, Saul experienced a dramatic conversion that turned his life upside-down, quite literally. He was a man of strong character and courage, bold and passionate in defending the principles he saw as truth, but what he thought was pleasing was not the one, true God. While we cannot condone his behavior, it is hard not to admire his passion, especially when so many people are so apathetic about their faith. In a flash, on that road to Damascus (see Acts 9:1-19), everything Saul knew, everything he had learned during his years of studying to be a Rabbi, was rendered almost irrelevant. In one instant, he went from being certain



of his superiority among God's children to staring God in the face and going blind.

But, in the face of love, Christ transforms everything. Now called Paul, the future saint's understanding of his vocation and purpose took on new meaning. But Paul did not go straight from his experience on the road to Damascus to preaching; he spent years in prayer and discernment, growing in humility and preparation.

Paul did not want converts to the faith to view Jesus merely as a piece of history. Paul focused on Christ's presence in the present. Following his encounter with Jesus, he viewed Christ as ever-present, not as a historical figure. Paul understood something that many people back then and still today seem to forget: Jesus is alive, and Jesus is always present.

It is important to remember that Paul was all about Christ but, also, about people ... whom he truly saw as his "brothers and sisters." Paul journeyed over 12,000 miles, taking multiple journeys and enduring incredible hardships (see 2 Corinthians 11:16-33 for a glimpse) in order to "successfully" win hearts for the Lord. He endured prison, torture, and exile, but he never stopped. Paul was unrelenting.

When you read Paul's letters (called "epistles"), we are not reading more Gospel accounts that tell of all Jesus did and said. He gave us the person of Christ and the picture of what it meant to follow Jesus daily. Paul was interested more in encouraging, inspiring, and, if necessary, correcting the early Christians and disciples, helping them to better understand the "dos and don'ts" of following Jesus; whether they began as a Jew or Gentile, they were now "Christians."

Paul's life reminds us that none of us are "too sinful" for God to love or use. The one who sinned so egregiously against

the Lord became one of His greatest missionaries. You might think you have sinned too much for God to forgive, but you would be wrong. Ask St. Paul to pray with and for you, that your eyes would be truly opened, that you would see not your sin but your own potential, and that you, like him, would have the courage to use every gift and talent God entrusted to you to lead others to Him.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Encountered a dramatic conversion that eventually led to becoming one of the Twelve Apostles
- Bold evangelist and preacher
- Travelled over 12,000 miles in order to spread the Gospel
- The New Testament contains 13 letters that are traditionally attributed to him

## **St. Pedro Calungsod**

**Born:** July 21, 1654

**Died:** April 2, 1672

**Feast Day:** April 2

**Patron of** Filipino youth, altar boys, the Philippines, Guam, and Cebuanos

### **Background**

How far are you willing to go for your faith? Are you willing to get up early to make it to Mass? Are you willing to drive to another town for confession or to make sure you receive the Eucharist? Are you willing to say “yes” to the priesthood or religious life if that is where God is calling you? Are you willing to say “no” to a typical career and “yes” to life as a missionary? How about dying a martyr? Are you, as a teen, willing to die for your faith? Saint Pedro Calungsod was open to all of it and, as a result, lived a more heroic life by 17 than most people do in a lifetime.

Pedro was born in the Philippines in 1654. At only 13 years of age, he became a lay missionary with the Jesuits and travelled to Guam to help spread the Gospel. As his knowledge and wisdom caught up to his passion, Pedro became a trusted young missionary within their ranks. The Jesuit priests believed that having courageous and passionate teens along as witnesses to the faith would help influence the large number of teens and young people in the countries they were attempting to convert. When he was around 17 years old, Pedro travelled with some of the missionary fathers and a group of lay people to the Marianas (an island group north of Guam, east of the Philippines, and far south of Japan).

In April of 1672, Pedro was with a Jesuit priest, Fr. San Vitores, when they were attacked by a tribe of people who disliked their message of Christianity. Though both unarmed, they were attacked with lances. Father San Vitores was struck and bleeding to death, but Pedro dodged the projectiles first thrown at him. He could have escaped, but the teen refused to abandon his priest and, as a result, suffered a deadly thrust through the chest. As he lay there dying, Pedro received absolution from Fr. San Vitores before they both died a martyr's death. Both of their bodies were then thrown into the sea. It was during the beatification of Fr. San Vitores in 1985 that the story and life of Pedro Calungsod first came to light. Soon after, a formal inquiry was opened into eyewitness accounts and testimonies that had been recorded centuries earlier about the brave teen martyr. Pedro was beatified by St. John Paul II in 2000 and canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012.

When given the opportunity to run to safety and choose to preserve his own life, St. Pedro Calungsod humbly and courageously refused to leave his priest alone to die. That level of selflessness is not typically seen at any age, let alone from a teen. If you struggle with putting others before yourself or if you are somewhat "afraid" to really share your faith with others who might not agree or who would most likely mock you for it, find a holy friend in St. Pedro Calungsod. Ask him to pray with you, to unleash the courage buried deep within your heart. Give God permission, as this great young saint did, to lead and propel you to heroic and bold new levels of faith. You may not end up a missionary in a foreign country, but God will use you as a missionary in your own home, school, and parish.

#### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Selflessly responded to Jesus' call to discipleship as a teen
- Heroic lay missionary and evangelist
- Martyr for the faith

## St. Perpetua

“Stand fast in the faith, and love one another.”

**Born:** Around A.D. 181

**Died:** A.D. 203

**Feast Day:** March 7

**Patron of** mothers, expectant mothers, ranchers, and butchers

### Background

Certain things in life are just meant to go together: peanut butter and jelly, Batman and Robin, high school and acne ... and, in the great communion of saints, you cannot mention St. Felicity without also discussing St. Perpetua.

As we have discussed throughout this book, most of the early martyrs' lives are a mix of legend and historical fact, and it can be tough to decipher what “really happened” and what became the subject of heroic reminiscing on the part of the early Christians. The good news in the case of Perpetua and Felicity, however, is that we have the journal Perpetua kept, outlining their lives and eventual martyrdom (as was chronicled by her teacher, Saturus, and surviving companions).

Perpetua was born around A.D. 181 and was raised by a Christian mother and pagan father. A well-educated noblewoman, Perpetua was in her early 20s when she boldly decided to become a Christian. Her pagan father had advised against it throughout her youth and teen years but, over time, the Gospel message, love of Jesus, and witness of the Christians around her turned Perpetua's heart fully to the Lord.

Perpetua converted against her father's wishes and was baptized before eventually being arrested and imprisoned for her bold and passionate witness to the Christian faith. Her journal spoke of messages she had received from God, telling her to pray for nothing but endurance in the trials she would soon face. Caught as part of the Christian persecutions taking place in Africa under Emperor Severus in the early 200s, Perpetua could have denied the Lord and gone home to her child, but she would not renounce her faith or deny the Lord who had blessed her so abundantly.

As you may remember from St. Felicity's story, the two women (and some female companions) were stripped naked and forced to face a rabid heifer. When that "did not work," they were thrown to gladiators, where they stood side by side as they were executed by the sword before a cheering crowd. They are still mentioned as a pair in one of the Eucharistic prayers at Mass and are rarely spoken about without the other mentioned.

Hopefully you have a faithful friend to share trials and struggles with. If so, thank God for them and if not, begin praying that the Lord would send you one. Additionally, if you have never journaled about your faith, consider starting. Invite St. Perpetua to pray with you as you do, that your thoughts may be illuminated to see how and where God has worked and continues to work in your life. Over time you will experience emotional and spiritual growth but also gain greater wisdom and insight into who God is and how He places certain situations and people in your path to grow you in virtue and holiness.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Converted to Christianity in a time when Christianity was illegal
- Unwilling to deny the Lord despite certain consequences
- Her compiled journals can be found under the title, "The Passion of St. Perpetua, St. Felicitas, and their Companions"

## **St. Peter the Apostle**

“Lord, save me.” (Matthew 14:30)

**Born:** First century

**Died:** Around A.D. 64

**Feast Day:** June 29

**Patron of** fishermen, net makers, and ship builders

### **Background**

Have you ever been driving down the street when a police car begins following you? All of a sudden you are totally aware of the speed limit, the use of your blinkers, your hands at “ten and two” ... I imagine that is what it was like (at first) being one of the Twelve Apostles. Imagine how stressful it would have been when Jesus would throw out a question like, “Who do people say that I am?” and no one among the Twelve Apostles wanted to be the first to venture a guess. You know all those times in class when you did not raise your hand out of fear you would get the wrong answer? Yeah, that was not St. Peter. He was always speaking up, even if it meant putting his sandal in his mouth.

Originally known as Simon, Jesus called the fisherman on the shores of the Sea of Galilee to abandon his fishing nets (and way of life) and follow Him on a new mission. Jesus recognized something in Simon, though, that elevated him above the other eleven disciples.

Simon was one of Jesus’ closest followers and friends (along with James and John) and was present at many private, yet historic moments like the raising of Jairus’ daughter, the Transfiguration, the Last Supper, the agony in the garden, and the Resurrection appearances. One day, Jesus changed

Simon's name to Peter (which means "rock"), signifying a change in his essence and mission. Peter became the first pope and the rock upon which Jesus would "build His Church."

Even though Peter sometimes spoke and acted without thinking, Jesus loved his humility and self-awareness. Peter did not pretend to be someone he was not. He was a sinner who wanted and needed God's mercy and forgiveness, a disciple who got back up after he fell. His life was filled with ups and downs, but he remained humble and kept learning lessons as he went along.

Saint Peter is a great patron for anyone who realizes their sinfulness, is quick-tempered, or has been called (or feels called) to lead but is a little insecure in their abilities. When we look at St. Peter, we see someone who probably never thought he would be worthy of the role of the first pope, much less a recognized saint, which goes to show what can happen if we have the humility to follow the Holy Spirit one day at a time.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Listed first among the Twelve Apostles
- Walked on water
- Witnessed the empty tomb on Easter Sunday, along with another apostle
- Given "the keys" to the Kingdom and named the first pope
- Present at Pentecost and, through the Holy Spirit, became a powerful leader
- Credited with writing first and second Peter in the New Testament



## St. Peter Damian

“Do not be depressed. Do not let your weakness make you impatient. Instead, let the serenity of your spirit shine through your face. Let the joy of your mind burst forth.”

**Born:** Between A.D. 988 and 1007

**Died:** February 23, 1072 or 1073

**Feast Day:** February 21

No official **patronage** exists for this saint.

### Background

Have you ever thought about what your life would look like if it were made into a movie? Which actor or actress would portray you? Which villains would wage battle throughout your story? Many saints lived epic lives that would lend themselves to a great action movie or heart-wrenching drama. Some may lend themselves to a more intellectual thriller or thought-provoking documentary. The life of St. Peter Damian would be classified as a bad Disney fairy tale turned passionate courtroom drama with a sad, quiet deathbed scene.

At a young age, Peter lost both of his parents and was forced to live with one of his older brothers. Saying “forced to live with” is a kind way of saying that Peter was treated more like a slave than a family member — living like a dog and being responsible for cleaning, doing hard labor, and eventually tending to the swine as a farmhand. After years of living like this, another older brother (who happened to be a priest) took Peter in and ensured that he received a proper education. Peter took his brother’s name, Damian, as his surname to demonstrate the father figure his sibling had become to this orphaned saint-in-the-making.

Perhaps due to the lack of compassion Peter received early on in his life or his newfound guardian's pastoral care, Peter developed a deep and abiding love for the poor and forgotten in society. Even when Peter was elevated to the status and role of professor, he continued to use his free time to serve the poor of his community. Peter had a strict and devout prayer life. He fasted frequently, spent hours each day on his knees in prayer, and even wore a hairshirt (a type of rough cloth) underneath his clothes as a penance for the sins of the world. He offered the constant physical discomfort and annoyance up to the Lord for the forgiveness of sins.

Over time, Peter left teaching to focus strictly on his prayer life and ministry. He joined the Benedictines and became a priest and monk. His holiness challenged everyone he encountered to look at their own lives and quest for holiness. He later became the abbot and led other priestly souls of his order. He spoke out against the common sins and misconduct of the clergy at the time and, in turn, made a lot of enemies. Pope Stephen IX named Peter a cardinal and the great leader continued to try to reform the Church where it was needed. He went toe to toe with kings and cardinals throughout his adult life until he finally succumbed to poor health and died a quiet, peaceful death, still inspiring and guiding the multiple priests and brothers who kept vigil at his bedside.

In addition to his public ministry, Peter was a prolific writer and thinker. Over 170 of his letters are still in existence, along with over 50 of his sermons and seven biographies. In 1828 he was given the rare distinction and title, "Doctor of the Church" for his amazing work and development of doctrine.

It is said that Peter Damian was one of the most disciplined and devout saints to ever serve in Church leadership. His deep desire for increased humility and charity was witnessed by all who knew him. If you have ever felt tempted to compromise

your values or feel a particular allure to the pleasures of the world (over the promise of heaven), ask St. Peter Damian to pray with you. Through his intercession you will no doubt grow in strength and certitude that the Lord's way — the way of heaven — is worth the daily struggle and that the soul is worth far more than anything this world has to offer.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Orphaned at a young age
- Served as an educator and shepherd for other priests
- Holy priest and monk, eventually ordained cardinal
- Spoke out against misconduct within the clergy
- His most famous written works are “Letters of St. Peter Damian, v. 1-3 (1-150)” and “Liber Gomorrhianus”
- Declared a “Doctor of the Church,” an honor bestowed on only 36 saints (to date)

## **St. Philip Neri**

“A joyful heart is more easily made perfect than  
a downcast one”

**Born:** July 21, 1515

**Died:** May 26, 1595

**Feast Day:** May 26

**Patron of** joy and the United States

### **Background**

If the communion of saints were a deck of cards, St. Philip Neri would be the joker. Born in Florence, Italy in 1515, Philip is a saint who knew how to laugh ... at himself. Though he came from a poor family and lost his brother in early childhood, Philip did not let personal hardship steal his joy. At 18 years old he arrived in Rome, penniless but happy. He tutored to make money, wrote poetry for fun, and began studying philosophy and theology to grow in knowledge. However, Philip was not your normal student; he was far more eccentric. When he got tired of learning, he sold all of his books and gave the money to the poor.

Philip's prayer life is what kept him so joyful. His entire life became a prayer. He only ate once a day and, even then, it was only bread and water. Though he had a bed, he usually opted to sleep on the floor, without a pillow. During his intense daily prayers that lasted hours, it was not uncommon for him to experience ecstasies and visions. During one such night of intense prayer, he experienced what is described as a "globe of fiery light" enter his mouth and sink into his heart. He felt great pain in his chest, which over time transformed into pure joy. Witnesses said that the side of Philip's heart was

so noticeably swollen that it looked as though there was a fist inside his chest.

In time, Philip wanted to interact with people, so he left his hermit lifestyle; he went out into the city streets and began to preach the Gospel, care for the sick, and reach out to the poor. A true “do-gooder” in every sense of the word, Philip was funny and charming, and in a short time many people began to work beside him and follow his lead. Philip and his followers built and staffed a hospital with a meeting room where they would gather at night to talk, preach, pray, and listen to music.

At the age of 36, Philip was ordained a priest and his burning heart gave him almost superhuman energy. It is said that some days he would hear 40 confessions before sunrise. He was given the miraculous gift of reading souls, meaning he was able to tell people their sins before they even confessed them. When Philip prayed Mass, witnesses watched in amazement as his face radiated light; occasionally Philip would even levitate during the consecration in a state of ecstasy and sparks would visibly shoot forth from his eyes. In addition to these miraculous displays, it is said that Philip could bilocate and was given the gift of prophecy through his many visions.

Philip was determined not to let any one of these miraculous “abilities” affect his humility; he never took himself — or anybody else, for that matter — too seriously. Philip liked to keep people on their toes. It was not uncommon to see him walk out in public with his clothes on inside out or with half of his beard shaved off. He loved humor, played practical jokes on his fellow priests, and used unconventional methods to teach people about the love of God.

When Philip died in 1595, an autopsy revealed an abnormally large heart. The spiritual ecstasy and vision he had was not

only proven true but gave miraculous, medical proof to God's glory at work in the saint.

If you ever feel like the faith is boring, if you have lost your joy, or if you worry that you cannot be holy *and have fun* in this life, ask St. Philip Neri, God's joker, to pray with you. The only reason to take this life too seriously is if it is your only one! Heaven awaits and St. Philip Neri is there waiting for you ... bless his heart!

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Deeply self-motivated and prayerful
- Light-hearted and joyful
- Often received visions and experienced ecstasies in prayer
- Had the gift of reading souls

## **St. Philomena**

**Born:** A.D. January 10, 291

**Died:** A.D. August 10, 304

**Feast Day:** August 11

**Patron of** infants, babies, and the youth

### **Background**

Have you ever heard the phrase “too good to be true”? Some use it to describe a new love interest, others for incredibly good news when all hope seemed lost. In the case of St. Philomena, one might easily adopt this phrase when learning about her life.

Little is actually known, historically speaking, about St. Philomena. Sister Maria Luisa di Gesù provides us most of what we know about Philomena. In Sr. Maria’s account, she claims St. Philomena appeared to her in a dream and detailed important insights about her teen life in the late third century. Sister Maria shared the details that make up Philomena’s biography today.

According to this account, Philomena was the daughter of a Greek king who had converted to Christianity (making this young saint, if true, a princess). At the age of 13, Philomena (like many other young women in this book and throughout the early Church) took a vow of consecrated virginity. While accompanying her father and family to Rome, Emperor Diocletian (a fierce hater and murderer of Christians) was captivated by her beauty and fell “in love” with young Philomena. When she rebuffed him and refused to become one of his wives, it appears that Philomena was scourged, drowned with an anchor attached to her leg(s), and shot with

arrows. Why so many ways to kill her, you ask? Because each one failed. It is said that during each attack, angels appeared to help her survive. Finally, Philomena was decapitated on a Friday afternoon at 3 p.m. (the same time of death as our Lord, Jesus). Again, how much of this is legend and reality, we cannot be sure but what happened next led to her canonization and lead most to believe in the historic reality of this young saint's heroic life.

When her bones were exhumed after discovery, miracles began to occur. When her relics were placed in a church in Mugnano, Italy, parishioners and visitors began to report healing of wounds, the curing of cancers, and other miraculous changes to long-standing illnesses. Other saints also began prayerful devotion to St. Philomena and recounted miracles they attributed to her intercession, including Sts. John Vianney and Peter Chanel.

While St. Philomena is not well-known by many Catholics, her name and fame are growing. You will likely never have to face martyrdom (let alone such a violent, multi-faceted martyrdom) like St. Philomena, but you may be called to stand up to abuse, mockery, or tyranny against you and your family because of your faith. Be brave. Stay bold. Ask St. Philomena to pray with you that you, like her, would have the trust and courage not only to die for what you believe in but to truly live for it — and for Him — every day of your life.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Took a vow of consecrated virginity at 13
- Heroically stood firm in the faith at the face of death
- Survived multiple attempts on her life thanks to the miraculous aid of angels
- Her life (as revealed in private revelation) was documented by Venerable Mother Maria Luisa di Gesù



## **St. Pius X**

“I was born poor, I lived poor, I will die poor.”

**Born:** June 2, 1835

**Died:** August 20, 1914

**Feast Day:** August 21

**Patron of** the Archdiocese of Atlanta, GA

### **Background**

Do you know what it is like to clean up someone else's mess? Maybe you have had to share a room with a sibling or maybe you have worked as a busser in a restaurant. Maybe, just maybe, you have had to pick up trash as part of a punishment. Cleaning up your own mess is one thing but cleaning up the messes of others can be really, really annoying ... it is very likely St. Pius X did not feel the same way.

Born into a very poor family, Giuseppe Melchiorre Sarto (later Pope Pius X) was the second of ten children. His father worked as a cobbler and his mother as a seamstress. An extremely devout and hard-working man and priest, Giuseppe never sought to be pope; he only strived to be holy. He graduated high school at 15, demonstrating his commitment to working hard and his dedication to learning (and teaching others). While his family was unable to provide higher education for their son, his intelligence, kindness, and strong morals caught others' attention, earning him scholarships not only to college but also seminary. Giuseppe was ordained a priest in 1858 and spent all of his time teaching, studying, and tending to the needs of the poor. He was made a bishop in 1884 and became pope (less than 20 years later) in 1903.

Now as the Vicar for Christ on Earth, Pope Pius X walked into several “messes” he needed to clean up. Some were major and others hardly noticeable to the outsider, but the effects are felt still today. He inaugurated a new liturgical renewal, reemphasizing the importance of the Mass. He restored and encouraged the frequent reception of holy communion from childhood on. He waged war on modernism and its assaults against Church teaching and the moral good. He denounced heresies and encouraged greater devotion and study of Scripture. Never forgetting his roots as a priest, it is said that he frequently snuck out of the Vatican through garden passageways without any escorts or guards to visit and pray with the sick in local hospitals. Additionally, he continually sought ways to help the poor, sheltering refugees personally and at his own expense.

Pope Pius X was not afraid to do what had to be done. Many of his decisions unintentionally upset others but brought needed reform and renewal to the people of Christ and His Church. He took his studies seriously, and he took his prayer equally seriously. He sought ways to bless others over himself. He never wanted to be famous or “known,” and he never forgot his humble roots or love of being an “ordinary priest,” even after becoming pope.

If you struggle academically or with discipline in your prayer life, ask St. Pius X to pray with you. If you find yourself in a leadership position you never imagined or sought out, likewise, ask this great saint to intercede. God gives us these saints and their life stories as gifts to be emulated. When we call on their prayers, we not only honor these holy men and women but the God who called them to spiritual greatness.

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### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Humble priest, bishop, and pope
- Led the charge on numerous efforts to reform the Church for the better as pope
- Spoke out against various government actions that would eventually lead to WWI
- Often credited with developing the framework of catechism and adult education still practiced in parishes today

## **St. Raphael the Archangel**

“Praise God and give thanks to Him in the presence of all the living for what He has done for you. ... Do good, and evil will not overtake you.” (Tobit 12:6-7)

**Born:** N/A

**Died:** N/A

**Feast Day:** September 29

**Patron of** travelers, the blind, bodily ills, happy meetings, nurses, physicians, and medical workers

### **Background**

We live in culture in which more people can name the four teenage mutant ninja turtles than the three archangels listed in Scripture. We have already covered Sts. Gabriel and Michael; the third and final “known” archangel (by name, at least) is Raphael (whose name, in fairness, is also a mutant ninja turtle). What you may not know is that Raphael’s name truly means “God heals,” and for good reason.

Most of what we know about Raphael comes to us from the Book of Tobit, which is a scriptural book found only in Catholic Bibles (as it is one of the seven books “removed” during the Protestant Reformation). Not to spoil it for you if you have not read it yet, but in it, the Archangel Raphael is disguised as a human who is traveling with Tobit’s son, Tobiah. In the book, Raphael eventually reveals that he was sent by God to heal Tobit’s blindness and to deliver Tobiah’s future wife, Sarah, from a demon. Without ruining the ending, it is important to mention that Raphael — when revealing his true identity — says that he is one of the seven (archangels) who stand before the Lord (Tobit 12:15).

Thanks to Raphael, Tobit has a happier ending than originally anticipated and we are given a glimpse into the love and mercy of God the Father. There are a couple of other moments in Scripture (like John 5:1-4) when “an angel” moved through the waters, for instance, and stirred them up for healing. That angel, though unnamed specifically, is usually associated with and believed to be the Archangel Raphael.

Raphael’s purpose and very existence — like his counterparts Gabriel and Michael — give us tremendous insight into God’s heart. God wants to heal, restore, and elevate us to everlasting life. This is why He gives us angels and archangels ... *to help us live in and with Him for all eternity*. He does not abandon us to the demons or the world; He sends us angelic and divine gifts to guide us and protect us along the way!

Is there someone in your life who needs healing? Perhaps you are the one who needs some type of healing — even emotional or spiritual, not just from something physical. Invite St. Raphael to pray with you for whomever is in need of the Lord’s healing touch.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Appeared to Tobit in the Old Testament
- One of God’s three “archangels”
- Powerful intercessor for healing
- His name means “God heals”

## **St. Rita of Cascia**

“Let me, my Jesus share in thy suffering, at least of one of thy thorns.”

**Born:** 1381

**Died:** May 22, 1457

**Feast Day:** May 22

**Patron of** impossible cases, difficult marriages, parenthood, victims of abuse, infertility, sterility, and widows

### **Background**

Some saint stories almost seem made for a big-budget Hollywood film, utilizing the most state-of-the-art special effects to bring their miraculous feats and inexplicable lives “to life” on the big screen. Then, there are saints like St. Rita of Cascia, whose story seems more fitting for a heart-wrenching, tear-jerking television soap opera.

Rita was born to elderly parents in Cascia, Italy, late in the 14th century. At the age of 12, Rita was betrothed to marry a local gangster named Paolo who had an adulterous heart and a terrible temper. Rita obeyed her parents and, at 18, married him. Over the next 18 years, Rita bore twin sons — which brought her the only joy outside of God, as she was both neglected and abused by her drunken, constantly cheating husband. Eventually, Paolo was killed by some of his enemies. When the sons wanted to avenge their father’s death, it was their mother’s prayers that converted their hearts.

After both of her son’s deaths, Rita lived and worked within her religious community, serving all she encountered and working for peace in a violent region of Italy. Rita used to actually pray

to suffer as Christ did; so strong was her devotion to Christ's Passion that it is reported that while she was praying, Christ (in His mercy) consented to her request and sent a thorn from His crown flying across the room to be lodged in her forehead. It was noticeable to all, causing her chronic headaches, noticeable bleeding, and even a foul stench that no one could miss. This "blessing" went on for 15 years, allowing many to grow in their devotion to the Lord and in gratitude for His Passion. Undoubtedly, there has never been a holier headache in history.

It is said that, in her final days, a visitor from her hometown asked her if there was anything she wanted; Rita's last request was for a single rose to be brought to her from her family's estate. Though it was January and the request seen as impossible, the visitor arrived to find an otherwise barren and dead rose bush with one single rose in blossom. After her death, the foul stench that previously accompanied her wound became a beautiful odor — one that still permeates the convent in which she lived over 500 years ago.

Saint Rita reminds us to be careful about what you pray for and that God is faithful to the end ... and then some. Invite St. Rita into your prayer each and every time you begin to think that God is testing or trying you beyond what you can bear. Pray, too, that you can look upon the trials of life as gifts from the Lord (James 1:2) — signs that He believes you are faithful and wants you to grow in virtue, to help you become a saint.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Faithful despite intense physical suffering
- Deeply devoted to the Eucharist
- Her body remains incorrupt to this day

## **St. Rose of Lima**

“When we serve the poor and the sick we serve Jesus. We must not fail to help our neighbors, because in them we serve Jesus.”

**Born:** 1586

**Died:** 1618

**Feast Day:** August 23

**Patron of** Latin America, the Philippines, gardeners, florists, those who suffer ridicule for their piety, and people who suffer family problems

### **Background**

I always wanted a nickname growing up. I felt like my name was boring so, in grade school, I tried several times to give myself a cool nickname — it never stuck. I would try to get my friends to call me by a new name, but it just never caught on. I learned that a nickname had to be more “organic”; it could not be chosen, it just had to be “earned.” Some saints have nicknames that are well known, like St. Thérèse of Lisieux who is known as “The Little Flower” or St. Thomas Aquinas who was known as “The Dumb Ox.” Few Catholics know Isabel Flores de Olivia, but many have heard about her under her saintly “nickname,” St. Rose of Lima.

Isabel was many things — intelligent, holy, chaste, prayerful — but what drew the attention of many and brought her the nickname “Rose” was her immense physical beauty. In a world that worships beauty, Rose would have had more requests to follow on Instagram than any girl could keep up with. It has been said that St. Rose of Lima was second only to the Blessed Virgin Mary in her exquisite beauty and that she



holds the unofficial distinction as being the best-looking saint in the entire communion of saints. Regardless of her physical beauty, one thing is for certain: Rose's internal beauty was even more ravishing.

Born in Lima, Peru in 1586, there was something different about Rose. She pursued God with a deep and fervent passion. She prayed, fasted, and went to Mass and Adoration, daily. She served the poor, took a vow of chastity, and sought to become a nun. Her daily penances for others were so severe that she actually suffered — voluntarily and joyfully — offering her unseen sacrifices to God for the sins of others. As she moved into her teen years, her immense beauty began to attract a lot of potential husbands. Clashing with her parents, who wanted to marry her off, Rose would rub pepper all over her face to make it blister and cut her hair short in the hope of lessening her exterior beauty and deterring would be suitors. Finally, her parents relented and Rose was able to pursue a life of prayer and privacy.

At age 20, she joined the Third Order of St. Dominic and became even more dedicated to prayer, penance, and fasting. As another act of penance, Rose wore a heavy silver crown of thorns with spikes that pierced her flesh, in an effort to share in Christ's sufferings just a little bit. Over time her health steadily declined, and Rose died in 1617 at the age of 31. She is a national "hero" in Peru and is celebrated with great admiration over 400 years after her death.

Rose of Lima endured great sufferings in her lifetime, some self-imposed and some due to physical health issues and cultural expectations. Though many would regard immense physical beauty as a great blessing, Rose was always worried about taking others' attention away from God. So deep was her devotion to the Lord that she actively sought ways to "decrease" so His name, glory, and presence might "increase" in others' estimation.

Would that have been your attitude? If others were to shower you with attention for your looks or talents or achievements, would you just want to soak up that praise or is your natural response to redirect it to the God who granted you the gifts that brought such attention? If you struggle with the need for affirmation or attention or know someone who does, perhaps ask St. Rose of Lima to pray with you, that you would grow in humility, simplicity, and virtue. Pray that you — and all those you know — would find their affirmation and validation not in “likes,” comments, or followers but in God, alone.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Known for her immense beauty
- Extremely dedicated to prayer and penance
- Joined the Third Order of St. Dominic at the age of 20
- Celebrated in Peru as a national hero

## **St. Rose of Viterbo**

“Live so as not to fear death. For those who live well in the world, death is not frightening, but sweet and precious.”

**Born:** 1235

**Died:** March 6, 1252

**Feast Day:** September 4

**Patron of** florists, flower growers, Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, and people in exile

### **Background**

As you have no doubt realized by now, some of the stories in this book are insane. I am constantly floored by how holy these men and women were and find myself both humbled and inspired by their stories. That being said, there are some stories you hear that really make you just stop and say, “WhaaaaaatTTTTT!?” Saint Rose of Viterbo is one of those stories.

Born in the town of Viterbo in the 13th century, Rose lived during a tumultuous time in the Church. Viterbo belonged to the Papal States (Rome had a large territory of land and towns that fell under its “jurisdiction” and ownership). The problem was that the people there had revolted against the Church and pope, desiring less accountability and a more sin-filled lifestyle. Moral degradation had swept through the town and “religion” had become a dirty word. It is in the darkest and most sinful cultures, however, that the Lord raises up the most amazing saints.

It is said that Rose was trying to pronounce the names of Jesus and Mary before she could even speak. The minute she could walk and communicate, she asked to be taken to church to pray and be with the Lord. Rose was just three years old when her

aunt died. At the funeral, Rose approached the bier (a wooden platform the body was placed on in lieu of a coffin) and prayed silently. She then placed her tiny hand on the corpse and called her aunt by name. Witnesses watched as the deceased aunt came back to life and embraced her niece.

Later, at the age of nine, she had a vision of Jesus where she touched His wounds and experienced His suffering. It affected her so deeply that she began to preach about His sufferings and call everyone — especially the adults of Viterbo — to repentance. So powerful was her preaching that throngs of people came to listen to her and most converted back to the Lord and His Church.

Rose was fearless, persistent, and courageous. She wanted everyone to know the love and mercy of God and did not care what struggle the devil threw her way. Drawing strength from an intense and devoted prayer life, Rose saw every obstacle as an opportunity for the Lord's power to shine forth and His glory to be recognized.

You may be afraid to share your faith, thinking that you are “only a teen” or that “adults would never listen to me.” You would be mistaken. Holiness transcends age and cultural barriers, as St. Rose of Viterbo teaches us. If you are afraid of confrontation about the faith or worry about how others will respond if you are more outward about your beliefs, ask St. Rose of Viterbo to pray for you, that you, like her, can not only withstand the fires that come your way but conquer them by the grace and power of God.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Pious and prayerful from a very young age
- Brave in the face of evil
- Countless miracles are attested to her life and prayers

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## St. Sebastian

**Born:** Unknown

**Died:** A.D. 288

**Feast Day:** January 20

**Patron of** soldiers, athletes, and those who desire a saintly death

### Background

Every good story needs both a hero and a villain, but some of the best stories have a hero *disguised* as a villain — a sort of “undercover agent” or spy, if you will. The tension mounts and the drama unfolds as you watch someone navigate a double life, risking it all from one moment to the next, trying to avoid discovery while keeping their secret identity and true intentions veiled in secret. Saint Sebastian’s story unfolded in this way.

We do not actually know much about Sebastian’s early years, but it is believed that he enlisted in the Roman army when he was a teen (around A.D. 283). Working under the guise of loyalty to the ruthless, murder-of-Christians Emperor Diocletian, Sebastian’s true purpose was to try to help the Christians being persecuted by Roman soldiers and the government. Acting as a “double agent,” Sebastian would regularly minister to prisoners, attempting to secure their release and helping those who had been tortured to heal. The heroic saint eventually worked his way all the way up the Roman ladder to become one of Diocletian’s personal guards.

After Sebastian successfully converted the Roman governor, Chromatius, the leader resigned his position and went on to free 16 Christian prisoners. As news got out, Emperor

Diocletian ordered his “trusted” guard, Sebastian, to be tied to a stake in a field and used as target practice for his royal archers. Sebastian was struck repeatedly with arrows and left for dead. Soon after, St. Irene of Rome found him barely alive, hid him, and nursed him back to health.

Now, this is where the story gets really epic. One would think that Sebastian, after narrowly surviving death and having his cover blown, would just retreat into hiding or move to another country to evangelize. Nope, he was not done yet. Desiring even the evil emperor’s conversion, a healthy Sebastian marched straight up to Diocletian, publicly reprimanded him for his treatment of Christians, shared the Gospel, and challenged him to abandon his paganism and worship the one, true God. Diocletian became so enraged that he ordered Sebastian to be martyred again. The great “spy” saint was then clubbed to death by multiple soldiers and his body was thrown into the sewer, where it was later fished out by a Christian woman and properly buried in the Roman catacombs.

Is there anyone in your life who you have “given up on” or are intimidated by when it comes to sharing your faith? If so, ask St. Sebastian to pray with you, inviting his intercession to help soften the hearts of others in your life. Pray that you, like he, would be so filled with zeal and passion that you would have the courage to share the Gospel constantly, even with — and especially to — those souls who most need but least want to hear it. God may just want to use you as an arrow of truth that will finally pierce their heart.

#### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Worked for the Roman army
- Secretly ministered to soldiers and prisoners
- Fought courageously for persecuted Christian
- Died a martyr for the faith

## St. Tarcisius

“Oh, dear Jesus, how I love you. How good you are to choose me as your little messenger. How willingly I would suffer and die for you, like these good people in prison. Perhaps one day you will let me lay down my life for you too.”

**Born:** A.D. 263

**Died:** A.D. 275

**Feast Day:** August 15

**Patron of** first communicants

### Background

When you think of the most dangerous jobs in the world, what comes to mind? Perhaps you envision a soldier or first-responder. Maybe you imagine a lion tamer or shark hunter. If you were to list the “Top 50 Most Dangerous Jobs,” however, it is highly unlikely that altar server would make the cut ... but that is only because you have not heard the story of St. Tarcisius. Born during the horrific Roman persecutions in the third century, Tarcisius was a 12-year-old acolyte (a big word for altar server) who heroically died a martyr’s death before becoming a teen.

In those days, Christians had to gather for Mass in secret, fearing for their lives under the threat of torture and death if discovered. Meeting secretly in underground burial chambers (called “catacombs”), Christians would risk anything to come together for “illegal” Masses. After Communion, a deacon would hide the Eucharist within his garments, taking the Lord’s true presence to Christians who were imprisoned and condemned to die. One Sunday when there was no deacon

to send, young Tarcisius was asked to bring the Eucharist to the prisoners.

As Tarcisius was on his way, he ran into a “gang” of boys his age who asked him to join their game. He declined, saying he was in a hurry, when a couple of them noticed Tarcisius firmly holding and hiding something. When they pressed him to know what it was, he refused to show them the Eucharist (knowing they were not Christian and might disrespect the Lord). The gang of boys turned violent and beat Tarcisius severely until they were chased off by a fellow Christian who happened to be walking by. Tarcisius successfully protected the Blessed Sacrament but died shortly thereafter. His body was buried in the cemetery of St. Callistus in Rome and his relics can be seen, still today, at a church in Rome.

How deep is your love and reverence for the Eucharist? If you were sitting in an adoration chapel, for instance, and someone came in seeking to steal, vandalize, or do harm to the Blessed Sacrament, would you be willing to give your life to defend Christ's true presence? Do you believe in Jesus' presence in what looks like mere bread and wine (but is actually His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity) enough to sacrifice your life to protect His true and glorified presence?

Invite St. Tarcisius to pray with you for an ever-deepening love and appreciation for this most Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist. By his intercession, may your heart and eyes be opened to new levels of the mystery of the Eucharist, and may your life be centered even more around the love being continually poured out upon that altar.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Deeply devoted to Christ and the Eucharist from a young age
- Courageously protected the Blessed Sacrament while being attacked by boys his age



## **St. Teresa of the Andes**

“The more we love, the more we need sacrifice and the more we ardently desire it.”

**Born:** July 13, 1900

**Died:** April 12, 1920

**Feast Day:** April 12

**Patron of** sick people, the youth, against bodily ills, and against illness

### **Background**

What do Batman, Han Solo, and St. John Paul II have in common? At different ages of my life, I called each one of them “my hero.” Obviously, only one of those figures was worthy of deep and long-lasting admiration (no offense to Han and, let’s be honest, Marvel is way better than DC, Batman). When I discovered the writings and words of (then) Pope John Paul II, my life was changed forever. I imagine that is how St. Teresa of the Andes felt as a teen when the writings of a saint — St. Thérèse of Lisieux — changed her life forever.

Saint Teresa of the Andes was actually given the name Juanita, when she was born to a wealthy, Catholic family in Santiago, Chile. How wealthy you ask? Well, they had a private chapel on their family property and Juanita was able to attend Mass each day from a very young age. Juanita’s favorite pastime was reading the biographies of saints and at 14, she came across a little (not yet famous) work entitled, “The Story of a Soul.” The book — an autobiography about a famous little Carmelite nun, St. Thérèse of Lisieux — had a profound effect on young Juanita.

At the time, the 14-year-old immersed herself in prayer, taught religion to children at her parish, and served the poor in her free time. As a teen, she sold her family's belongings and almost everything she owned, giving that money to those who were less fortunate. Juanita was a picture of virtue whose dream was to join the Carmelite Sisters at their convent in the Andes. At the age of 19, she joined the convent and took a new name, Sr. Teresa of Jesus (after her hero). She had never been happier and was really thriving in the convent when she developed an infection and grew quite ill. She died soon after and, though only 20 years old, had a huge funeral that was attended by a large number of people whom the family had never even met but whose lives Teresa had touched through her service of the poor. Teresa was canonized in 1993 and holds the honorable distinction as the first (of only two) saints from Chile.

Teresa was passionate, relentless, and compassionate. She woke up with a mission and purpose every day of her young life. Through her study and devotion to St. Thérèse, Teresa learned the power of prayer, simplicity, and selfless, merciful love. Her willingness to let go of her family's earthly wealth demonstrates an incredible example of trust and abandonment to God's providence. Her interest in and devotion to the lives of the saints, likewise, reveals a self-awareness and pursuit of virtue that was well beyond her years and would humble most adults.

Consider your heroes. Who do you look up to and why? If you are "lacking" in solid role models of the faith, ask St. Teresa of the Andes to pray with you, that the Lord would send you stories (like He did for Teresa) or people to inspire and walk with you. If you are looking for more ways to grow in your love for others or are enduring personal suffering, ask this amazing young saint to kneel beside you and pray for you. She accomplished so much in such a short time on Earth ... imagine what that passionate efficiency can do for you from heaven!

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Deeply devoted to the Mass and learning about the lives of the saint
- Gave up a life of wealth to take a vow of poverty and serve the Lord as a Carmelite sister
- Her writings can be found in the compilation, "Letters of Saint Teresa of Jesus of the Andes"

## St. Teresa of Avila

“Whoever has God lacks nothing: God alone is enough.”

**Born:** March 28, 1515

**Died:** October 4, 1582

**Feast Day:** October 15

**Patron of** headache sufferers and Spanish Catholic writers

### Background

If you heard a teen guy describing a girl as “witty and beautiful, intelligent and charming, funny and deep,” you might assume he was talking about his dream girl, but he could have easily been describing young St. Teresa of Avila. Born in Spain in 1515, Teresa entered a world that was battling between seeking God and seeking only the comforts that came with “seeking” God. In fact, St. Teresa’s own life reflected this tension.

Teresa developed a love for clothes, perfume, and boys. She cared about fashion and flirting far more than her overprotective father was comfortable with or willing to allow. He became so enraged by his wild child’s antics that he sent Teresa to live in a Carmelite convent when she turned 16.

While living in the convent, Teresa continued to struggle with the same battle and eventually, contracted malaria, which later led to three years of paralysis. Her physical suffering became unbearable. She struggled with prayer, blaming her sickness on her own sinfulness, and proclaimed that she did not deserve God’s love or mercy.

Finally, at the age of 41, a priest convinced Teresa to really start praying again. Teresa prayed, and boy, did God listen (as

He promises us in Jeremiah 29:12). Teresa began receiving visions and gifts from God in prayer, often finding herself in a state of ecstasy and levitating. The visions frequently caused her intense mental and physical distress.

The spiritual gifts far outweighed her physical pains, though, bringing Teresa peace, encouragement, and a clear goal. Unlike Martin Luther who tried to reform the Church from the outside, Teresa would obediently and humbly work for change from within the Church. The pursuit of holiness became the goal of Teresa's life and writings, so she founded a new convent for Carmelite sisters that was devoted to a life of poverty and intense prayer. Teresa founded 17 convents before her death, and both nuns and priests were (and still are) inspired by her holy example of simplicity and prayerfulness.

Whenever you find yourself caught in the tug-of-war between heaven and Earth, ask St. Teresa of Avila to pray with you. Over time, she learned what it meant to be in the world but not of it. If you ever doubt whether God is listening to your prayers or, in your sufferings, fear that God may be punishing you for all of the sins you have committed, ask St. Teresa of Avila to take you by the hand and walk you to the cross. Her intercession will help remind you that, no matter how difficult or painful your life may become at times, the Lord's mercy is always greater than your sin.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Experienced visions of Christ and was able to levitate
- Founded 17 convents
- Her body is believed to be incorrupt
- Her most well-known writings are "Interior Castle" and "The Way of Perfection"
- Declared a "Doctor of the Church," an honor bestowed on only 36 saints (to date)

## **St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross**

“One cannot desire freedom from the cross when one is especially chosen for the cross.”

**Born:** October 12, 1891

**Died:** August 9, 1942

**Feast Day:** August 9

**Patron of** Europe, the loss of parents, martyrs, and World Youth Day

### **Background**

Sometimes, as you get into your faith, people will tell you that “you have changed.” Maybe it is at a Life Night with your youth group or a weekend retreat as you begin to open your heart to God in new ways. If a friend or family member says, “you have changed,” it normally sounds like an insult rather than a compliment — choose to take it as the latter. When a new life (in Christ) begins to overshadow and recreate an old life (in self), heaven applauds. This is a fact that St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross knew all too well.

Born in Germany in 1891 — long before she was a saint or Carmelite nun ... or even Catholic — St. Teresa Benedicta was Edith Stein, a brilliant young Jewish girl from a successful family. During her childhood and preteen years, Edith abandoned her Jewish faith and began studying philosophy. She graduated with the highest honors, became a nurse during World War I, and earned her Ph.D. all before the age of 30. Interestingly, it was another Teresa — St. Teresa of Avila — whose story profoundly touched Edith in her young adult years. In the brilliant mind and sacrificial life of the saint from Avila, Edith found a place where

her incredible intellect (reason) and wandering desire to worship (faith) met and completed one another.

In 1922, against her mother's wishes, Edith was baptized Catholic. She went on to teach at a university level, lecturing on everything from philosophy and theology to women's issues. In 1933, the Nazis rose to power and Edith's Jewish roots quickly ended her teaching career. She entered the convent a year later and took the name Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Her new vocation was to pray for and serve the Jewish people, most specifically those around her who were in danger.

Teresa Benedicta worked tirelessly to hide, help, and save lives. Several years later, Teresa, her sister Rosa (who also converted to Catholicism), and most of Teresa's religious community were arrested by the Nazis. Sent to the now infamous Auschwitz concentration camp, Teresa died at the hands of the Nazis on August 9, 1942. She was canonized by St. John Paul II in 1998.

Teresa understood, firsthand, the horrors and evils of man. She experienced the realities of suffering in the Nazi concentration camps, but she never allowed her personal sufferings to overtake or overshadow the sufferings of her fellow prisoners, who she truly saw as her brothers and sisters. If you are suffering, trust that God knows and is with you, and then invite St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross to pray with you for a greater perspective, an ability to see the crosses and sufferings of those around you. Ask the Lord to grant you wisdom and insight into how you can help others carry and bear their crosses and sufferings. Do that and you will have carried on the mission of love that St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross carried out so beautifully in the most horrible place on Earth.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Convert to the Catholic faith
- Earned her Ph.D. by age 30
- Heroically and tirelessly worked to save the lives of Jewish people who were hiding from the Nazi's during WWII
- Died at Auschwitz concentration camp in 1942
- Her most notable writings are "The Science of the Cross" and "Edith Stein: Essential Writings"



## St. Thérèse of Lisieux

“Miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there by a kindly word; always doing the smallest right and doing it all for love.”

**Born:** January 2, 1873

**Died:** September 30, 1897

**Feast Day:** October 1

**Patron of** missions, tuberculosis, France, and florists

### Background

When I was young, I wanted to be famous. I would look at movie stars, musicians, and athletes and think of how cool it would be to have adoring fans, tons of money, and be “known” everywhere you went. The Lord allowed me to meet several famous people over the years and I saw — up close — what their lives were really like. I was wrong. Being famous like that would be insanely hard. No privacy, intense pressure, and people pulling on you every minute of the day is not a life to be envied. In fact, we should probably pray against the desire for fame. That being said, sometimes fame finds those who least desire it, as is the case of this next saint. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux is as close to a “rock star” saint as you are going to find but, ironically, that is the last way she would have wanted to be seen.

Born in France in 1873 to a devout Catholic family, Thérèse was one of six girls. Losing her mother to breast cancer at only four years old, Thérèse looked to the Blessed Virgin Mary for motherhood at a very young age. She was mocked at school and eventually left to be home-schooled by her older sister. Her sister then left for the convent and Thérèse felt like she had lost her “second mother,” but the Virgin Mary’s

intercession was already at work. At age 15, Thérèse sought to enter the convent, too, but she was denied because of her young age. This is where we see how strong-willed young Thérèse was.

After being denied entry into the convent, Thérèse traveled to the Vatican and personally petitioned Pope Leo XIII for permission to enter the order. The pope encouraged her to be obedient and trust God's plan, and not long after she was allowed join the order (and two of her sisters who were already there). The convent was in Lisieux, France. Life in the convent was not perfect. It was cold and the days were long. There was infighting between some sisters and, even, gossip. There was also a negativity toward Thérèse from some who considered her "spoiled," "entitled," and "immature." Rather than retaliate with anger or gossip, Thérèse's strategy or "little way" was to love them even more. Her belief was that it was not big speeches or grand gestures but simple acts of love that would turn a heart ... and she was right. Though younger, she became an example to all in her community. As she grew older, her health worsened. Now bedridden, her superiors begged her to write down her spiritual insights so others could learn from her "little way." At age 24, Thérèse succumbed to tuberculosis and went home to heaven, unknown to most in the world. After her death, her words began to be read and circulated and, eventually, became a spiritual classic. She was canonized in 1925, only 26 years after her death.

Thérèse was not known by many while she was alive. Her "fame" came long after her death (which she would have considered a blessing). She did not get to travel the world (as she had hoped) to serve Christ. Instead, she stayed close to home, in obscurity and anonymity at a convent. She did not do interviews, post vlogs, or intend to write a best-seller (though, in time, she did). Rather, she simply looked for a "little way" to love like God. Thérèse reminds us that what

Earth often seeks (fame) is not what heaven desires (holiness). In fact, heaven applauds what Earth rarely sees. She taught us what it looks like to love and serve God in “un-famous, unglamorous” ways, daily.

Today, I invite you to ask St. Thérèse of Lisieux to pray with and for you, that God would reveal to you how you can love Him and the people in your life more simply. What little things can you do to serve your family, your circle of friends, and, even, your “enemies”? Do not look to be seen or thanked; simply serve out of love for God. You may never achieve earthly fame, but your name will be known, written, and celebrated in heaven.

#### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Joined the convent at 15
- Is known for her “little way,” offering her life to Jesus in the simplicity and suffering of the everyday
- Her most famous writings include “Story of a Soul,” “Letters of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, volumes 1 and 2,” “The Poetry of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux,” and “The Prayers of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux”
- Declared a “Doctor of the Church,” an honor bestowed on only 36 saints (to date)

## St. Thomas Aquinas

“Lord, nothing but yourself.”

**Born:** 1226

**Died:** 1274

**Feast Day:** January 28

**Patron of** students and universities

### Background

Do your friends find you a little “quirky,” either for the way you dress or the way you act? Do you have your own way of doing things that differs from others? Do you ever see the world a little differently than those around you? If so, you might become one of the most important saints in the history of the Church, as you will see in this story.

Thomas Aquinas was “different” in many ways. His classmates made fun of his big, bulky frame and quiet demeanor, giving him the nickname “the dumb ox.” He was in his head a lot and did not see things like other people did, but when he embraced all that made him different in the eyes of others, Earth began to see what heaven had created in him.

Born to a wealthy Italian family in the early 13th century, Thomas’ journey toward the priesthood and sainthood took some unexpected turns. Thomas was fascinated with philosophy as a young man and read everything he could get his hands on. He sought out mentors who had deep intellect and the finest education. When he met a preacher from a “new order” called the Dominicans, Thomas desired to join the order, but his family attempted to block the decision. They were so opposed to Thomas’ religious pursuits that, at one

point, Thomas was basically held prisoner in the family castle for over a year, unable to leave and, definitely, forbidden to travel. Thomas eventually "escaped" the family home and went on to Naples, then Rome, and then Paris to enter the Dominicans and continue studying and writing. And write, he did, prolifically. He earned his master's degree, taught at a university level, and did I mention that he wrote ... a lot?

He continued to write, teach, and take on more responsibilities in his 30s. He was even summoned to Rome to serve as the papal theologian before the age of 40. He wrote his most famous work, the "Summa Theologiae," and began a university in Naples before he turned 50. In 1274, while traveling to Rome to present his latest work(s) to the pope, he was injured, became ill, and eventually died. Thomas Aquinas' works and writings not only influenced the Church but have changed the world. His thoughts and insights remain fresh to this day. Few would have believed that young Thomas would have ascended to such great heights back in his teen years, but God knew otherwise.

Have you stopped and really prayed about what God designed you for and all He desires you to be? Do you think about your unique gifts and talents and pray about ways to put them to use *for God*? In times of loneliness, do you seek affirmation and attention or, like St. Thomas Aquinas, do you seek God's validation and glory?

Ask this great (big) saint to pray with you. May you, like St. Thomas Aquinas, come to realize your mission here on Earth, the presence of God within you, and the power of truth in a society and culture that often seeks to deny it. Ask the "dumb ox" to intercede for you, that the power of the Holy Spirit would be unleashed in you and that you, too, would change the world through the life you lead.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Deeply intellectual, taking a particular interest in philosophy and logic
- Maintained a devout prayer life
- One of the most prolific writers of the early Church
- His most famous writings include "Summa Theologiae," "Summa Contra Gentiles," and "Metaphysica"
- Declared a "Doctor of the Church," an honor bestowed on only 36 saints (to date)

## St. Thomas the Doubter

“My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28)

**Born:** Unknown

**Died:** A.D. 72

**Feast Day:** July 3

**Patron of** architects

### Background

I have a habit of speaking before I think, and it oftentimes gets me into trouble. There have been countless times in my life when I have reacted to a situation impulsively, only to pay the price later on — having to apologize, grovel, or eat a big, stinkin’ piece of humble pie. I wonder if that is how it was for St. Thomas in the years following Jesus’ Resurrection. Poor St. Thomas, who is most famous for his *one moment* of doubt, is perhaps the unluckiest saint when it came to being in the wrong place at the wrong time. He missed “one staff meeting” and look what it gets him ... 2,000 years of people calling him “the doubter.” Before we move forward, though, we need to take a step back.

Thomas was a Jew by birth and one of the original disciples who Christ called to be apostles. Though his words are not recorded much in the Gospels, the times he does speak reveal Thomas to be a passionate, devoted follower of the Lord. When the Lord may be in harm’s way — traveling to see Lazarus with public opinion growing increasingly negative — it is Thomas who calls out all of the other apostles, saying they must accompany Jesus. It was Thomas who sought clarity and understanding about the future during the Last Supper discourse. He was a true follower of Jesus and wanted —

more than anything — to remain near to Him and understand where they were (all) headed.

Fast forward to when Christ first appears to the apostles who are locked away in fear — Thomas is conspicuously absent. When he (later) hears that Jesus had appeared to them, he is in disbelief. In a moment of doubt — that such great news could really be true — Thomas blurts out that he would only believe if he sees Jesus with his own eyes and touches Christ's wounds with his own hands (see John 20:24-29). This was the biblical version of “a pic or it didn't happen.”

It is on the Sunday that follows Easter (which we now call Divine Mercy Sunday) that the Lord appears again and dispels all doubt from His passionate follower, Thomas. In this scene, we see a great proclamation of faith in God with his admonition, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). What often gets glossed over in this story, however, is that even though Thomas was not there to see Christ the first time, *he still stayed with the apostles*. He did not abandon the Church over a lack of proof. Thomas had faith and was patient as Jesus' plan unfolded.

Scripture does not tell us how Thomas died but tradition tells us that he took the Gospel to the Parthians, Medes, and Persians before heading further east, eventually landing in India. It is said that he converted thousands (including many Hindus) before his untimely death. Some say he was “accidentally” shot by a hunter, others that he was martyred by Hindu priests who were jealous of the many converts he had made in their home country. Regardless, his bones were buried in Mylapore, India inside a basilica that bears his name.

Do you have the faith to remain in and with the Church, even if there are some teachings you struggle with or find difficult to believe at first? Will you be like Thomas who will remain part



of the community until such time as Jesus reveals Himself to you as “the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6)?

If you struggle with doubt — doubts about God’s existence, the Church’s authority, or even your own goodness and beauty in God’s eyes — ask St. Thomas to pray with you. Thomas was not the only apostle to doubt (see Matthew 28:17) and he certainly is not the only saint to do so. Your doubts do not make you bad or “un-holy”; your doubts merely make you human. Lean into the Lord and, through prayer, trust that by this great saint’s intercession you, too, will fall to your knees in certainty before the Lord, with full confidence that He is real, that He is mercy, and that He loves you.

#### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- One of Jesus’ Twelve Apostles
- Passionate and devoted follower of Christ
- Missionary and evangelist

## St. Thomas More

"You wouldn't abandon ship in a storm just because you couldn't control the winds."

**Born:** 1478

**Died:** 1535

**Feast Day:** June 22

**Patron of** attorneys, civil servants, politicians, and difficult marriages

### Background

The truth hurts, but part of truly loving someone is sharing the truth with them. Remaining silent out of fear is not love, it is cowardice. It is with this in mind that we turn our attention to one of the most courageous and convicted "convict" saints of all time, St. Thomas More. Yes, Thomas More was a convict but for all of the right reasons.

Born in England in the late 15th century, Thomas began his formal education before the age of six and later went on to attend Oxford University, where he was likened to a genius for his strong command of math and science but also of languages (ancient and modern), art, and music. He was a true "renaissance man" who could understand and do almost anything. He prayed about religious life during his teen and college years, but he eventually married and had four children. In 1504, at the age of 26, Thomas (now a lawyer) was elected to England's Parliament. Not long after, his wife died during childbirth. Heartbroken but faithful, Thomas would eventually remarry a widow and live happily for many more years.

Personal sufferings aside, Thomas' professional career was going well, as he had become a close advisor to King Henry VIII. The king valued, respected, and trusted Thomas' intelligence, integrity, and wisdom. All that changed when King Henry decided that he wanted to divorce his wife, Catherine of Aragon, and marry Anne Boleyn. To do so would require an annulment from the Catholic Church, indicating that his first marriage was not valid. With no grounds to prove it as such, Pope Clement VI denied the annulment, sending King Henry into a rage. Thomas More, loyal to the Church and to truth, resigned his post, refusing to support the king's decision.

Two years later, King Henry — under threat of treason — began to force every Catholic leader in England to either affirm his relationship as valid or suffer the consequence. Thomas refused to do so. He was imprisoned in the Tower of London for over a year. After multiple refusals to swear a false oath, Thomas was indicted, given an unfair trial, and sentenced to death. Pope Pius XI canonized Thomas More in 1935.

Thomas More refused to deny truth or violate his own conscience. He stands as a historic and shining example of a principled Catholic who refused to turn his back on his faith or Church. Ask yourself if you would be willing to go that far to defend the truth and then ask St. Thomas More to pray with you for courage in the face of adversity, especially when those around you challenge your beliefs.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Attended Oxford, where he was considered a genius
- Worked as a lawyer and advisor for King Henry VIII
- Heroically defended the Church's teaching on the sanctity of marriage

## St. Timothy

**Born:** A.D. 17

**Died:** A.D. 97

**Feast Day:** January 26

**Patron of** stomach and intestinal disorders

### Background

When people ask you, "What are you going to be when you grow up?" how do you respond? Oftentimes when we think about our future job, we try to envision ourselves in settings we think would make us happy. At the same time, we try to eliminate certain jobs based on things we dislike. Some people pick jobs for the power, others for the hours, and many for the money. Some people just take whatever they can get and wait until something better comes along, as there are bills to pay and food to buy. A job is a job, right? Well, yes and no.

Timothy was the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father (Acts 16:1) and must have learned about the faith and Hebrew Scriptures from his mother, Lois, and grandmother, Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5). He was apparently a very well-respected young man in his community — the leaders there spoke so highly of him that St. Paul invited Timothy along on his missionary work (Acts 16:1-2).

The rest of what we know about Timothy, we learn from St. Paul's letters (called "epistles"). Timothy traveled with Paul to learn, preach, and teach the Gospel. In addition to other travels, Timothy remained with Paul during his imprisonment in Rome and, eventually, became a leader in Ephesus to deal with problems that were erupting there (2 Timothy 1:4). When

reading Paul's letters to Timothy, the love and friendship the two great evangelists shared is apparent. Paul respected Timothy very much and spoke highly of him (Philippians 2:19-22).

When he was younger, Timothy probably had different plans for his life, as no young boy's dream is to be chased out of towns, mocked, and eventually martyred for the faith. At the same time, Timothy also knew a deeper joy that many never experience: the joy of knowing Jesus intimately, sharing in His life and grace on a daily basis. Timothy saw the world, witnessed miracles, and humbly spoke with authority and power as he served Jesus and His Church. Through Timothy's "yes," countless souls came to know God and were saved.

Are you willing to do what God calls you to do and go where God calls you to go? Are you willing to be uncomfortable or suffer for your faith? You are a one-of-a-kind masterpiece, designed to reflect the light of Christ to all those you encounter. Do you glorify Him and reflect His light to the world?

God believes in you so strongly that He does not leave you alone. Whether in your home, parish, or school, ask St. Timothy to pray with you, that God would send people to offer you good examples of Christian friendship as Timothy had in Paul.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Mentored by and traveled with St. Paul, preaching and teaching the Gospel
- Deeply and humbly devoted to Christ
- Risked his life and livelihood to spread the Gospel to the earliest Christians
- The epistles of Paul to Timothy are found in the New Testament

## St. Valentine

**Born:** Unknown

**Died:** A.D. 269

**Feast Day:** February 14

**Patron of** love, the youth, and happy marriages

### Background

"The Bachelor" searches for it. Saint John wrote about it. Music artists sing about it. Shakespeare penned stories about it. And every year Hallmark, flower shops, and chocolate makers invoke a Catholic feast day to charge a fortune for overpriced cards, roses, and candy. Oh, what would the real St. Valentine think of February 14, the day of his martyrdom?

Valentine, the (now) patron of love, lived in the third century. To be honest, Valentine is another one of those early saints whose life is a combination of testimony, tradition, popularity, and legend. It can be hard to sort through which facts are absolutely true, which is why the Catholic Church recognizes him as a saint but does not "officially" celebrate him on the Roman calendar anymore. That being said, what is attributed to Valentine is worthy of admiration and honor.

Another one born during a time of intense persecution against the Catholic Church, Valentine grew to become a priest and bishop. As the story goes, one day he was arguing with a well-educated though pagan judge named Asterius. Valentine gave an impassioned testimony about the reality of Jesus but Asterius would not open his mind or heart. The judge then brought his blind daughter before Valentine and was told that if he could restore her sight, the father would do anything

Valentine asked. Valentine prayed and the girl's vision was restored.

At Valentine's request, Asterius fasted for three days, smashed all of the idols to false gods in his home, and, along with over 40 members of his household, was baptized right then by the bishop. Later, Valentine was accused of and imprisoned for secretly marrying Christian couples (in part where the association with love and romance comes from) and aiding Christians who were being persecuted, both of which violated Roman law. Valentine was told to renounce his faith in Christ and pledge his allegiance to the false gods of Rome, but he vehemently refused as he was emphatically and unapologetically a Christian. He was brought before the Roman emperor, whom he also tried to convert. Enraged, the emperor commanded Valentine to be put to death.

The great saint of love — on the day of "love," February 14 — was beaten with clubs and beheaded a martyr (reminding even those who spend Valentine's Day alone that it could be much, much worse). Although details regarding his life vary, archaeologists unearthed a catacomb in Rome with his name emblazoned upon it. Additionally, relics of St. Valentine can be found all over the world.

Saint Valentine is a standing example of what true love is and requires. Far more than the romantic gestures associated with his feast (holi)day, St. Valentine reminds us that true love requires sacrifice. If someone says they love you but is unwilling to sacrifice for you, it is not love. Whether you are in a happy, holy relationship or are currently unattached, whether you are called to marriage, the priesthood, or the single, consecrated life, ask St. Valentine to pray with you, that you patiently pursue the vocation God has designed for you. Pray, too, not to give in to the world's false sense and narrative as to what love is. If you want to see true love, "love

in its most radical form” as Pope Benedict XVI once said, look to the cross. As the Lord proved on Good Friday and St. Valentine bled for on what is now Valentine’s Day, love is sacrificial.

### **Notable Moments/Achievement**

- Miraculously restored (through his prayers) the sight of a judge’s daughter
- Risked his life to administer the sacraments in a time of Christian persecution
- Presided over the weddings of numerous Christians in secret
- Refused to renounce his faith in the face of death



## St. Vincent de Paul

“Go to the poor: you will find God.”

**Born:** 1581

**Died:** 1660

**Feast Day:** September 27

**Patron of** charities, horses, hospitals, leprosy, prisoners, spiritual help, St. Vincent de Paul Societies, and volunteers

### Background

This great saint and lover of the poor began very poor, born in 1581 to a peasant family in France. Educated by the Franciscans, Vincent developed a love for God and the poor from a very young age. He was quite intelligent and soon earned enough money tutoring kids to put himself through school. He was ordained a priest at the age of 19 and a few years later, while traveling at sea, his ship was hijacked; Vincent was captured and sold as a slave. After two long years of slavery, Vincent and a friend escaped and made their way back to France, where Vincent became a pastor, spiritual director, teacher, tutor, and chaplain in charge of dispensing money to the poor.

Apparently not busy enough, Vincent also went on to establish hospitals, write extensively, call out and reform clergy who lacked proper theology, found an institute for lay women (the Ladies of Charity), found an institute for priests (Congregation of the Mission), preach missions, and oversee more than 50 seminaries. He did all of this without forgetting his primary role and love: to serve the poorest of the poor. In fact, the primary mission of the institutes he founded was serving the poor.

Vincent died at age 80 and left an incredible legacy that still serves the poor today. In addition to the centers that bear his name, there are currently over 18,000 Daughters of Charity who serve in nearly 100 countries. Additionally, the priestly institute he formed has over 4,000 members in roughly 85 countries. It is said that Vincent wrote over 30,000 letters in his lifetime, 7,000 of which have been located and collected. Multiple collections of these letters are visible and readable today.

Vincent did not set out to become a saint; rather, he sought to serve God and help others. The more he served, the more opportunities to serve were put before him. Vincent just kept saying “yes” to God, and that is the challenge put before you, too. Can you say “yes” to God, today? Will you say “yes” tomorrow?

Ask St. Vincent de Paul to pray with you now, that you may see the “poor” — those who are financially poor but also may be “poor in spirit” — in your life. Through St. Vincent de Paul’s intercession, may you come to recognize those who are in need of the Lord’s mercy and may you have the urgency, like this great saint, to do something about it.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Ordained a priest at 19
- Escaped slavery after two years of being held in confinement
- Established many organizations to help the poor
- His writings have been recorded in numerous anthologies throughout the years

## St. Zélie Martin

“The good Lord does not do things by halves; He always gives what we need. Let us then carry on bravely!”

**Born:** December 23, 1831

**Died:** August 28, 1877

**Feast Day:** July 12 (along with her husband, Louis Martin)

No official **patronage** exists for this saint.

### Background

Some of the most popular movies recently have been origin stories and prequels. Writers and filmmakers have taken classic films and trilogies and gone “back in time” to show fans how their favorite characters came to be the men and women we love (or love to hate) in the films we cherish. All saints have an origin story, but few saints are the origin story. Not sure what I mean? Keep reading.

It was 1831 in France when a young girl named Zélie was born into a cold, somewhat unloving, unaffectionate, military family. Her hometown of Alençon, France was well-known for their incredible and expensive (exporting of) lace. It took a skilled artisan and immense amounts of time to create the unmatched lace designs — it just so happened that Zélie was a natural. As a teen and into her 20s, Zélie perfected the craft, quickly making a name for herself as a successful businesswoman and master artisan. In her early 20s, Zélie met a man named Louis. The two fell deeply in love and were married in 1858. Over the next 15 years, the couple was blessed with nine children, whom Zélie described as “their life and their happiness.”

The joy turned to suffering, however, as the holy couple lost four of the nine children in a span of about three years. Sickness and tragedy surrounded the family, leaving Zélie and Louis with a decision to make: trust God or abandon Him in the midst of deep suffering.

The couple trusted in the Lord, namely that the God who had blessed them with children in the first place would never abandon them. Zélie gave birth to her last child on January 2, 1873, but the doctors were almost certain she would not survive. Zélie strained to trust God, hoping for the best but expecting the worst. Against all odds, the baby survived and grew into a joyful and spirit-filled young woman. Her birth name was Marie Françoise Thérèse Martin, but the world knows her simply as St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Saint Thérèse's origin story began with a mom who grew up in a loveless home, was turned down by the convent, and went through immense sufferings.

Saint Zélie could have given up on God and abandoned all hope, but she was firm and resolute, leaning into God in the face of suffering. Ask St. Zélie to pray with you and for your parents, your family, and couples everywhere, especially those who have lost children or who are struggling to conceive. Ask her to pray, too, for anyone in your life who has abandoned the Church or the faith or is tempted to do so, that the Lord would use you (if it is His will) to direct them back to Him.

### **Notable Moments/Achievements**

- Skilled artisan and successful businesswoman
- Deeply devout to God despite great loss
- Mother of St. Thérèse of Lisieux
- Her writings to her husband can be found in the book, "A Call to a Deeper Love: The Family Correspondence of the Parents of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, 1863–1885"

## ORDINARY SAINTHOOD

### St. Joseph

We started this book with Mary because we need to understand how incredible the Blessed Virgin Mary is in order to fully appreciate how insanely cool St. Joseph is. If Mary is the most important saint in heaven, St. Joseph definitely comes in second.

Think about it: God did not have an entire plan to preserve Mary from original sin (known as the Immaculate Conception) and then choose some random dude — some average “Joe” — to be her husband and raise His only Son. God chose this Joe for a reason. He did not simply pick Joseph because the Holy Family needed to look “complete” in the world’s first Christmas card. I mean, if Joseph’s role was “only” to protect Jesus and Mary, God could have assigned a few more guardian angels — kind of like divine, personal bodyguards — to keep them safe and out of harm’s way.

No, Joseph was a vital part of God’s plan from the beginning.

Consider this for a second: Out of every single man on the planet, God chose Joseph to teach Jesus what it meant to be a person of virtue. God could have chosen a famous teacher, an earthly king, or a fearsome warrior to raise Jesus, but He chose neither. Instead, God chose a humble carpenter from a town in the middle of nowhere. Joseph of Nazareth would not have had a verified account on Twitter or many followers on Instagram. He was a no name, a “nobody” in the eyes of the world — but in the eyes of heaven, Joseph was very, very special.

How about you? What would heaven say about the person you currently are and are becoming each day? Does heaven

think you are “a nobody”? The crucifix that hangs in your church, your home, your room, or around your neck is living proof that God thinks you are a somebody — somebody who is incredibly valuable, actually.

God did not die for “nobodies”; He died for everybody, including you. Jesus did not die as a baby, though. Jesus lived for more than 30 years before He took up His cross. We do not know exactly when Joseph died, but we do know it was most likely sometime in Jesus’ young adult life, which means that Jesus had the benefit of Joseph’s example during His childhood and teen years. He learned from His earthly father how to treat His mother, how to speak truth, how to love the unlovable, how to swing a hammer, how to be silent when necessary, how to defend the dignity of a woman, how to show kindness to a stranger, how to help those who are less fortunate. All of these lessons — and countless more — Jesus learned from the (almost) perfect example of Joseph. Joseph, through his daily life, showed Jesus what it meant to be a Godly and virtuous person.

Joseph — because of his holiness and humility — is the only soul God entrusted to honor Mary and Jesus in the way they deserved. God the Father let Joseph become a father to His only Son. Can you think of a higher form of respect?

Ask St. Joseph to pray with you when you are fearful, when you are doubting God’s plan, when you are feeling attacked for your faith, or when you are in need of a spiritual father. There is a reason that he has been given titles like “Guardian of the Church” and “The Terror of Demons”; St. Joseph is a powerful friend to have in your prayer corner. Go to Mary and Joseph daily with your prayer requests, trusting that they not only have the respect of God the Father but hearts to help guide you closer to their beloved Son.

## **POPULAR QUESTIONS ABOUT SAINTS**

### **What is a saint?**

The word “saint” comes from the Latin word “Sanctus,” which means “holy” or “set apart.” Saint Paul first said it (Philippians 4:21) to mean all of the faithful early Christians who would undoubtedly see heaven. Our Church teaches that the saints occupy a hallowed (meaning holy or special) place in heaven in the presence of the Beatific vision. Basically, they have a front row seat in God’s throne room.

The Church does not say that every saint is named — far from it. The ones we officially call “saints” are joined by countless others who lived “saintly” lives but whom we have not investigated and officially titled “saints.” By best estimates, there are over 10,000 saints who are currently named. Again, most saints are not named on Earth but are known in heaven. In fact, there are living, breathing saints around you right now — and not just the St. Teresa of Calcutta or St. John Paul II types that you may have seen in more recent historical footage. It is likely that there are saints in your parish and neighborhood. Most of them will never enjoy the title on Earth, but that is OK as those who are truly saintly would never want the title, anyway.

### **How does someone get the title of saint?**

The title of saint is conferred on someone after the canonization process. The process was most formalized by Pope Alexander III in the 12th century. He restricted the prerogative of canonization to the Holy See (Vatican authority). Canonization means “being raised to the full honors of the altar,” which is a Church-y way of saying “made a saint.” (You can read more about this in the Catechism of the Catholic Church 828.)

Basically, if there was a person you wanted to suggest for sainthood, you and a group would send a report to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints (a Vatican group). That congregation would research the candidate's virtues, life, etc. to see if he or she should be recommended. If the pope accepts the report from the congregation, the person in question is titled "venerable," which means "accorded great respect due to heroic character."

Once a candidate is titled venerable, there are several more steps in the process to exhaustively research and examine the person's life. If no longer living, witnesses are contacted who knew the deceased. Various people can come forward to raise objections, debates can ensue, and discussions be had. In addition, at least two miracles must occur and be directly attributed to that saint's intercession to God. Once this process is completed, the person is "beatified" in a ceremony performed by the pope at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, after which the person is declared "blessed."

After a period of time and a couple of miracles, the "blessed" will be recommended for canonization and, eventually, named a saint at a ceremony in Rome (it is rare that a canonization ceremony takes place outside of the Vatican).

### **Why do Catholics pray with/to saints? Does this go against the Bible?**

In short, no. Asking for intercessory prayer does not go against Scripture. In fact, the Bible encourages intercessory prayer. When people take issue with the Blessed Virgin Mary's role or the communion of saints, they typically are misunderstanding intercession: how it works, the primacy of Jesus (which is never in question), and what we are asking of the saints on our behalf.



Jesus is our mediator and intercessor; this is what the Church teaches. That being clearly stated and understood, Mary and our brothers and sisters in heaven are powerful intercessors of prayer for us. They are secondary intercessors who join their prayers to ours, putting them at the feet of Jesus, for His glory.

### **Why do we have patron saints, and why do we have patrons for such “random” things?**

While the patronages of certain saints do appear a little “random,” they are actually quite cool. Let me briefly explain. Saints had hobbies and interests, just like you and me. Saint Ignatius Loyola played pool. Saint Charles Borromeo loved to play chess. Saint Jerome played the fiddle. Saint Lydwina was an ice skater. You get the idea.

Now, how does someone become a “patron” saint? Well, take St. Lydwina, for instance. She was 16 years old when she had a freak accident while ice skating. What began as a broken rib led to gangrene (a condition where body tissue dies from a lack of oxygen) and, eventually, her being paralyzed. She offered her paralysis and suffering to God and continued to pray and meditate. Her devotion to the Eucharist grew, even though she was confined to her bed. Over time, she was given visions of heaven and purgatory and was visited by various saints. Tradition even holds that many miracles and healings were performed at her bedside. So, she is the patron saint for invalids, the homebound, and ice skaters.

Now, we have a patron saint for just about everything under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9), but this is a great thing. It is almost guaranteed that there is a patron saint for anything you like to do — someone who lived a holy life (worthy of sainthood) while enjoying the same thing you enjoy.

In addition, patrons are given to us for special situations (death, illness, divorce, etc.), special places (your hometown or native country), and special needs (hopeless causes, schoolwork, lost articles, etc.). Spend some time learning more about different patrons. I bet you will find some saints with whom you have a lot in common.

### **Why do we choose a saint name for Confirmation?**

The receiving of a name at Confirmation has a number of different sources in the history of the Church, the biggest one coming from the idea that a name is associated with a change of life. When Jesus told Simon that his name was now Peter (Matthew 16:18), it was because his role was changing; he was going to be asked to take on a leadership role. There are a number of others who we see this happen to as well, all because there is a deeper meaning in a name. To take on a new name at Confirmation also carries with it the idea that you are asking for the Lord to change you, to take ownership of you like He has never done before so you can live your faith more fully and with more life than you ever could have imagined.

The name of the saint should also have some personal significance to you. Perhaps that particular saint is an example of the type of holiness you would like to emulate in your life. Some people take St. Francis because they want to be kind to animals, while others take St. Joseph because they want to strive for his level of holiness. Still others take St. Monica because she practiced a great degree of patience with her children. The list could go on and on. The idea is to pick someone who says something about you. When you stand before the bishop on the day of your Confirmation and tell him your name, say it with pride, conviction, and the knowledge that the Holy Spirit is going to change you forever.

## **What is a halo, exactly?**

It is a popular video game ... next question.

In all seriousness, a halo is a “circle of light” that is seen in artistic interpretations of saints (or saintly people). It was originally used in Greek and Roman depictions of other gods, but the early Christians began using it in connection with the light of Christ. This is why, over the centuries, the halo has been seen and used in artistic representations of the saints to show how they radiate and reflect the light of Christ to the world.

## **What are relics, and what do they have to do with saints?**

Relics are special things associated with saints. While there are literally millions of relics in the world, not all are “official relics.” In fact, our Church is really careful about officially naming something a relic and rarely guarantees that a relic is authentic.

There are three different stages or “classes” of relics. First-class relics are actual body parts of saints, like bones or limbs ... or tongues. (Gross sounding, I know, but really interesting.) A second-class relic is usually something used by the saint, like a book, rosary, or some other special object. Clothing would typically count as a second-class relic. Third-class relics tend to be anything that was touched by the saint or to a first-class relic. Many altars (in churches just like yours) have a small piece of bone from a saint placed or built within them, so ask your parish priest if yours does.

**What about the “weird” things like saints’ bodies not decomposing? What is up with that?**

Some saints have “supernatural,” inexplicable miracles associated with their bodies and senses, including bilocation, incorruptibility, levitation, locution, the odor of sanctity, and the stigmata, to name a few.

While not much is reported about these miracles, they are real. Thousands of witnesses attest to seeing things like levitation, encountering saints in two places at once (bilocation), and touching the stigmata and watching blood flow from the wounds in the hands and feet (the wounds of Christ). Many, myself included, have seen incorruptible saints.

If you ever have the chance to travel, especially throughout Europe, you may have the opportunity to see an incorruptible saint — their body does not decompose or decay at a normal rate. That incorruptibility is seen as a sign of their incredible spirituality. Saints Bernadette, Clare of Assisi, Vincent de Paul, Pius X, John Vianney, and Frances Cabrini are all incorruptible, to name but a few from a list that goes on and on. Most of these saints have been dead for several hundred years, but their bodies are in amazing condition.

**Is it true that some saints have their “saint title” taken away?**

No, they are not “de-sainting” anyone in Rome or anything like that. Someone receiving the title of saint indicates that they have made it into the glories of heaven; we cannot kick anyone out. Now, if you are referring to saints on a calendar of holy days throughout the course of the year, that is a different story because the calendar of saints can be changed over time and is different in different countries. For example, some saints are more well known in the United States than in other parts of the world. There are also different calendars

of saints of religious orders that are special to them, like the Franciscans, the Jesuits, and so forth.

So, people can be taken off of the calendar of saints, but no one stops being a saint once they have been canonized. In the case of someone like St. Christopher, he has never stopped being a saint; he is just not the “primary saint” on the calendar of saints anymore. Most days have several saints that are celebrated, but one or two are “primary” for various reasons.

### **Why should saints matter to me today, in the 21st century?**

Many times, Catholics (young and old) question why the saints are important or how they are relevant in modern times. While technology and times change, life is a constant, as are temptation, sin, grace, and holiness.

Remember, it is not like the saints were perfect. To be clear, they were not. Even the saints were sinners — they were just sinners who fell down, got up, and tried again.

We can always learn from the saints. It is essential that we never lose our sense of discipleship (literally, “student-ship”). We must keep learning from our past and families, and the saints are our older brothers and sisters in the faith.

It is not weird to respect saints — to talk about them, study them, honor them, or invite them to pray with and for you. What is weird is claiming to be a Christian and not desiring holiness and intimacy with Christ to such an intense level that you would stop at nothing to live the life of a saint, yourself. Live the life of a saint this and every day and someday you will be one. You may even have a statue in your honor — not because you want it, but because your life deserves it.

### **Where can I read more about the saints?**

There are tons of great websites but be careful because some of them are more accurate than others. Check out the Life Teen website ([lifeteen.com](http://lifeteen.com)) to find more amazing stories of saints or try some online libraries like [catholic.org/saints](http://catholic.org/saints) for short bios.

Additionally, Fr. Butler's "Lives of the Saints" is generally considered the finest single compilation on the saints ever put together. There is probably a volume at your parish, or maybe even in your home if your parents went to parochial school.



